

**Confronting the Great Verities of Love and Death:
The Morality of Immorality in *The Satanic Verses***

Rarely does a fictional character articulate a rhetorical question that interrogates not only his own narrative-specific situation but also, indirectly, the fate of the very novel in which he lives and breathes; Saladin Chamcha – recently re-humanized and thus sans hoofs, horns, and sulfurous breath – manages such a prophetic metafictional feat vis-à-vis *The Satanic Verses*: “‘When you’ve fallen from the sky, been abandoned by your friend, suffered police brutality, metamorphosed into a goat, lost your work as well as your wife, learned the power of hatred and regained human shape, what is there left to do but... demand your rights?’” (Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* 416). Saladin’s improbable catalogue, highlighted by gravity-defying survival and inter-species transmutation, reminds one of the improbable transmutation of *The Satanic Verses* into the Satanic Verses Affair. In the wake of murders, a death threat, and worldwide protests, Salman Rushdie found himself demanding the rights of his novel *as a novel*:

At the center of the storm stands a novel, a work of fiction, one that aspires to the condition of literature. It has often seemed to me that people on all sides of the argument have lost sight of this simple fact. *The Satanic Verses* has been described, and treated, as a work of bad history, as an anti-religious pamphlet, as the product of an international capitalist-Jewish conspiracy, as an act of murder... as the product of a person comparable to Hitler and Attila the Hun. It felt impossible, amid such a hubbub, to insist on the fictionality of fiction. (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 393)

Rushdie does *not* deny that his novel is controversial and intentionally provocative. Fiction – especially in the case of *The Satanic Verses* – is far from being *just* fiction. Indeed, Rushdie’s fiction tends to make thematic the dialectic between imaginative ways of knowing/speaking and those discourses that posit themselves as univocally non-fictional. In Rushdie’s hands, the former typically deconstruct the latter by making them radically *new*, in other words, by demonstrating the metaphorical potentiality of various “truths” often taken to be anything but metaphorical. Rushdie’s fiction thus “opens new doors in our minds” (Rushdie,

Imaginary Homelands 423), doors that often lead into succulent, hybridized rooms whose very existence is denied by absolutist orthodoxies. Therefore, as Rushdie suggests in the above passage, to ignore the fictional status of *The Satanic Verses* leads to a kind of de-contextualization in which the novel becomes equated with the very discourses – religious, political, social – whose taken-for-granted status it seeks to call into question. In other words, to ignore *The Satanic Verses as a novel* is at once to literalize Rushdie’s imaginative questioning into an “act of murder” (one that requires a concomitant murderous response) and also to miss the architectonically radical implications of a fictional work that attempts to interrogate the solidity of the supposedly non-fictional ground from which the violent objections to the novel arise. In sum, fully to understand what is at stake in the Satanic Verses Affair would seem to require grappling with Rushdie’s text first and foremost as a novel. As Rushdie himself urged upon the novel’s paperback publication: “*The Satanic Verses* must be freely available and easily affordable, if only because if it is not *read and studied*, then these years will have no meaning” (Rushdie, “One Thousand Days” B-8). However, such an approach – reading and studying the text as a *story* rather than purely a sociopolitical event – is the exception rather than the rule in Rushdie criticism.

M. Keith Booker sums up the critical milieu of Rushdie studies in general and of *The Satanic Verses* in particular:

Astonishingly, more than 60 books have now been published, in various languages, dealing in whole or in a large measure with the *Satanic Verses* affair and the issues it raised. In comparison, approximately half a dozen book-length critical discussions of Rushdie’s fiction have appeared worldwide, which gives some indication of the extent to which traditional literary scholarship on Rushdie’s work has been dwarfed by the controversy surrounding *The Satanic Verses* and the Islamic reaction to it. (6)¹

¹ Two excellent examples of book-length critical discussions of Rushdie’s fiction are Roger Y. Clark’s *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie’s Other Worlds*, and Jaina C. Sanga’s *Salman Rushdie’s Postcolonial Metaphors: Migration, Translation, Hybridity, Blasphemy, and Globalization*. Clark’s overall thesis is that Rushdie utilizes cosmology, mythology, and mysticism to structure otherworldly dramas that are “fascinating in their own right, as well as

There are good reasons, of course, for focusing on the Satanic Verses Affair as a cultural phenomenon in which the intercultural encounters prompted by reactions to the novel raise concerns about cultural stereotypes and deep-seated biases within Western discourse – concerns central not only to postcolonial theory but also to Rushdie’s novel itself. In the aftermath of the fatwa, the death-sentence pronounced upon Rushdie by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, much of the support offered to Rushdie in both the popular and the scholarly press showed, as Booker puts it, “a disturbingly blatant tendency to employ Orientalist stereotypes in describing Rushdie’s condemnation as evidence of the savagery and brutality of Khomeini in particular and Islam in general” (5). Hence, it is understandable that the Satanic Verses Affair became a “text” in its own right to which postcolonial critics could turn their attention, one that went beyond Rushdie’s text even as it intersected with it. Essays such as Anouar Majid’s “Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak?: Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair” discuss the witting and unwitting orientalism present in the discourse surrounding the Rushdie controversy. Nevertheless, salutary as it may be, much of this type of postcolonial criticism obscures the possibilities for human affirmation that are present *within* Rushdie’s novel as it exists as a story. Few critics have noted that, in addition to its sharp-edged, provocative flights of fancy, and alongside its undeniably dark portrait of madness, violence, and perversity, *The Satanic Verses* offers a story of human triumph and love grounded in a complex vision of morality.

Timothy Brennan, in a remarkable overview of the “cultural politics” of Rushdie criticism, argues that the majority of critical approaches to *The Satanic Verses* and its resulting Affair tend to obscure a crucial aspect of Rushdie’s authorial project. Brennan describes an authorial

crucial to the more worldly points Rushdie makes about literary tradition, history, ethnicity, and the politics of religion.” Sanga seeks to illustrate the manner in which various overarching metaphors within Rushdie’s fiction represent history, language, and textuality in such a way as directly or indirectly to resist colonial constructions.

“persona” that runs throughout Rushdie’s fiction but has been obscured post-fatwa: “the venerable, new, proudly old-fashioned defender of the novel as a form, of the beneficent state, of tolerant public opinion, and of ethnic cross-dressing” (110). Brennan thus sees Rushdie less as a neo-liberal exhibiting a desire for “inclusion in a broadly accessible Western public sphere but wearing the mantle of filiative authenticity” (110), and more as an old-fashioned liberal pushing for “affiliation rather than filiation,” for tolerance facilitated by a beneficent state. Similarly, despite the fact that *The Satanic Verses* is often claimed to be postmodern fiction *par excellence*², Brennan believes that Rushdie’s novel goes beyond postmodern pastiche:

We are dealing, in other words, with a metafictional compendium that unlike many of its contemporary counterparts... was resolutely nonpostmodern. Rushdie’s discovery of the world of the heart, of intimacy and conversation, is surprisingly evident and unapologetic in the 1990s. He found this intimacy first, after all, in the closing passages of *The Satanic Verses*. (115)

Using Brennan’s comments as a springboard, this paper attempts to locate the “world of the heart” of Rushdie’s novel within the vicissitudes of the life of Saladin Chamcha, particularly in his entanglements with love and death, eros and thanatos – entanglements that are not separate from but rather intertwined with Saladin’s ongoing negotiation with cultural identity/identities. As Rushdie writes in an essay: “Chamcha survives. He makes himself whole by returning to his roots and, more importantly, by facing up to, and learning to deal with, the great verities of love and death” (*Imaginary Homelands* 398). In facing up to and dealing with the great verities of love and death, Saladin achieves a relationship with himself, others, and the world at large that is supportive rather than destructive, life-affirming rather than life-denying. As such, Saladin arrives at a mode of being in the world that can best be described as “moral”; however, Saladin’s morality cannot be located in conventional notions that seek strictly to locate the moral within orthodox, dogmatic codes prescribing certain parameters of moral behavior. As Rushdie puts it,

² As Booker writes, “many critics [have] made him [Rushdie] a paragon of postmodernism” (2).

The Satanic Verses explores a form of morality that is “internal and shifting... rather than external, divinely sanctioned, absolute” (*Homelands* 403). Such morality is located not within religious dogma but rather within what Rushdie calls a “secular definition of transcendence” (*Homelands* 420).

Saladin’s moral vision, powerfully evident in the latter parts of *The Satanic Verses*, is inseparable from the particular kind of morality offered by the novel (in general terms) as a literary form, as an imaginative way of engaging human life in the world. The novel’s morality, and also Saladin’s, involves a *suspension* of moral judgment as it is usually understood. As Milan Kundera succinctly expresses it in a discussion of the art of the novel as a literary form:

Suspending moral judgment is not the immorality of the novel; it is its *morality*. The morality that stands against the ineradicable human habit of judging instantly, ceaselessly, and everyone; of judging before, and in the absence of, understanding. From the viewpoint of the novel’s wisdom, that fervid readiness to judge is the most detestable stupidity, the most pernicious evil. (7)

In the course of *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin Chamcha comes to recognize this morality of what is ostensibly immorality, in other words, the morality that comes with suspending the “fervid readiness to judge.” In addition to offering a “migrant’s-eye view of the world” (*Homelands* 394), or rather precisely in and through offering a migrant’s-eye view of the world, *The Satanic Verses* thus offers insight into the complex morality that arises out of a confrontation with the universally human experiences of love and death. Rushdie’s book does this most powerfully when it is read not as a multifaceted cultural event but as what it after all gloriously is – a novel.

“It all boiled down to love, reflected Saladin Chamcha in his den” (411), the narrator tells readers at the outset of Part VII of *The Satanic Verses*. In the passages that follow, it becomes clear that this all-important entity, love, is a polymorphous, hard-to-pin-down, primarily imaginative reality. Love is the “refractory bird of Meilhac and Halevy’s libretto for *Carmen*”

(411), and as such it is one of the “prize specimens” in Chamcha’s Allegorical Aviary. In fact, all of the “winged metaphors” dutifully catalogued by Chamcha – “the Sweet (of youth), the Yellow (more lucky than me), Khayyam-FitzGerald’s adjectiveless Bird of Time (which has but a little way to fly, and lo! is on the Wing), and the Obscene,” the latter stemming from a delightful letter of Henry James, Sr. in which the patriarch discloses to his sons that the “natural inheritance of everyone who is capable of spiritual life is an unsubdued forest where the wolf howls and the obscene bird of night chatters” (411) – all of these flighty images appear to be different faces of the prism of love, “a zone in which nobody desirous of compiling a human (as opposed to robotic, Skinnerian-android) body of experience could afford to shut down operations” (411). Chamcha’s life, at least at this stage in the novel, has involved a fourfold love: “Of the things of the mind, he had most loved the protean, inexhaustible culture of the English-speaking peoples... Of material things, he had given his love to this city, London, preferring it to the city of his birth or to any other... *And of human beings, Pamela, I loved you*” (414). A fourth, final, and secret love involves the “love of a dream”: specifically, a recurring oneiric image in which Saladin teaches a grateful son to ride a bicycle. Taken as a whole, Saladin’s love as here described is a *dislocated* love, a love grounded in a dream-like desire for purity – a purity of culture (Western, English-speaking), a purity of place (Elloven Deeowen: Proper London), and a purity of relationship (an eternally grateful son, an eternally proud father) – that is disconnected from the inevitable impurity of the actual world. Pamela Lovelace, with her artificial smile – “her too-bright brightness, her face like a saintly mask behind which who knows what worms feasted on rotting meat” (417) – is fittingly the person in whom Saladin’s love of purity finds an ideal object, a nexus in which his dislocated love can find a tenuous location. By the end of the novel, however, Saladin has transformed (back) into Salahuddin, and

his love, too, has undergone a transformation: its ideal object is no longer that paragon of false purity, Pamela Lovelace, but Saladin's "very own djinn" (548), that all-too-human propheticess of hybridity, that cannibalistically intense lover whose tears have the color and consistency of buffalo milk, that art critic/doctor/political activist: yes, Zeeny Vakil.

It is no accident that Zeeny Vakil's book concerns itself with the "confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism" (52), for, upon barging back into Saladin's life on his theatrical return to Bombay, she begins "[t]he reclamation of" (53) Saladin from his self-imposed straitjacket of Englishized pseudo-authenticity. Zeeny perceives that Saladin's efforts to achieve an artificial form of purity – an imperially univocal Britishness – have resulted in a blank state of soul, a quality that, soon enough, will lead to Saladin's Kafkaesque transformation into a goatish devil. As Zeeny tells Saladin: "Sometimes, when you're quiet... when you aren't doing funny voices or acting grand, and when you forget people are watching, you look just like a blank. You know? An empty slate, nobody home. It makes me mad, sometimes, I want to slap you. To sting you back into life" (62). In the effort to sting Saladin back into life, Zeeny aims to restore him to the Bombay roots from which he has torn himself. These roots, in stark contrast to Saladin's purified fantasy of Proper London, are inherently *impure*. Witness: the ten-volume set of the Richard Burton translation of the *Arabian Nights* lying unread in Changez Chamchawala's library – a compendium if there ever was one of the Western Orientalist fantasy of inscribing its own fetish for the exotic upon the East as such. Saladin, upon his initial return to Bombay, has therefore returned to an impure father, an impure city: "Bombay was a culture of re-makes" (64). And according to the gist of Zeeny's book: "...for was not the entire national culture based on

the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest?” (52)

Zeeny embodies the eros of hybridity and/or the hybridity of eros found in *The Satanic Verses*, and she seeks to call Saladin home to her – and Rushdie’s – brand of “historically validated eclecticism.” As Rushdie writes in “In Good Faith”:

The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Melange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. (*Homelands* 394)³

Strikingly, though, Saladin at first resists the old self to whom Zeeny calls him back: “She was a vortex, a siren, tempting him back to his old self. But it was a dead self, a shadow, a ghost, and he would not become a phantom. There was a return ticket to London in his wallet, and he was going to use it” (59). If Saladin’s new, Londonized self appears empty to Zeeny, for Saladin the prospect of the old hybridity – a hybridity he had rebelled against since childhood – appears equally vacuous. Saladin is thus a man caught in a zone of in-betweenness surrounded on all sides by what feels like an abyss. Another way to express this condition: he is a man in love.

Zeeny is simply and not so simply a woman with whom Saladin falls in love – that most common of occurrences. Yet, in all of her multifaceted specificity, and in the apparent “banalities” (60) of her tryst with Saladin, Zeeny reveals something universal about falling in love: love involves one in the desire for another person who is undeniably *other*, another person who in turn responds to the *otherness* in one’s own precarious self-identity – as deconstructionists have long pointed out, self-identity can be defined in a positive sense of

³ As Booker notes, Rushdie’s writing has been “particularly attractive to postcolonial critics, such as Homi Bhabha and Sara Suleri, for whom cultural hybridity is a crucial critical category. On the other hand, the very hybridity of Rushdie’s work has been controversial as well, and many Indian critics have rejected his work as representative of Indian literature because Rushdie’s work (like Rushdie himself) is so extensively rooted in Western literary traditions” (3).

“presence” only because it is never actually identical with itself; in other words, forging an identity can occur only by foregrounding certain qualities of presence that must rely on a hidden background of absence, or otherness, in order to articulate themselves. In the experience of love, self-identity does not involve a univocal demarcation but rather a fragile intermingling of selves, a hybridity, a constant adventure of *newness*. Love, by facilitating a mutual commingling in which the categories of sameness and difference blur in an ever-shifting, never-fully-achieved-but-ever-desired union, makes one experientially aware of the inherent hybridity of the self. In dramatizing Chamcha’s complex negotiation of cultural identity within the locus of an ordinary love affair, Rushdie offers the “world of the heart, of intimacy and conversation” (Brennan 115), in other words, the immemorial verity of love, as both a way of understanding and a means of rectifying the tangled sociopolitical struggles in which an individual life is inevitably immersed. On the one hand, resistance to the uncertainty and open-ended *newness* of a relationship with the *other* leads to defensive violence – either explicit or passive-aggressive – that can wreak havoc either in an inter-cultural dialogue or in an individual love relationship; on the other hand, openness to the challenge of unhindered intermingling, of “historically validated eclecticism,” can help repair and foster relationships, whether sociopolitical or individual. Further, Rushdie reveals that cultural identity, like the tenuous identity of a lover in the grip of desire, is *inherently* hybridized. There is no *pure* culture that exists primary to the complex borrowings and interminglings involved in forging an ever-developing cultural identity. Chamcha, in his insistence upon judging hybridity based on an artificial dream of purity, falsely experiences Bombay and everything associated with it – his father, his childhood – as a *lack* that can only be overcome by the dream of purity. Nevertheless, in succumbing to the wiles of Zeeny Vakil, a

character who figures the enlivening potential of hybridity, Saladin reveals a crack in his dream of Proper London Purity.

In the course of the novel, Saladin exhibits two radically different reactions to Zeeny's powerful eros, both of which figure his overall relation to Bombay and its inherent hybridity.

First:

He had worked so hard and come so close to convincing himself of the truth of these paltry fictions [of his love for Pamela, for London] that when he went to bed with Zeeny Vakil within forty-eight hours of arriving in Bombay, the first thing he did, even before they made love, was to faint, to pass out cold, because the messages reaching his brain were in such serious disagreement with one another, as if his right eye saw the world moving to the left while his left eye saw it sliding to the right. (52)

Even though Zeeny's irrepressible naturalness and carnivorous sexuality reveal Pamela's artificial smile to be part of a paltry fiction created by Saladin's own fantasy of British purity, Saladin's "fervid readiness to judge" everything Indian, everything related to his father, prevents him from fully taking on the challenge of Zeeny's otherness. Later, however, when Saladin returns to Bombay to reunite with his dying father, it becomes clear that the challenge of Zeeny is one he has not put aside. Saladin

found his thoughts straying, no matter how hard he tried to fix them on his father, towards the question of Miss Zeenat Vakil. He had wired ahead, informing her of his arrival; would she meet the flight? What might or might not happen between them?... what did he really want? *I'll know when I see her*, he thought. (534)

And indeed, upon her djinn-like appearance, and as vivaciously hybridized as ever – "immersed in life up to her neck, combining occasional art lectures at the university with her medical practice and her political activities" (548) – Zeeny provokes in Saladin a spontaneous admission of love in which his fervent readiness to judge is at last tossed aside: "This was a generous woman, the most generous he'd known. *When you see her, you'll know*, he had promised himself, and it turned out to be true. 'I love you,' he heard himself saying, stopping her in her

tracks” (548). In proclaiming his love for Zeeny, Saladin simultaneously accepts his own impure, hybridized self. After the accumulated horrors of the novel, which partly serve to figure Saladin’s resistance to and eventual acceptance of hybridity, “Zeeny’s re-entry into [Saladin’s] life completed [a] process of renewal, of regeneration” (548) that is the heart of Rushdie’s novel. Nevertheless, Saladin’s acceptance of Zeeny/hybridity can only be understood in the context of his face-to-face involvement with his father’s death. In witnessing his father confront the most universal of human destinations, Saladin falls back in love with his father and thereby renews his own ability fully to love. Further: the verities of love and death, as encountered by Saladin in his reconciliation with his father, bring about a change in moral vision that allows Saladin to embrace the impurities not only in his father’s life but also in his own desire and, indeed, in his own hybrid identity.

That a book entitled *The Satanic Verses* problematizes conventional notions of morality perhaps goes without saying. That it offers alternative versions of what constitutes the “moral,” however, is not as readily acknowledged. Regardless, Saladin’s relationship with his father is the container in which Rushdie’s novel explores the contours of morality. Upon returning home to confront his father, with Zeeny Vakil in tow, Saladin is horrified at the odd domestic arrangement he encounters in his father’s home: Changez Chamchawala, married to Nasreen II and spending five days a week with her in a “high-walled compound nicknamed the Red Fort” (65), returns home to the old house at Scandal point to spend the weekends in quasi-divine homage to Nasreen I, Saladin’s mother. Not only has the house itself been “mummified” and preserved as it was on the day of Nasreen’s death, but also Nasreen herself has been resurrected, as it were, in the form of Kasturba, the wife of Changa’s long-time servant. So successful is Kasturba’s attempt to resemble Nasreen that Saladin himself thinks he sees the ghost of his dead

mother in the figure of Kasturba. Already with emotions running high – in confronting his father, after all, Saladin is facing the personification of all he sought to escape from in Proper London – and undeniably off-balance from his own problematic entanglement with Zeeny Vakil, Saladin reacts to his father’s unconventional arrangement with haughty moral outrage:

I did not come to fight him. Look, the old goat. I mustn't fight. But this, this is intolerable. “In my mother’s house,” Chamcha cried melodramatically, losing his battle with himself. “The state thinks your business is corrupt, and here is the corruption of your soul. Look what you’ve done to them. Vallabh and Kasturba. With your money. How much did it take? To poison their lives. You’re a sick man.” He stood before his father, blazing with righteous rage. (68)

What Saladin judges to be profane, Changez, and indeed Vallabh and Kasturba, view as sacred. “‘And you,’ Changez Chamchawala spoke as softly as his servant, ‘you come here to this temple. With your unbelief. Mister, you’ve got a nerve’” (69). This scene, clearly an instance of Rushdie’s sharp-witted and seemingly inveterate tendency to conflate the sacred and the profane, offers an emblematic example of Saladin’s fervid readiness to judge his father. Saladin’s ostensibly moral response is portrayed as a “losing battle”: in defensively asserting a strict dichotomy of moral-immoral behavior, Saladin misses the human specificity, the genuine, albeit ineradicably impure, feelings shared between the various players in this domestic arrangement. And further: since Changa’s odd, undeniably unnatural attempt to immortalize his dead wife can also be seen as a simulacrum of Saladin’s own quest for purity, Saladin’s strong reaction demonstrates the inevitable hypocrisy that characterizes a defensively judgmental response cloaking itself in so-called morality.

Late in the novel, under the influence of his father’s imminent death, Saladin is able to perceive the underlying love that exists within his father’s ostensibly immoral domestic life:

Nasreen II embraced Kasturba; each woman rested her head on the other’s shoulder. The intimacy between the two women was spontaneous and untarnished by resentments; as if the proximity of death had washed away the quarrels and jealousies of life. The two old

ladies comforted one another in the garden, each consoling the other for the imminent loss of the most precious of things: love. Or, rather: the beloved. (536)

And later:

In the morning, Nasreen and Kasturba arrived in clean saris, looking rested and complaining, “It was so terrible sleeping away from him that we didn’t sleep one wink.” They fell upon Changez, and so tender were their caresses that Salahuddin had the same sense of spying on a private moment that he’d had at the wedding of Mishal Sufyan. He left the room quietly while the three lovers embraced, kissed and wept. (541)

If “the proximity of death had washed away the quarrels and jealousies of life” in the relations between Nasreen and Kasturba, in the case of Saladin it had washed away his former moralistic response and brought about a truly moral understanding of the impure complexities of human love. Similarly, Changez’s proximity to death transforms Saladin’s overall dream of purity in which he had grounded his own desire and deepest identity. In witnessing his father nobly confront death, Saladin appears to see Changez as *human*, in all of his impure hybridity, for the first time. In this act of vision, Saladin’s own “old self,” the same self he had formerly found to be threateningly empty, transforms itself into a vibrancy of possibilities:

To fall in love with one’s father after the long angry decades was a serene and beautiful feeling; a renewing, life-giving thing... Saladin felt hourly closer to many old, rejected selves, many alternative Saladins – or rather Salahuddins – which had split off from himself as he made his various life choices, but which had apparently continued to exist. (538)

In opening himself up to a relationship with his father, Saladin opens himself up as well to a relationship with the mystery of death. “*What did he see?*” Salahuddin kept thinking” in the aftermath of witnessing his father’s death in all of its mysterious actuality. “*Why the horror? And, whence that final smile?*” (546). Changez bequeaths to Saladin a “life illuminated by a strangely radiant death, which continued to glow, in his mind’s eye, like a sort of magic lamp” (549). With transformed vision, free from the narrowly judgmental morality that comes when the inherent impurity of life is viewed from an imperial fantasy of purity, Saladin is now capable

of giving himself over to his own status as a hybrid being. He is able to embark upon the adventure of *newness* that commences when he spontaneously tells Zeeny Vakil that he loves her.

Out of his confrontation with the great verities of love and death, Saladin is able to transcend, albeit guardedly, the myriad horrors that he had undergone throughout the novel: an airplane disaster, a goatish transformation, a self-perpetuated act of Iagoesque treachery, the death of his wife, the suicide of Gibreel, and the list could perhaps go on. At the end of the novel, Saladin, now fully accepting his hybrid cultural identity, has learned that “this, too, was what human beings were like: considerate, loving, even noble. We are still capable of exaltation, he thought in celebratory mood; in spite of everything, we can still transcend” (542). This affirming insight is the rarely acknowledged positive message of *The Satanic Verses* in toto. Amid all the controversy generated by Rushdie’s book, it is important to realize that *The Satanic Verses*, in quietly affirming the morality of the seemingly immoral world of the heart – a world irretrievably connected to the mystery of death – offers a guarded sense of hope in the face of the precise kind of violence in which it has come to be embroiled. It offers this guarded sense of hope not as a political treatise or a religious manifesto, but as a novel, that unique form of art that suspends the insatiable human urge to judge so as to promote an imaginative, humane approach to life in the world.

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