Writing Back, Emptying Out and Satanic Narration: Why London Wins Out in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* [1]

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Abstract

The Satanic Verses occupies a prominent place in the postcolonial canon because it challenges the social, historical and political place of London by 'writing back' or 'emptying out' the city's imperial residues. The novel's narrative acts of 'emptying out' echo postcolonial literature's broader engagement with the place, legitimacy and ethics of marginalized migrant or diasporic points of view within metropolitan centers. But while *The Satanic Verses* is imbricated in this postcolonial dynamic, techniques of 'emptying' are counterbalanced by the presence of Satan as the novel's narrator. Both as a symbolic figure and through the story he tells, Satan is identified with a rather more sinister aspect of London: as the narrative challenges, resists and reconfigures London, London mounts a stronger counter-resistance, absorbing blows, tolerating violence to its structures of power, but in the end remaining as it is. The novel's Satanic London represents how London 'plays' with social and cultural identities – allowing marginalized subjects to reimagine themselves and the city – only to foreclose any possibilities for agency, social revolution, and economic equality. In this sense, the real London and the novel's London both remain fixed entities: changes that appear protean and revolutionary are smothered by the pressure that London continues to exert.

Keywords: London, *Satanic Verses*, satan as narrator, post-imperial

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At one point in Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, Gibreel Farishta sets out on a mission to transform London. He wants to turn what the narrator calls the "slippery, most devilish of cities" away from its moral relativism, its hybridity, its secular humanism, to a "tropicalized" (Rushdie 1988, pp. 364-65) metropolis. The narrator, taking Farishta's side, enumerates a list of benefits: "increased moral definition" being the first, followed by

> "institution of a national siesta, development of vivid and expansive patterns of behaviour among the populace, higher-quality popular music, new birds in the trees (macaws, peacocks, cockatoos), new trees under the birds (coco-palms, tamarind, banyans with hanging beards). Improved street life, outrageously coloured flowers […] spider-monkeys in the oaks. A new mass market for domestic air-conditioning units, ceiling fans, anti-mosquito coils and sprays […] better cricketers; higher emphasis on ball-control among professional footballers, the traditional and soulless English commitment to 'high workrate' having been rendered obsolete by the heat. Religious fervour, political ferment, renewal of interest in the intelligentsia […]" (1988, p. 365)

The list continues. London, however, won't conform: as the narrator tells us, "the city in its corruption refused to submit to the dominion of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning, making it impossible for Gibreel to approach his quest in the systematic manner he would have preferred" (1988, pp. 337-38). Gibreel Farishta begins to realize his lack of power: again, as the narrator informs, "In this pandemonium of mirages, he often heard laughter: the city was mocking his impotence, awaiting his surrender, his recognition that what existed here was beyond his powers to comprehend, let alone to change" (1988, p. 338). London 'wins' this

encounter: Gibreel Farishta eventually admits defeat by committing suicide, and the city remains untropicalized. It has allowed Gibreel to push, but pushes back even harder.

The Satanic Verses occupies a prominent place in the postcolonial canon because it challenges the social, historical and political place of London by 'writing back' or re-appropriating London's symbolic currency through acts of 'emptying out' – evacuating from London symbols and social structures that carry imperial residues. Gibreel's tropicalization of London is but one example. The novel's narrative acts of "emptying out" echo postcolonial literature's broader engagement with the place of marginalized migrant or diasporic points of view within metropolitan centers (London being one of the most prevalent in postcolonial Anglophone literature). They question the politics of location – the legitimacy of metropolitan material and economic power centers (again, like London) – and the ethics of representation within metropolitan centers. The latter involves stories of/from marginalized subjects – immigrants from the former colonies, racial and ethnic others, women – and their relationships to structures of power, be they imperial, postimperial, or metropolitan – terms which can often be very similar. But while *The Satanic Verses* is imbricated in this postcolonial dynamic, its narrative acts of 'emptying out' are counterbalanced by the presence of Satan as the novel's narrator.[2] Both as a symbolic presence and through the story he tells, Satan is identified with a rather more sinister aspect of London: as the narrative challenges, resists and reconfigures London, London mounts a stronger counter-resistance, absorbing blows, tolerating violence to its structures of power, but in the end remaining as it is – rather like Satan himself, and his identifications with the persistence of imperial, global, and metropolitan hegemonies which win out over the postcolonial one. The novel's Satanic London represents how London 'plays' with

[2] Satan as narrator of the novel has received scant attention: "Only two critics, Alex Krönagel and James Harrison, directly confront the question of satanic narration" in The Satanic Verses (Clark 2001, p. 140).

social and cultural identities – allowing marginalized subjects to reimagine themselves and the city – only to foreclose any possibilities for agency, social revolution, and economic equality. In this sense, the real London and the novel's London both remain fixed entities: changes that appear protean and revolutionary are smothered by the pressure that London exerts as a global economic center – which itself is a development of London's existence as an imperial center.

By interposing a fundamentally unstable and untrustworthy voice between himself and the reader, Rushdie turns London into a battleground for the souls of Gibreel and Saladin, with the city space the ground upon which identities are lost, reinvented, and lost again. He uses London both as a stage for the narrator's malign intent and as metaphor for it. Satan's toying with the city is figured in the novel's literary pyrotechnics, the extravagance of the language, the wildness of the magic in this hallmark work of magic realism. As the omniscient presence in the novel, Satan not only 'records' the story, he plays favourites and punishes enemies in both the voice of the realist and of the postmodern meta-narrator calling attention to his or her own narratological, and moral, instability. He presents his characters with the proposition of eternal doubt and/or a choice of deities, "both of which seem to exist in a universe in which no irruption of the sacred can truly orient the self" (Clark 2001, p. 131); with the consequence that old truths, of the religious[3] as much as of the imperial kind, resurface to wield enormous power. In that sense, the satanic narrator is undermining London, using it as a prop and a background for exoticizing and othering. The satanic narrator figures as a guide and a symbol of the nature of London, rendering it a site of transitoriness, instability, and self-fashioning, but also residual colonial identity. He is a shape-shifter

[3] The main conflict in The Satanic Verses occurs when the satanic narrator tries to tempt Mahound by pretending to be the archangel Gabriel and persuading Muhammad to accept three goddesses as intercessors between the human and the Divine. Fuller discussion of this aspect of the novel is beyond the scope of this essay.

and a shaper of shifts, staging conflicts between the angelic and diabolic which play into the novel's representations of postcolonial London.

The satanic narrator takes his cues from the palimpsest that is contemporary London. London is built on historically sedimented layers of shifting realities and representations, each exerting an influence on the novel's need for a fixed, immutable London. This immovable London has roots in its historical role as the center of the British Empire, when it regulated and controlled the material and cultural conditions of places far beyond its borders. As Raymond Williams describes:

> [w]hat was happening in the 'city', the 'metropolitan' economy, determined and was determined by what was made to happen in the 'country'; first the local hinterland and then the vast regions beyond it, in other people's lands. What happened in England has since been happening ever more widely, in new dependent relationships between all the industrialized nations and all the other 'underdeveloped' but economically important lands. Thus one of the last models of 'city and country' is the system we now know as imperialism. (1973, p. 279)

Historical changes have rendered London more elusive, but they have not 'emptied out' its centrality. Between 1890 to 1920, the period of waning Victorianism and a rising English literary modernism, Malcolm Bradbury writes that London "had now become the outright point of concentration for English national culture, overtaking and pre-empting the role of the provincial large cities" (1991, p. 179). This centralizing meant that London "had acquired utter dominance in communications, commerce, banking and, of course, most forms of cultural activity; through it and from it came the newspapers, the books, and the ideas of the country at large" (1991, p. 179). The hegemonies produced and controlled by London solidified a sense of the centrality of London in the

global imagination. Ian Jack captures this sense in his introduction to a special London edition of *Granta* (the edition itself, of course, perpetuating a London legacy): "Some cities in the world have no legend outside their immediate hinterland. A few, of which London is certainly one, have many. People who come to London also bring it with them in their minds. They have a feeling of how the city should be before they meet it" (1999, p. 6). The legend of London, the sense of London as a touchstone of metropolitan identity is similarly expressed by Stuart Hall, this time combined with the colonial subject's desire to return to the centre:

> You have to live in London. If you come from the sticks, the colonial sticks, where you really want to live is right on Eros Statue in Piccadilly Circus. You don't want to go live in someone's else's metropolitan sticks. You want to go right to the center of the hub of the world. You might as well. You have been hearing about that ever since you were one month old. (2000, p. 24)

Hall is talking about the attraction of London of the 1960s to a young Jamaican. Update that to 1988, the time of *The Satanic Verses*, and you get the sense that the metropolitan nature of London has only grown stronger.

The narrative strategy behind Gibreel's tropicalization is to demonstrate the futility of attempting to reverse this centripetal postimperial dynamic. This strategy is a microcosm of the narrative pattern of the whole novel, which in virtually every episode highlights futility masquerading as creative reinvention. This may seem paradoxical, if not wrong-headed, particularly when one considers that *The Satanic Verses* has been praised for being all about destroying certainties, binary oppositions, old categories of good and evil, black and white, us and them, self and other; and for breaking down oppositions between city and nation, cosmopolitan and local. These progressive demolitions form a

thematic core of the novel, motivated by questions posed early in the text. "How does newness come into the world?" asks the narrator. "How is it born?" he continues, "[o]f what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made" (1988, p. 8)? However, these questions only construct one side of the inquiry, the affirmative side that sees newness in terms of London-based and -inspired fusions, translations, and conjoinings of ideological, ethnic, and postnational hybridity. This is the side that has preoccupied critics. John Clement Ball's take on the novel is typical: "Through a combination of magic and magic realism Rushdie portrays a city lurching through a painful process of renewal and transformation that will inaugurate a future in which the spatial and racial geopolitics of the past can become obsolete" (2004, p. 202). Such interpretations overlook the implication of the questions Rushdie asks in the novel: "How does it [newness] survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine" (1988, pp. 8-9)? In other words, the satanic narrator challenges us to recognize our fears of change, and then throughout the novel exploits them by telling a story of London that illustrates the dangers of newness and the strength of the old to fight to retain its place. *The Satanic Verses* does not, therefore, depict what London can become, *but argues for what London is*. It is a power center that forces us to reconceptualize the boundaries of our images of the city, and to understand that for every change, there is a backlash, an equal and opposite need for a fixed symbol or image of the city.

The flexibility of the novel's London allows it to pose as a renewable space that nevertheless withstands tropicalization and other transformations, reflecting the real city's transition from imperial center to postcolonial meeting place, and even prefiguring the transition to neo-imperial global city. Such profound transitions have been marked by successive permutations of London's demography, including the opening up of the metropolis to immigrants in the post-imperial period, when London became a draw for its former colonial subjects. John Clement Ball points out that for

many this relocation exemplified an act of resistance: "[a]s ex-colonials come to dwell in London and walk its streets, they appropriate it and reterritorialize it" (2004, p. 9), much like Gibreel and his tropicalization. Postcolonial writers, Ball argues, enact a similar kind of resistance by reinscribing the "metropolis against their backgrounds and identities as formerly colonized subjects. The London that once imposed its power and self-contradictions *on* them can now be reinvented *by* them" (2004, p. 9). But as Gibreel's failure shows, reinventing London in the face of changes and accretions of wealth and power means reinvention is confined. Reinvention, moreover, is doubly circumscribed because invention, as Julian Wolfreys notes (drawing heavily on Jacques Derrida), is itself not a creative act. Invention "produces nothing as such, out of nothing. Instead, *invention* is a response, a reaction or finding out that which was already there, a discovery that is *dis-covering*" (2007, p. 2). Gibreel's tropicalization exemplifies this dis-covering all too well: Ian Baucom sees Gibreel's 'tropicalization' of London as the way to return England to what he calls "the blinked-away landspaces of its elsewhere and its past" (1999, p. 209). It is an attempt to re-place in London "fragments of the cultures that the English Empire collected [. . .] metonyms of the Not-England that England occupied, reluctantly abandoned, and now wishes to forget" (Baucom 1999, p. 211). But Gibreel will not be conjuring what is absent, he will (in Baucom's words) "rain this catalog of difference" upon London not to make it a "foreign city but to deny the foreignness of these differences to the city, to announce that London is a conurbation of such differences" (1999, pp. 211-12). Newness will enter London as those fusions, translations and conjoinings of things that already exist in the history and the present, collapsing the over-there of Empire with the here of the metropolis.

One problem with this reading, which Baucom obliquely registers but does not follow up on, is that Gibreel projects London-bred stereotypes of and attitudes to its former colonial places onto an equally stereotypical English vision of London as fixed and immutable. Gibreel's reinvention of

London is thus another instance in London's long history of literary inventions, each of which "produc[es] one from a potentially endless series of Londons, each the crystallization or actualization of the city's countless singularities [. . .] in finding what was already there it recalls, it brings back what is forgotten, overlooked, occluded, obscured, taken for granted, or ignored" (Wolfreys 2007, p. 3). In this case, the narrator does not simply show the imperial residues that have escaped memory, he punishes Gibreel and Saladin for thinking they can appropriate the city for themselves.

The punishment is incurred from the start, as Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha journey to London from Bombay. Their Air India 747 is blown up by terrorists, sending the two characters on a long fall to the ground. This fall symbolizes rebirth and mutation, as well as serving as a parody of both 'writing back' and colonial longing: in the moments immediately after their fall to British soil Saladin's body comes to take on the characteristics of a traditional devil, with vast horns, hoofed-feet, a hairy pelt, and an enormous very public erection. Gibreel, for his part, will appear as a well-dressed Englishman. Moreover, this is Saladin's second instance of colonial longing. At the age of thirteen, he sees London as the moral and aesthetic antidote to his father's religious zealotry, and to the dirt and vulgarity of Bombay, and accordingly takes on the role of "a goodandproper Englishman" (1988, p. 43), dreaming of life as "a neat man in a buttoned suit" living "an ordered, contented life" (1988, p. 75) in London, married to the English girl of his dreams. In a flashback the narrator shows how the schoolboy Saladin so alters his appearance to conform to his colonial stereotyping of 'London-ness' that he no longer remembers what he used to look like. After the fall from the 747, Saladin's devil-body is clearly Satan's punishment for his colonial idealization of "Proper London" (1988, p. 43). The narrator undermines his cosy assumptions by having London represent "the place where the (post)colonial subject becomes aware that her identity is enmeshed in and constructed by imperial power relations" (Ball 2004, p. 49).

The Satanic narrator serves up and makes great sport of Saladin's anglophilocentrism to emphasize the gap between his delusions and the race-riot, police-brutality reality of London. This is the city in which Saladin encounters Sufyan, Mishal and Hanif, Indian immigrants who refuse to assimilate like Saladin – "Look where all your law abiding got you," says Mishal to Saladin (1988 264). His Anglo-pose has blinded him to the violent truths of immigrant life, and of the social turmoil that erupted in the real London as it transitioned throughout the 1980s from the center of its own imperial system to being a center of the newly globalizing neoliberal economy. The London of the 'Big Bang' economic reforms of 1986, a time when Saskia Sassen argues that London became a paradigmatic global city,[4] was a city of deregulated twenty-four hour trading with other centres of global finance. These reforms shook the sociological organization of the City of London, creating "a rapid phase of change [. . .] entail[ing] new investment players, new financial institutions and conglomerates, new practices, and a changing and expanding labour force" (Jacobs 1996, p. 54). These transformations also entailed changes in the social makeup of the City labour force: while management followed traditional class lines, younger workers comprised a mix of class, race and gender (Jacobs 1996, p. 54). Yet, as with the novel's London, this attitude towards social mobility would not be without limits. As the Corporation of London wrote in the 1986 City of London plan:

> The City of London [. . .] is noted for its business expertise, its wealth of history and its special architectural heritage. The combination of these three aspects gives the City a

[4] Saskia Sassen's definition of the global city, as well as being the most precise and detailed, points to how global city functions evacuate history in order to more smoothly function in global networks. Global cities must share similar functions in organizing the global economy in order to control and create markets. These functions make global cities "nodal points for the coordination of processes" and the production of highly specialized services and financial goods. Thus, global capital, financial information, and labour migration flow in and out of global cities, and global cities control these flows. Thus, "key structures of the world economy are necessarily situated in cities" (Sassen 1992, pp. 4-5).

> world-wide reputation which the Corporation is determined to foster and maintain [. . .] The City's ambience is much valued and distinguishes it from other international business centres. (qtd. in Jacobs 1996, p. 55)

London's embryonic global city status would rest on heritage correctly preserved and enhanced, making it distinct from other global centres. This heritage-based view of London would call on reconfigurations of the Englishness of London, involving deliberate constructions and ideologies of national identity.

One such construction is figured in the novel through the character of Hal Valance, a representative of the values of Big Bang London. Valance is inflicted on Saladin as a punishment for clinging to dated self-preserving Anglo-delusions, which his wife tells him are made up of "'museum-values [. . .] Sanctified, hanging in golden frames on honorific walls'" (1988, pp. 412-13). These values persist, despite Valance having harangued Saladin with a new vision of what it means to be English: "'I love this fucking country,'" Valance roars (1988, p. 277). "'That's why I'm going to sell it to the whole goddamn world, Japan, America, fucking Argentina. I'm going to sell the arse off it. That's what I've been selling all my fucking life: the fucking nation. The *flag*'" (1988, p. 277). His profane love is a triumphalist embrace of Margaret Thatcher's promise of a new kind of England: "'What she wants,'" he explains, "'is literally to invent a whole goddamn new middle class in this country. Get rid of the old woolly incompetent buggers from fucking Surrey and Hampshire, and bring in the new. People without background, without history'" (1988, p. 278). These neoliberal ravings represent the invasion of market-pleasing forces that leave Saladin, as the narrator explains, "Abandoned by one alien England, marooned within another" (1988, p. 279). Saladin responds, in accordance with his satanic appearance, with feelings of anger, hate, and revenge.

In a similar vein the satanic narrator deploys Gibreel's various guises to illustrate how London plays with social and cultural identities. Gibreel's transformation into a well-dressed Englishman is not only a mockery of Saladin's anglophilocentrism, it is also a parody of the newness that Gibreel sets out to inflict on London – the colonial outsider in the clothes of the colonial outsider's stereotype. Yet for a moment in the narrative Gibreel's outsider status allows him to take advantage of his status as a marginalized subject and use London streetspace to reinvent himself. The narrator, however, has more up his sleeve. As a walking, talking parody of colonial longing, Gibreel proves most amenable to the destructive energies that London makes available to the migrant. The most destructive of these is his guise as the archangel who sets out with the *London A-Z* map book in his pocket to redeem London, "to bring this metropolis of the ungodly [. . .] back to the knowledge of God" (1988, p. 330). In streets that coiled around him, writhing like serpents, London had grown unstable once again, revealing its true, capricious, tormented nature, its anguish of a city that had lost its sense of itself and wallowed, accordingly, in the impotence of its selfish, angry present of masks and parodies, stifled and twisted by the insupportable, unrejected burden of its past, staring into the bleakness of its impoverished future. (1988, pp. 330-31)

London's changing nature reveals its true 'self,' a city that suffers but also inflicts its imperial past on Gibreel. The latter's sense of London is represented in the way he senses the mocking presence of Satan everywhere he goes. Later, in yet another guise – that of resurrected Indian film icon – Gibreel takes to the skies above London in another attempt to show them – yes! – his *power*. – These powerless English! – Did they not think their history would return to haunt them? – 'The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor' (Fanon) . . . . He would make this land anew. He was the Archangel, Gibreel. *And I'm back*! (1988, p. 363)

The narrator has so infuriated Gibreel's relationship with London that the latter lapses into a militant need for moral clarity, and finds it. "This Shaitan was no fallen angel," explains the narrator, mocking Gibreel's demand to an end to "England-induced ambiguities," and "Biblical-Satanic confusions" (1988, p. 364)! Gibreel's mission to transform the "slippery, most devilish of cities" (1988, pp. 364-65) away from its moral relativism, its hybridity, its secular humanism, to – as we have seen – a "tropicalized" metropolis ends with the latter reasserting itself as a postimperial metropolis.

By limiting these gestures to 'empty out' London and reconfigure it, the narrator in effect satirizes the postcolonial transformations and reinventions of identity that Homi Bhabha sees as characterized by the colonial process of othering. For Bhabha "[t]he power of the postcolonial translation of modernity rests in its *performative*, *deformative* structure (1994, p. 241); tactics of mimicry and displacement that lead to agency-granting adoptions of a positive subjectivity. But like the narrator displacing or 'emptying out' London, the performances of Gibreel and Saladin actually deform not structural residues of colonialism, but their own identities. This suggests that London permits the kind of performance and deformation which allows subjects to change both themselves and the images of the city that they need to fulfil their sense of belonging to it. They have not so much gained agency as learned to perform to new scripts, a less than positive postcolonial transformation similar to that which Geeta Kapur sees in the cosmopolitan world of the "twice-born," a first world site – and London would be a prime example – where "identity is ambivalent, restless, interrogative" (1998, p. 199). In Kapur's view, this discursive emphasis on identity produces "a simulacrum of cultural identity," "a *play* of choice, not a test of praxis" (1998, p. 200). As if to echo Kapur's critique of this play implied in Bhabha's and Rushdie's rhetoric of exile and hybridity, *The Satanic Verses* grants to London the "holding power of the historical paradigm where differences are recognized to have real and material consequences" (Kapur 1998, p. 200). Thus,

difference and newness have to be contained. Timothy Brennan sounds a similar critical note when he praises *The Satanic Verses* for introducing some "fresh thinking about national form, about a new homelessness that is also a worldliness" (1989, p. 165). However, he goes on to say, the novel also sees through this homeless worldliness and recognizes "how strangely detached and insensitive the logic of cosmopolitan 'universality' can be" (Brennan 1989, p. 165). In other words, the novel registers the cultural history that has produced it, and thwarts all resistance, making the argument that words have a home. When a migrant can re-shape and re-settle London to fit the dream images of a perpetual outsider, it is an act that reinscribes the colonial longing behind dreaming of London in the first place.

The narrator underscores the "real and material consequences" of London-generated colonial historical paradigms through the creation of Jahilia, the shifting sand city which serves as a metaphor for the novel's London. Jahilia is dreamed into being by the fevered, psychotic imagination of Gibreel (who, at this point, is narrating the novel; viz. Jahilia is also the product of the devil). He crafts Jahilia from "the fine dune-sand of those forsaken parts – the very stuff of inconsistency – the quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack-of-form" (1988, p. 96), representing the surface pliability of London. Conversely, Jahilia, in its "newly invented permanence" is also "a sight to wonder at: walled, four-gated, the whole of it a miracle worked by its citizens" (1988, p. 96). The dualism of Jahilia matches that of London in the way impermanence masks the fixed "walled, four-gated" fact of permanence, underscoring the satire implied in the narrator's rhetorical question "How does newness come into the world?" The newness that London symbolizes as a mongrel, shape-shifting city being recolonized by diasporic subjects is the newness of unmoored identities, neither English nor Indian nor anything else. Gibreel cannot recognize this delusion, perhaps because of the shifting permanence of Jahilia/London itself: he can celebrate the life and ingenuity of Jahilia, while in the next breath fantasize about its destruction. "I, in my wickedness," he intones,

"sometimes imagine the coming of a great wave, a high wall of foaming water roaring across the desert, a liquid catastrophe full of snapping boats and drowning arms, a tidal wave that would reduce these vain sandcastles to the nothingness, to the grains from which they came" (1988, p. 96). This fancy of destruction becomes reality toward the end of the novel when Gibreel, under the influence of his rival Saladin, instigates race-riots that engulf south London in flames.

The novel's race riots have a historical counterpart in the riots that engulfed south London in 1981. The social unrest behind the novel's riots is as complex as the reality of London's (persisting) racial tensions, but the riot scene in the novel can also be read as a moment in which the satanic narrator delivers his verdict on optimistic gestures towards hybridizing social and cultural transformation. The riots mock the promise of such gestures on the worldly level, exposing hybridity as a sham because "on the other-worldly level it contains what Aravamudan calls 'the slyly ironical last laugh of the devil, who has conquered by fading away into innocuous moral virtue'" (Clark 2001, p. 130). Coupled with the novel's general narrative elusiveness, this gives the sense that Satan, in control of the representations of the world, is telling us that the only possible future is to abandon social transformation and progressive politics, not because they offer no solution, but as a way of dodging the responsibility for imagining the world and staking claims on our images and ideas. The corollary is that if our representations of cities like London shift and change in the winds of demographic and diasporic change, then the question "How does newness come into the world?" will be answered by a demonic shrug of the shoulders, and London's retreat into nostalgia, sensual comfort, nationalism, and moral relativism.

The devil's shrug plays with our ability to read the novel, and by extension our ability to judge the moral nature of London. The end of the novel marks the end of the main characters' engagement with that city. Saladin's return to his native Bombay and his love-interest there can be read as a

triumph of his flexibility and transnational reconciliation, and Gibreel's murder of Alleluia Cone and subsequent suicide can be interpreted as an allegorical rendering of how ideological fixations lead to destruction. In Afzal-Khan's view,

> [i]n choosing to let the 'angelic' Farishta die and the 'satanic' Chamcha live, Rushdie is surely challenging the conventional definitions of good and evil [. . .] [the novel] ends on a note that suggests that only those who are flexible survive [. . .] and also that all old, inflexible ideologies and definitions of the world and of its peoples must die or be destroyed if there is to be any hope of renewal, of survival. (1993, p. 172)

But the flexible Saladin has given up on London: he will be flexible and survive by moving back to Bombay, which "represents Rushdie's 'third principle,' a space that attempts to include both sides of the east/west, secular/religious, real/fantasy, colonizer/colonized binary in ever new combinations that foreground hybridity over clarity and open-endedness over closure" (Clark 2001, p. 88). The London of postcolonial migrants and their diasporic communities threw Saladin's images of London into flux and offered no solution. Like it or not, the satanic narrator seems to say, you humans cannot maintain psychic balance unless you give up on newness altogether – that is, they must throw out the baby with the bath water, and give up on whatever social, political and economic progression might result from a commitment to newness and return to the social and cultural fixities that London represents.

Those fixities come from seeing London through the value-laden lens of Rushdie's "third principle." In staking a claim for this space's commitment to newness and "inclusive space[s] of hybridity" Rushdie "privileges an urban, upper-middle class, college-educated, 'worldly' intellect" (Clark 2001,

p. 88). Subaltern voices, and those without the economic means to relocate, are left out of the narrative. The sins of imperialism are washed away in a drive to neuter cultural memory via cultural commodification. As poet and novelist Iain Sinclair saw it, "The Thatcher/Major (bingo millennialist) era was . . . the art of the proposal [in which an] industry grew up for describing things that hadn't quite happened, epiphanies for empty rooms" (1997, p. 217). This is the emptied out but moneyed-up London of Hal Valance, which carries on into the present historical moment as a city that functions within a globalized network of trade, information, and financial and cultural capital. The way the novel suspends its interrogation of London's social inequalities eerily predicts how culture would be mobilized to sustain London's immutability. Projects like the Millennium Dome showed that even a Labour government was not immune to thinking of London as the home "of core values with which not only Londoners but also the British people as a whole are expected to identify" (Schlaeger 2003, p. 55). *The Satanic Verses* did not start this trend, but it can be read as another instance in a cultural history of perpetuating the notion of London as it once was and should forever be.

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