

**How Newness Enters the World, Discussing Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*:
Incorporating an Original Piece of Fiction.**

By

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Introduction

This thesis aims at discussing a number of Rushdie's devices in *The Satanic Verses* to reach an understanding of his fiction, in particular the construction of a form that allows the "miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level – as the same order of event" (Rushdie, 1991). The paper combines an interest in literature and creative writing in my Bachelor study and anticipates my postgraduate study in the same direction. The thesis is divided into three parts; a discussion of *The Satanic Verses*; a short story by my own hand entitled 'Headcase', and an analysis of the short story.

In the first part, I will begin by discussing the multitude of traditions and myths in Rushdie's novel and explain how this is related to a miscellany of identity and truths. Also, I will argue that names are intrinsically connected to identity and I will suggest that they possess such guiding force in a character's life as could be called destiny. Furthermore, I will comment on the doubling of places and argue that in *The Satanic Verses* this makes for a shrunken universe. Additionally, I will discuss the psychological consequences of loss of faith and connect this to one of the major themes in Rushdie's work, which is transformation. Moreover, I will consider the setting of the novel in metropolitan areas as particularly suitable for this theme. Further, I will briefly outline the narrative construct of the novel and address the device of recursiveness.

The second part of the thesis consists of the short story 'Headcase', for I believe the best way to understand particular techniques is to employ them in literary fiction. This is followed by an analysis, which is the third and final part. In the analysis I will discuss which Rushdie-related themes I have incorporated into 'Headcase'. The appendix contains a diagram and plot outline of 'Headcase'.

About How Newness Enters the World

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a novel which challenges and contests discourse, problematizes discursive authority, and examines who may say what, and how; furthermore inquiring into the effects multiplicity of discourse has on the individuals who use it, and those who find themselves in the subject position. Especially, the novel examines the consequences of *linguistic appropriation* on the consciousness of the individual, exemplified by the transformations, both mental and physical that the protagonists undergo.

In Rushdie's (at first glance) chaotic manner of narration, in which different characters offer up clashing stories, realities and discourses, it becomes impossible to distinguish reality from dream, truth from lie, and God from Devil; resulting in a discourse that succeeds in encompassing a multitude of contrasting characteristics, rather than a single static element, all of the time. "The ambiguity and inherent contradictions of the formative mechanism of the text calls into being a narrational paradigm in which truth and fact are not necessarily interdependent or mutually referential" (Miller, March 2005).

It follows from this that the truth, at least in this particular novel, is a multi-faceted, non-absolute, ever-changing concept, an unstable abstraction that particularly Gibreel Farishta embodies, being moviestar, prophet and archangel all in one. In his dreams he is Mahound (a derogatory name for the prophet Mohammed) and he experiences the angel and himself flow in both directions of the umbilical cord that connects their bodies. He cannot tell who speaks, or who he is. Furthermore, Gibreel's early career as an actor refuses a singular notion of truth, since his great success, and his "old weakness" lies in taking on "too many roles" (108) as deities from various local traditions, suggesting a miscellany of identity and truths. In "In God We Trust" Rushdie describes *The Satanic Verses* as: "Mélange, hotchpot, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. The Satanic Verses is for change-by-fusion, change-by-rejoining" (394).

Names

Names play a significant part in directing the characters' destinies and run parallel to the transformations individuals undergo; old names are discarded as old selves die, and with the voluntary or forced birth of new selves, new names are adopted. For example, Farishta, born into a poor but loving family, was first named Ismail Najmuddin. According to the Bible, Ismail is the name of Abraham's bastard son who is cast out into the desert as soon as Abraham manages to conceive a son with his wife, Sarah. Christians believe Christianity was passed on through the legitimate son Isaac and Muslims think the Islam was passed on through the illegitimate child, Ismail.

The second name, Najmuddin, supposedly means "star of faith" and comes from Punjab mythical tradition, a northern Indian state bordering Pakistan (H.A. Rose et al). Farishta's multiplicity of personality is predestined in the bestowing of two different legacies.

Furthermore, his mother's childhood nickname for him is later on accepted as his full name. Farishta means 'angel' and so Gibreel Farishta refers to the angel Gabriel, but the purity of the name becomes ironic in later years when Farishta becomes a shameless womanizer who seems to get away with whatever damage he leaves behind, except for his affair with Rekha, the wife of a merchant, who throws her children and herself off the Everest Villa apartment building. Farishta is regularly haunted by her ghost. Especially during his periods of schizophrenia induced delusions he cannot get away from her. She follows him around on a flying carpet, going so far as to even find time to discuss his misdeeds with him when he is busy falling from an exploding plane.

It becomes clear through the transformations that the protagonists undergo that labels have the power to influence the labelled, or in other words, a description can change the described. The angelic label has a meaning affixed to it that alters the individual's character, subtly changing his consciousness. The human mind struggles to take on attributes of the description to try and live up

to the name, impacting in that sense one's concept of identity. Labels are powerful influences because they are intrinsic to a person's connection to society. In the case of labelling, as long as a person can rationalize the label for him or herself, its content is not necessarily accepted or taken on (Lemert, 1951). In other words, the external is not internalized. However, in a situation where one's relations, and in particular close relations such as family or friends, withdraw or disappear, one's tie to society becomes tenuous and the sense of connection to society as a whole diminishes. When that happens, it becomes increasingly likely for an individual to adopt the label and accept it as a part of their self image (Becker, 1963). In Farishta's case, his name becomes his identity, but because the word angel implies a person to be in the possession of certain characteristics, first and foremost purity, he is unable to live up to its demands. Purity, after all, does not allow compromise.

Furthermore, with regards to Farishta's identity, he cannot control that part of himself he wishes to be continuous and unchanging. He is no longer (and possibly has never been, because do not people change all the time, from birth to death?) a stable singular, but instead a protean being. These variations gradually slip out of his control; they get away from him and bleed over into his daily life to the extent where his self-concept is fractured beyond repair, or beyond coherence, to be more specific, with tragic consequences.

In contrast, Saladin Chamcha's new identity is not imposed, but self chosen. Saladin is short for Salahuddin, a name he leaves behind when he gets on a plane to England. Saladin was also the name of a famous Asian conqueror, consciously chosen to underline Saladin's own desire to conquer his much beloved England by adopting the customs, culture and the accent he imagines to be characteristic of Britishness. His last name Chamcha is similarly an abbreviation of Chamchawala, and means 'spoon'. As Zeeny tells Chamcha in the novel: "You name yourself Mister Toady and expect us not to laugh" (54). Toady and Spoon are both the appellations of an obsequious yes-man. M Keith Booker notes in his "Beauty and the Beast," that: "The cooperation of such "chamchas," of would-be Westernized natives, in colonized India made possible the success of the colonial enterprise" (996).

Doubling makes for a shrunken universe

The doubling of the names of locations is pivotal in the text. For example, Mahound travels to Mount Cone to receive the archangel's revelations, but Cone is also Alleluja Cone's last name. Allie Cone is a real, flesh-and-blood woman with history and troubles of her own. Although hallelujah is usually a term used in religious settings to praise the Lord, Alleluja in the novel is a non-religious person. Unlike her namesake mountain she is not a Cone of spiritual transcendence nor a place of revelation or Absolutes, but instead a person in whom the sacred and the profane overlap in a manner reminiscent of Gibreel, yet to a less dangerous extent. On the climb on mount Everest, Allie sees ghosts, in particular one Maurice fellow who follows her back to London. Also, when she reaches the top, she sees a city of ice, but is thankfully startled out of her altitude-induced hallucinations by a hard sound like a gunshot. It is entirely possible that in Rushdie's shrunken universe, she heard the sound of the exploding aircraft, *Bostan*, in that moment on the mountain. Bostan, it must be mentioned, is named after one of the Islamic Paradises.

Gibreel inevitably always ends up on Allie's doorstep when he comes out of his delusions, again providing an odd sense of doubling. Allie functions as a safe haven for Gibreel, assisting him in attempting to retain some semblance of sanity, but she also unintentionally causes his death. She serves as a blameless catalyst when she becomes the object of Gibreel's jealous fantasies that will push him to murder her (pushing her off the same building Rekha threw herself off of, Everest Villa), and lead him to commit suicide.

It seems that the world is not that big; the double names of people and places makes for a shrunken universe in which no individual can truly evade an other, or the history that binds the two, as evidenced by the conclusion, when Gibreel embarks upon his story "- which was also the end of many stories" (543) in Saladin's deceased father's study. London; Bombay; Desh; Jahilia, every place with its own eclectic mix of characters but in the end the universe is reduced to simple

contrasts, an unarmed man versus an armed one. Saladin and Gibreel have been each other's mirror image all along, opposites, but two halves of the same coin. Rushdie says in an answer to a student's question that it would be "perfectly legitimate to reduce them to a single entity. At the beginning of the book, they are said to be twins, two halves of a single whole" (MacCabe, June 1996, 59). In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie says: "For are they not conjoined opposites, these two, each man the other's shadow? - One seeking to be transformed into the foreignness he admires, the other preferring, contemptuously, to transform" (426).

Empty God space

"The haunting sense of absurdity in this text suggests a postmodern discourse at odds with the behaviors and espoused ideologies of many of the characters" (Miller, March 2005, 30). Both protagonists experience an internal incongruity that originates from doubt shaking the foundations of belief. Farishta quite abruptly loses his faith and sets to proving his "new-found atheism" (In *God We Trust*, 377) by munching copious amounts of pork, which is incidentally also the precise moment when he meets Alleluja Cone. It is proof of Gibreel's magic with females that she falls for him on the spot, angelic face greased and bulging with forbidden foods. That same night, Gibreel's dreams begin.

In "In God We Trust" Rushdie says that: "The dream is part of our very essence. Given the gift of self-consciousness, we can dream versions of ourselves, new selves for the old" (377). In every second chapter, Farishta dreams himself as prophet and angel, sometimes being both simultaneously. "He's not just playing the archangel but also him, the businessman, the Messenger, Mahound, coming up the mountain when he comes. Nifty cutting is required to pull off this double role, each must speak to empty air, to the imagined incarnation of the other and trust to technology to create the missing vision" (108).

The plurality of selves would not necessarily obviate the possibility of genuine revelation, but rather problematize the fusion of "the contemporary experience of revelation with the outside world. Gibreel fears sleep because he does not know how to interpret his experience" (Kuortti, 8). He has recently lost his faith, after all, so one can imagine that to become the unwitting spectator and participant in revelations of a Being in which he has only just started disbelieving, might have destabilizing effects on the psyche.

For Gibreel, his revelation is a genuine experience. "What keeps returning is this scene, the entranced Prophet, the extrusion, the cord of light, and then Gibreel in his dual role is both above-looking-down and below-staring up. And both of them feel scared out of their wits by the transcendence of it" (111). Allie too, experiences a moment of exaltation on her mountain. "Everest silences you [...] When you come down, nothing seems worth saying, nothing at all. You find the nothingness wrapping you up, like a sound. Non-being" (296). What Rosa sought in Argentina, under the "limitless blue vault of a sky" and Allie momentarily finds on the mountain, is an escape from moral definitions, to get away from the good or bad, to have all of that stripped away, to be reborn.

Gibreel's visions do not seem to originate from God's will, but rather, are drawn from him by the Prophet's desire for revelation. That is not to say the experience of revelation is therefore by extension corrupted and unreal. The experience itself does not have to signal divine intervention, but a vision may very well be a genuine spiritual moment.

In comparing belief and disbelief, Chamcha's convictions are different from Gibreel's only in that his have come to rest on Englishness. He conceives of it as an external force in which he invests the near supernatural power to transform him into a real Englishman. Chamcha attempts to reinvent himself over and over again in that image, until finally he is forced to conclude that his wishes and dreams do not align with reality, are incapable of alligning, and he is no longer able to blind himself to his limitations in becoming what he imagines he wants to be. This tranformational process of necessary desillusionment is very painful, or so he discovers when the police mistake him for an illegal immigrant and subject him to humiliation and torture. England is not the country

he thought it was.

In this sense, both protagonists lose their faith. In truth, their lives seem to be an ongoing process of imagining realities and the invention of frames. The characters enter these constructed pictures and live in them. These mirror-realities are powerful enough that stepping out of the frames takes more than human effort. Even if the picture does not equate with the world, the characters try to grab onto it as long as they can, because stepping from one frame into another requires a change in person as well as vision, it is an experience of "uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) and from which can be derived a metaphor for all humanity" (In God We Trust, 377).

The loss of faith is an earth-shaking event with great transformational influence on the individual's consciousness. Rushdie cautions that its effects should not be underestimated. One enters a state of incoherence, reaches a point from which there is no turning back. It becomes necessary to find a way to reach new coherence; to build a new framework for reality by imagining it from the ground up.

Furthermore he states in "In God We Trust" that in attempting to describe reality as it is for religious people, the form of his writing was affected. He found "the conventions of what is called realism" to be inadequate following the reasoning that for those with religious conviction, "God is not symbol but everyday fact" (376).

Miller says in "It was so, it was not so" that: "The surrealism of the world in which the characters live stems from the clashing of personal and social discourses against the reality of cultural (and individual) systems that give the lie to any claim of unimpeachable, disinterested truth" (30).

Collision, death, renewal

The scene of this battlefield of clashing discourses in *The Satanic Verses* is usually set in a metropolis, as Allie Cone's father calls it: "the locus classicus of incompatible realities" (314). It is a logical setting. Metropolitan areas are places where a great many different influences come together, allowing separate elements opportunity to react and fuse in a playground of continuous transformation. In an interview, Rushdie says that Ovid's *Metamorphosis* was very helpful to the creation of his own novel and adds: "after all this (*The Satanic Verses*) is a novel about metamorphosis" (MacGabe, 8). The characters change shape, growing horns and haloes, and have their hair turn white overnight. The text poses important questions regarding the nature of change also addressed in Ovid, particularly whether "a change in form was a change in kind" (MacGabe, 8).

Sufyan, who hosts Saladin in goat-state, spends a few pages explaining the different views on "mutability of the essence of the self" (276) by drawing on ancient philosophers. Lucretius, as Saladin is told, holds the view that when a thing transforms, it is released from the bounds of what it was before and changed into something new entirely. The old dies to make way for the new. Change, in this sense, is irreversible, what is lost cannot be brought back, which is something Saladin wants most, but is also fearful of. "He had been reborn into the knowledge of death; and the inescapability of change, of things-never-the-same, of no-way-back, made him afraid" (260).

In contrast to Lucretius' views, Sufyan expounds on Ovid's theory in *Metamorphosis*, that people are flexible beings who are able to change shape under transformational forces without losing or breaking the essence of what they are. To recall his phrasing, Ovid likens people to wax, which can take various forms and "is stamped with new designs" (276) yet its shape or design does not in the least affect or impair the simple fact that wax is wax. "Our spirits! Our immortal essences! - 'Are still the same forever, but adopt in their migrations ever-varying forms'" (277).

The protagonists are at some point or other forced to ask themselves the question of whether identity remains the same through several states, if there is some sort of thread linking the human experience, or if the human essence is just a random collection of sequential moments. "Hume and Nietzsche hold this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination

merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions and volitions" (Ricoeur, 246).

Chamcha prefers Lucretius over Ovid. "The inconstant soul, the mutability of everything, das Ich, every last speck. A being going through life can become so other to himself as to *be another*, discrete, severed from history" (288). That choice makes sense, because after all, that is what Saladin desires most, to change himself completely. He has immersed himself so deeply in this internal discourse that it overrides even what his senses tell him is true. Although he strives to speak perfectly accented British, he cannot erase all characteristics of his mother tongue. He feels betrayed by his voice when his native language makes itself increasingly known the more physically closer he is to his land of birth.

Saladin blinds himself to reality and continues to stick to his internal rhetoric. Though he has considered himself to be a secular man ever since his God-like worship of his father diminished and changed to a relationship of mutual frustration and resentment, he is filled to the brim with beliefs, secretly accompanied by doubts. When first he moves back into the house with Pamela and her lover Joshi, he holes up in his room. "He remained at first virtually immobile in his den, allowing it to grow back around him at its own pace, waiting for it to regain something of the solid, comforting quality of its old self, as it had been before the altering of the universe" (405). But it fails to do so, because the change in the universe in truth represents a change in him, and proves to be irreversible. Chamcha's internal rhetoric is further evidence of him trying to retain his faith, attempting to persuade, justify and reason away the facts.

Saladin confides to Zeeny that: "each phase of his life, each self he tried on, had seemed reassuringly temporary. Its imperfections didn't matter, because he could easily replace one moment by the next, one Saladin by another. Now, however, change had begun to feel painful; the arteries of the possible had begun to harden" (63). For Chamcha, the settling of his transmutation signals the beginning of another kind of change, of *becoming*, while for Farishta, the distance between his selves has made coherence a tenuous thing.

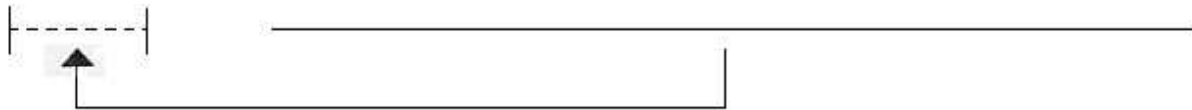
Narrative construct

Rushdie alternates between his character's *limited omniscient* points-of-view (Burroway, 302), or "those things belonging in a character's model of reality" (Rushdie, 174). He shifts the fictional *means of perception* between what we learn to be Shaitan's perspective, the protagonists and a multitude of smaller characters. For example, when Gibreel has the archangel fully born into his flesh while walking through London, he suddenly 'regains' the archangel's memories and remembers a flood of some kind. Also, Gibreel, by essentially becoming another person, a kind of hybrid of both the moviestar and the angel while retaining the memories of both, the merging of those two viewpoints offer a new perspective. The love the moviestar has for Allie, for instance, is transformed from a source of comfort to one of temptation. In the reading of any type of fiction, the reader is asked to go along, to allow small details and transcending concepts some space in our consciousness. In that space, fiction creates a framework for reality, in which a certain amount of room between belief and disbelief is filled up with probabilities. In a fictional universe, believability involves setting several premisses, deriving predominantly from the setting of rules for that particular universe, and furthermore a consequent adhering to such rules. In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie aims at inspiring doubt, using "the power of description" discussed earlier. He re-appropriates that power, as it were, giving the described the opportunity to define themselves. Chamcha in his full body-turned-Devil state embodies the fear of otherness that is so often the subject of post-colonial discourse, but to the Others, the marginalized immigrants and the rootless generations that are born from them see this Devil form as "messianic," children wearing plastic devil-horns at what is to be the start of collective defiance. A single being can have many different definitions, several, often contrasting meanings attached to it. The multitude of perspective-dependent meanings forces the reader to question the nature and the accuracy of the information offered. Obviously, this questioning pertains to the retelling of Mohammed's revelations, but also reaches beyond the veil of religion, inquiring into the very nature of revelation itself.

Recursiveness

"Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion" (McHale, 37). Reading a novel can be such an excursion of the consciousness, but in *The Satanic Verses*, it is also something Gibreel experiences with his dreams. Furthermore, it is an effect structurally recreated in the novel's generous employment of *repetitive narration*. "What 'happened' once is told several times. The narration returns again and again to a specific story-event [...] and then links these repetitions to other narrative variations – of narrator, perspective, and passage of time. These variations create thematic complexity, among other things exploring how far-reaching (and different) the consequences of one single action might be" (Lothe, 61). The most often observed device is the one of *external analepsis*. We "jump back to a point in the story before the main narrative starts" (Lothe, 54).

Fig. 1.
External analepsis (Lothe, 55).



The temporal shifts function as supplements to the main narrative. This supplement can, in chronological time, lead up the main narrative, or can, as is often the case in Rushdie's work, be located in an isolated piece of time before the main narrative. Then, we move from the supplement to the point in the main narrative where we last left off in another time leap, this time jumping ahead, from which we move forward in a linear direction before repeating the same circular motion.

Rushdie often circles back, clearing up what was purposefully kept opaque before, reshaping and redirecting the discourse. Every new fork in the road we are allowed to look in on the fiction's framework of reality from another point of view, shedding light on some obscurities, and adding complications to what we previously assumed was transparent. "It's an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back" (205). "This is not just a set of facts in a vacuum, but a structure of fact, explanation, supposition, which draws on our already existing knowledge" (154).

Similarly to what the reader goes through, Gibreel and Saladin both experience a circling back on events, places and people, when they reach that point of return, the universe splits; it forks off into new directions and the characters take another path. In this text, nothing is straight-forward, the very form of the novel changes. A discourse that is subject to constant alteration cannot be a singular, uncompromising absolute.

Headcase

When Solian woke, he knew that something had become dislocated inside of him; an indispensable adhesive element keeping his parts together had dissolved overnight. Fragments had shifted out of their places, had been sent skidding and sliding across his being and were lost in between the cracks and gaps he was made up of. It was the first morning in six months that his mother wasn't there to greet him with a smile. It hadn't been her real smile, for she was dead even though she refused to disappear, but a smile he'd photocopied onto her face with the help of his box of old, yellowing memories. He considered it an amusing, slightly sad side-effect from all that she'd taught him, to have flattened her like a picture, and to have invented her as someone she'd never been. Her transformation was complete now. With the force of his imagination he had un-made her, for the house was silent except for the irregular murmur of bubbles inside the radiator.

It was just when he'd pushed himself up, sitting on the edge of his bed that he was overcome by fear. Through the open door of his bedroom he spotted a cockroach moving across the living room floor, and it wasn't the bug per se that caused his anxiety, he prided himself on having no irrational fears; but instead he was distressed to find himself confronted with the unlikeliness that his earlier dreams had begun overlapping with reality right in that moment when his mother had ceased smiling. The bug's tiny feet tapped out a code on the wooden floor and the impossible sounds reverberated like drumbeats in his skull. It was like nothing he'd ever heard before, up until then he had only been familiar with inscriptions, but he knew, because his mind had gone quiet and very, very clear, that the secret communication spelled out his name. Not his given name, but the one belonging to the man his mother had tried to turn him into.

They knew where he was. Solian felt sweat break out all over his skin. They had summoned him, calling him by his true name – a name they couldn't know, because it had not survived his childhood and wasn't known to anyone but his mother and himself. They must know everything. They were coming for him. Frantically, he searched his brain for warnings and signs, for lately there had been frequent moments when he knew himself to be observed. That man in the coffee shop a few days back, he'd worn a black tie with white oval-shaped dots on it. Abruptly, he seized the memory and brought the white shapes into sharp focus. They'd been skulls. The man had been watching Solian and texting all the while. And the mail man, giving him those looks, - the sun had briefly glinted off a round object, a bald head, dangling from his keychain - and that lady across the street, and that skateboarding guy and and and...

Solian jumped to his feet, suddenly certain there must be eyes *inside* his house as well. Nothing was beyond their reach. He felt it then, the sensation of being watched like a hundred tiny insect feet on his skin. He sprinted into the living room and hurriedly drew a chair away from the table. He climbed up on it and detached the ceiling lamp with shaking hands. He unscrewed the light bulb, inspecting it closely enough his nose left a sweaty stain on the glass. There was something inside the little glass bubble. Solian jumped off the chair, forgetting for a moment his limitations that increased yearly, and crashed face first to the floor when his ankle gave out promptly upon impact with the floor, light bulb pressed protectively to his chest. It made a dull crunching sound under his body.

For a brief moment, he lay very still and merely focussed on breathing and blinking. He felt disoriented and couldn't tell whether he was awake or dreaming. His name, the cockroaches' message still echoed in his mind and continued to gain force. It was as if the shock of skull on floor had made it fall out of his head, rolling over the floor like a glass marble, then returning, bigger and faster, slamming back home where it belonged. The name was pulsing outward from his brain to his eyes, pushing beyond the barriers of his vision. He dimly registered the sound, information filing away in some obscure lobe, but he didn't *know*, wasn't consciously aware that he'd been murmuring his own name out loud all along.

It was as if his earlier dreams (the recurring ones that made him afraid to sleep) had bled over into his hard-wood floor. The grain in the board that pressed against his cheek came alive under the touch of his eyes, started shaking trembling shifting, - *he did that, but how?* - and

slithered around him, wild undulating lines attempting to convey some sort of message. He tried to track the movements, but when he shifted, they shifted along. As soon as he reached out towards the lines with his mind, they were obliterated. They spun out of his line of sight and away from his control, lingering on the edges of his vision like predators right outside a camp-fire's circle of light.

With some difficulty, Solian regained control over his limbs, and pushed himself up. He forced his rubber legs to cooperate, folded them under his body (hissing when his abused ankle protested) and sat down on the floor. He brushed the pieces of broken light bulb off the front of his shirt, and was glad that the glass hadn't cut his skin. He wiped his sweaty hands on his knees before cautiously sweeping the pieces of the light bulb together with his fingers. He gathered them in a small hill and examined each fragment with great attention. He didn't know how they'd done it, but he found a little black metal wire that had been inside his store-bought bulb. A secret military invention of some kind. Whoever was after him, they were using highly advanced technology. He had to get out. Right now. His apartment was compromised.

* * * * *

Shoeless and in a sweat soaked shirt, Solian hurried through the streets. He ignored the people staring and merely limped faster. He had to reach the old factory. Everything would become clear. The inscriptions on the factory walls would tell him what needed to be done. He was good at decoding the messages. His mother had taught him well. He hadn't known what Fabel had been doing, of course, but from her stories, he realised now, it was obvious she had understood the necessity of training him to fulfil his purpose all along. Her tales had centred around him, he'd been the main character in every one of them. The stories had been meant to prepare him for exactly this day.

Little Howard Carter, she had called him. She'd been inordinately proud to find him digging up her flowerbeds in search of treasure. True genius, she'd told the neighbours. The real Howard Carter had started studying inscriptions when he'd been seventeen, but her Solian started digging at the age of five. That boy was going places. That had been the most frequently misunderstood thing about Fabel Paucis, who with her sharp tongue and quick wit had taught herself the art of appearing arrogant, simply to hide that she was a woman made up solely of doubts and fears. She needed constant fiction in her life to prevent serious disorganization of her person.

From birth onwards, possibly even before (in his calmest, darkest dreams he thought he heard a steady ba-bump ba-bump intertwining itself with her voice) she had coloured his childhood with too many things that could-have-been but *weren't*. Somewhere during middle school, when his willingness to listen to her stories started to disappear, Solian felt deeply the disenchantment of bare, untold reality and begun to experience life as an endless succession of disillusionments.

He had soaked up her stories, immersed himself in the adventures and in the separate versions of himself so completely that he'd started to wonder too late how he could go back if he wandered too away from himself. What he blamed her for was that she had made him believe in the fictions of his own person. She had created for them a universe and invested in herself the power of Creator (the old cliché, the writer as god), inventing him over and over again, sorting out the essential elements within the manifold forms in which his mind presented itself, and separated the parts forcibly and forever, stapling names and faces to his traits and shaping the fragments after their definition. Although her inspiration in dividing and altering and setting apart seemed limitless, she had never thought to imagine for them some sort of unification.

Fabel had fed his natural curiosity for history (histories, really, he could not escape from the plurality she imposed) and gave it direction by holding up for him a kind of mirage of the future – this is what you can be and should be. An archaeologist, to Fabel a nearly superhuman being, digging up what was lost, decoding what was mysterious, and recreating its glory. Solian had dreamed (his sleep invaded by his mother's will) of discovering cursed tombs in Egypt, or unearthing Incan burial grounds in Peru, or explaining on the Oprah talk show in detail his ground breaking research on hidden rooms in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Of all those dreams, the only one that had come true was the one of growing older.

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Solian limped towards the boarded up frame of Sinai, a long shut down factory of stone tablets; gravestones, monuments, the lot. Nearly there, so close, close enough to touch, blessed epiphany for sure, new messages, now he'd know. His hands traced in air the communication he desired to touch, but dared not. The Wall he'd come for specifically was overwritten with secret inscriptions, data hidden in a multitude of murals, every detail important, nothing without its reason, and Lord, what a beautiful thing, Solian thought, that there was nothing in the world without a reason for existing. Finally then, fortifying himself, he reached out with his right hand and reverently touched the tip of his forefinger to a neon-green painting of a skull. His brain was instantly overloaded with images and information; a great rush of having all that he'd ever learned of skulls abruptly shoved into the forefront of his consciousness. All that knowledge was equally present, a single photo frame fitting a million pictures; everything, everything, too much. Solian shook as if something in his mind had short circuited, but even then did not relinquish his contact with the Wall. The ultimate message was there, waiting for him, and Solian knew he was the only human being whose eyes could break the encryption.

From the world he'd just left by stepping through the portal on Sinai, the sound of his name tugged insistently at him, and because he hadn't finished shedding his skin yet, that old itchy thing, it rejuvenated when the sound came closer, *a woman's voice*, his name tightened his skin and recaptured his spirit, forcing it to settle once again in his unloved bones. Finger still touching the coloured bricks, Solian turned his head, observing with a languid kind of apathy that there was a woman pulling at him.

Marta shifted her sunglasses higher up her nose to hide her continually watering eyes, one of the few secondary symptoms of her condition, relatively small, really, but one that she loathed; and committed herself to the practice of patience. It wasn't going well. The stares slid off her like water, and public opinion had never influenced her even the slightest, (except for when it was turned against her, then she fed on it and flourished) but she was rather galled to find that the man she'd been avoiding for weeks was clinging to her like a child, and showed no signs of letting go.

"Shhhhh, please shut up," she sighed, not unkindly, and awkwardly patted him on the head. She shifted in her seat as much as his embrace would allow her and tried to reach the bus cord. She stretched her whole body so far she thought her joints might pop out. Her fingertips finally touched the cord, but right then, Solian squeezed her so violently she lost her grip.

"For heaven's sake," she wheezed, "we need to get off here, let me just umpf gasp goddamnit Solian, let me go."

In the end, they passed their stop and had to walk two blocks back to her house, and walking was something that Marta did not find enjoyable. Standing or sitting down, nobody could tell there was something wrong with her. Only when moving, her rigidity showed and proved her limitations.

It had been easier getting him on the bus than off. He had claimed the engine was speaking to him, kind but sad words, and doesn't everyone need someone to listen to them? That had been disturbing. But not as disturbing as when he'd started talking back. Marta was pretty sure it wasn't an actual language. The police should have been there for that show, honestly, they should have just locked him up when she told them to, poor sod, truth-staring at graffiti on a wall, obviously unhinged. Sure he seemed non-violent, but who was going to take care of him now, barefoot and wearing pyjamas, even she wasn't heartless enough to leave him to his own devices.

Marta was startled out of her contemplative mood when Solian promptly burst into tears next to her. He hurried to hide himself behind her and shook. He was horribly afraid of the lock in the front door.

"Skull, skull, skull," he jabbered. They knew where to find him, he hadn't finished his

mission yet, and it was important, so important. Marta wanted to cry as well, and she would have, but her eyes were already watering, and really, she just plain wasn't the type for hysterics.

She took his hand and squeezed it gently, hoping it would have more positive effects than her previous attempts to reason with him. He went very still under her touch, and opened his eyes so wide it looked like it hurt, for all the world seeming as if she'd never touched him before, and now that she thought about it, maybe she hadn't, not really. He had always been the one to initiate contact before, she hadn't reached for him even once, except maybe in her mind. She hadn't loved him, but she had made an honest effort to hide it, which she considered a much more noble endeavour than the useless pursuit of teaching oneself to generate affection. What with her history of being passed around from relative to family-friend to foster home and back again - caught in some kind of loop, like a snake biting its own tail (but that was really Solian's thing, the Mayan imagery, he must've gotten into her head after all) she had felt lovelessness taking up space in her body, a small crack that widened and pushed her own ability to love to the outskirts of her being, as if stretching her capacity for warmth generation around a steel frame, where it remained, tight and dried out by disuse.

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He had insulted that about her, her lack of feeling, the first time they met. Back turned to her, he had stood in front of one of her paintings, and at the sound of her heels coming to a clicking halt behind him, cocked his head and loudly announced that the work was flat, that it was a piece without feeling, nicely calculated and properly structured, but flat. She'd been constructing some wonderfully acid comments when he turned his vivid blue eyes on her, and childishly stuck out his tongue. In her surprise, she'd swallowed her insults and introduced herself instead.

"Then how about this one, how do you like this piece?" He had stared at it, touching his ear to his shoulder, whether to find a new angle, or to buy time, she couldn't tell.

"That's intense," he eventually said, without hiding he'd found nothing in her work to compliment. There was something about his unapologetic honesty she found very charming.

"You're odd," she said. He smiled and Marta was surprised to find herself mirroring it without effort. It felt natural to smile at him.

There was something free about Solian. It was exciting in a frightening way, because he threatened the organization of her carefully constructed person and her life, while making her realise at the same time that it was what she'd been longing for all along.

"You wanna have dinner with me?" he asked. "I don't really like your paintings, but you seem interesting enough."

"What did you have in mind?"

"I could go for some old fashioned dine and dash," he grinned at her. "I'll pick you up at eight. Wear running shoes."

It hadn't been his fault they hadn't worked out. Their fights had been explosive, drawing on each other's deepest reserves of resentment, and focussing all that newly released energy into hurting the other. She had accused him of loving his mother too much, and he had accused her of lovelessness, which had touched upon such an old hurt in her she'd set to breaking all the pottery in the house.

Marta had passed through a great number of homes, revisiting and passing again and again and again. Before she'd turned ten, she'd lived in twelve different families. An ever-changing environment had become norm rather than exception. Marta had made herself the constant. She fancied herself a rock in a river, unmoved by the continuously altering flow around her. She had defined her characteristics (or invented them, she couldn't tell) and made a conscious effort to become what she told herself she was. She would never yield, couldn't, not after she had resolved never to again.

It was a game aunt Cecile had liked to play with her. At the end of the week, after a few glasses of the dark unlabelled bottle in the back of the cupboard, hidden behind the cereals and rice,

Cecile would inspect Marta's room. She would trail her fingers over the shelves, trying to catch the remaining dust. She'd get down on her knees and feel around under the bed. If the cleaning duties had been completed successfully according to Cecile's standards, and it always was, even when Marta stopped cleaning at all (it hadn't been about cleanliness, after all), Marta would receive several pounds pocket money.

Aunt Cecile would drop the notes on the floor, not unkindly, for she hadn't been an unkind woman, not really, and at first Marta hadn't understood why she dreaded that moment at the end of the week so much, but it was only when she bent over and picked up the money that Cecile would gently touch her hair, lean in too close, tell her *good girl*, and smile at her. Really smile, with warmth, in exactly the way Marta yearned for during the rest of the week but was always denied without the influence of cooking sherry. It seemed to her that bending (submitting, really) was a prerequisite for love.

Then Cecile would walk out of the room taking measured, careful steps to try and hide what Marta had guessed already by the smell of her breath. Cecile's broad ankles – the only part of Cecile Marta could see when stooped – were the first things that ever inspired a stab of true animosity in her, and when she was picked up by another relative a few months later to go live on the other side of the country, she had made a promise to herself never to bend again. Over the years, her spine had stiffened alongside her resolve.

“It sounds like superstition, maybe,” she told Solian, “but I've always kind of thought I did it to myself.”

The diminishing flexibility of her spine had been mistakenly written off as growing pains at first, but eventually, that explanation ceased to suffice. Marta's head contained odd facts about the medical terminology used in that eventual condemning diagnosis, something about inflammatory arthritis, chronic, HLA-B27 gene, tiny useless facts, they did not matter. What was important, however, was that these small things would have the rather large consequence that her spine, by then already stiff and inflexible, would fuse together as the disease progressed. The fusion of her spine would also stiffen her ribcage, restricting the expansion of the lungs.

Even as the near-adult she'd thought herself to be at thirteen, she hadn't been able to pronounce *ankylosing spondylitis* properly, but was determined not to be beaten by something as simple as a definition, – definitions were her forte, her secret pride, she owned the power of definition, damnit – and she had referred to her disease from then on as Bamboo Spine, which made the doctors wince, but also, as an unexpected but welcome side effect, garnered the respect and admiration of her peers. It was then she learned that pretending to be tough paid off. She had an expressive face and therefore poured excessive amounts of energy into smoothing it out. Marta had always wondered if with her growing ability to smother its physical manifestation, she could also learn to smother the feelings it originated from. Solian had no such aspirations, all that he felt showed on his face, immediately and without attempting to hold back, ongoing fluctuation of mood and emotion allowed free play with his body. It struck her as immature, but she also secretly considered it a beautiful thing.

He had glowed with almost childlike delight when he presented her with the treasures he'd dug up from the mess the previous owners of the house had left behind. She lived in a restored Public Library and had set up her studio in the attic under newly installed skylights. Solian had found in the basement some of the large aluminium letters that had previously adorned the front of the building, but not all. Some were missing, and others were dusted white and riddled with holes. Eventually, they decided to only reinstate the 'P' and the 'L', which had both remained intact.

"It stands for 'Place to Live'," she said, when people asked. Solian, however, had renamed it the Promised Land.

Solian had hung them close together and high up on the wall while Marta held the ladder.

“Little more to the right,” she'd called.

“Sure thing, my ox-eyed darling.”

“Did you just call me a cow?” She shook the ladder threateningly and Solian squealed in a decidedly unmanly fashion.

“Don't kill me! I likened your eyes to the dreamy dark ones of an ox, totally different. In Greek mythology, there was this jealous goddess that turned this beautiful girl into...”

“Stop before you dig yourself in any deeper.” Marta smiled. “I will not be compared to anything with four legs, however cute the story attached to it.”

“But really, it's quite a compliment.”

“Don't you know anything about women?” She shook the ladder again, playfully. “Sometimes I think the only reason you wear a head on your shoulders is to look taller.”

He laughed so hard then she'd needed both her hands to steady the ladder, and she couldn't help but join in, even though her quiet laughter, as it reverberated painfully up her stiff spine, was swallowed up by his.

To Solian, Marta's personality had seemed a strength, and he had blinded himself to the limitations of immutability. Increasingly of late, she would stop in the street, finding it hard to breathe, resenting her body for confining her spirit. Living in a vivid world as a fully-awake person, what a dream that would be. Solian walked and breathed (lived) with an ease that was painful to watch. He was a violent splash of red against a white wall.

But then he'd slowly become more intensely absorbed in her work, asking every day to see what she'd worked on, following her to the studio and hovering behind her. She had been amused at first, and a little flattered, but then the interest he'd had in her transferred itself to her paintings entirely. She thought he'd been analysing the pieces as a way of understanding her, but he had started to view every work as if it were a world on its own, a story in itself. He named each piece as if he had the right to – “This one should be called 'Holy Peak'” and refused to let her sell them. He related everything back to his mother, of whom he talked as if they were still chatting daily. When he told her that Fabel had only recently passed, Marta was honestly grieved. It was hard to compete with a dead woman. Harder even to win.

“I'm sorry,” she said. “I know how much you loved her.”

“It's not like it was unexpected,” he said, fingers restlessly fluttering over and tracing in air the lines of red in one of her paintings. “Everyone dies, after all.” There had been so little feeling in his eyes that Marta had felt her blood run cold.

As a side effect of her chronic, inflammatory arthritis, Marta's eyes had started to hurt and became sensitive to light. Her eyes watered continually even in her darkened living room, and her beloved studio with its glaringly white walls was suddenly the worst place to be. What about her art? What about life without the smell of paint, without colours? Solian had taken the news even harder, had yelled, raged and cried until Marta forcibly shoved him out the door, and told him never to come back.

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He was calm now, eyes half-lidded, but not sleepy. He seemed almost normal, save for sudden twitches as if every now and again, invisible people were touching and poking him. She shifted closer and looked at the ceiling. She had turned on her old lamp, the one that projected constellations. It had been a final measure of calming Solian down. Surprisingly, it had worked. They lay next to each other on the carpet, side by side, without touching. When he started talking, she'd never felt farther removed from him.

“She was mad,” he said, and Marta was startled by how clear he sounded out the words.

“She spoke,” he continued, but lost where he'd been going and started again half-way somewhere else.

“Frag frag many us.” *She spoke the words, fragmented us, made one into too many.* Marta knew the words by heart.

“Love,” Solian said, and faltered, seeming to lose his trail of thought entirely, but now that he had embarked upon his often repeated story, Marta couldn't un-remember it. *I don't think I loved her anymore, near the end. I could not see what linked us. All those separate fictions, and nothing to keep us together. Every day, our fragments drifted farther away. I didn't know where my mind*

ended and hers began. It seemed that even the space in my head was really just an extension of her. He turned his head to Marta as if tuned in to where his memory-self had left off in her head and confided in a low voice:

"We wandered. Far. She. Back." His speech degenerated into mumblings. *I wandered too far, got lost too often, but she made it seem that instead of forgetting myself, I was gaining everything. But now she's gone. She took all the road signs with her and I don't know the way back.*

His breathing had turned shallow, and with a faint start, Marta realised his face was unattractively folded up in an attempt not to cry.

"How. She. How do I find myself?" he asked, twisted mouth sharply biting off the words. It was the same thing he had told her nearly a hundred times over, same theme, near-identical words. She had wondered before, and she guessed it was cleared up now, that Fabel had not been the mad one for telling so many different stories. Maybe true madness could be found in telling only a single story over and over again. Fabel had shown at least that she controlled the tale. Solian, inversely, was controlled by the story.

Marta understood that Fabel was what had kept him together like glue, and when she died, it had unravelled him at the seams, picking his stories apart and ripping out the guiding thread until he was nothing more than a mere sequence of events.

"If you," *wanted to*, Marta's mind filled in, *I'm "sure" you could "find me."* Solian reached for Marta's hand (but was he looking at her, really, when had he ever seen her?) and clung to it with both of his own. She let him.

"Tell me," *how to recognize myself and maybe "he and I" can once "again" inhabit the "same" body.*

A bit of wetness seeped from her lashes, but Marta told herself it was just from staring too hard at her old sky.

"Sure, honey," she said. "Tomorrow, we'll find a way to help you."

The firmament trembled, stars shifted and started moving in new, faster-paced patterns so quickly Solian thought the experience of movement might very well be due to a defect of his eyes, or of his brain. Perhaps he was intoxicated, or maybe he was shaking his head really hard from side to side, he didn't know, sometimes it was hard for him to tell what he was doing. But then the thought fell into his head as if shaken loose from the sky. It dropped down into the empty room in his head that had been built for receiving messages, and everything became clear.

So this is Apocalypse. He realised he had been bracing himself throughout his entire life for precisely such an event.

Missing time. A sky, there had been a sky. Nothing between himself and the infinite, then a hole in his head. He pinched the bridge of his nose, and realised there was paint on his hands. A beautiful, full colour. Had he done that, the painting? It looked like a random collection of words and phrases shaped into something like a human head, a face with holes where eyes and nose should have been, there was a word for that kind of thing, he knew, but it was a dead thing, and dead things had the tendency to escape his grasp, so he didn't search for it, not the thing nor the word. He turned the canvas around and pressed the wet paint against the white wall with deliberate and steady hands.

When he let go, finally, *enough is enough* after all, there was an inverted life on his wall, he thought. It was a little smeared and very, very right. He could still recognize the message. The imprint on his brain overlaid the wall, shifted focus when he shifted focus, moving over his paintsplattered hands, the floor, back to the wall. The image fit seamlessly enough that he couldn't tell whether the picture in his head was the real, or a laterally reversed one. His brain was trying to escape its confines, *ba-bump ba-bump*, so hard to think. He would have closed his eyes if he thought it would help.

He would repaint the wall. Broad white strokes. A few coats. It took about a day to dry a single coat, he'd learned that from a woman, a good sort of woman, kind, but she'd been tried for lovelessness, and had been found guilty. Three coats and three days should cover it all.

Analysis

"Headcase" begins with the awakening of Solian, who has been undergoing a steady transformation for several months, a disintegration really, and has now arrived at some kind of breaking point. As in *The Satanic Verses*, the story touches upon the question of mutability of the self, and the possibility of a single physical body possessing several selves. Similar to Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, Solian and Marta are opposites in every way. Like Chamcha, Solian is constantly subjected to change, though Solian believes that his continual reinvention is not of his own making, but is imposed on him by his mother. Throughout his life, Chamcha tries on different selves, discarding the old faces he does not need anymore. Eventually, dehumanized and then *re-humanized*, Chamcha returns to his home to find his life has been built up of pretenses and feels keenly a sense of emptiness. For him, that is a kind of breakthrough. He travels back to India, makes well with his father, and undergoes some sort of wholesome process that Rushdie calls *becoming*.

Marta, like Gibreel, is very concerned with holding onto a picture in her mind of what she's told herself she is, and reinvents herself after that image. She makes herself tough, almost cold, and most of all, uncompromising, but she is starting to realise that her rigidity is really a limitation. She literally (because of her disease) feels it constricting her ribcage. The ability to breathe is a metaphor for freedom, and its reduced ease insinuates that Marta has imprisoned herself. However, unlike Gibreel, for her this does not become a source of madness.

For Solian, who also possess one element of invariability – telling the same story over and over again – this is where the insanity comes in. It proves he is not in control, he is unable to exert any kind of influence over his own tale, and instead is lived by it. Solian cannot tell who he is anymore. His real self, if there even is such a thing, seems to be lost between the multitude of fictional selves. He has become destabilized, there are cracks and gaps in his being, and his fragments disappear in them. In a sense, this process of destabilization is similar to Gibreel's loss of faith. When Farishta ceased believing in God it opened up space for delusions and hallucinations to room in. We could say that with the loss of faith the foundation for reality becomes unhinged, which is exactly what is happening to Solian.

The death of his mother, essentially his creator, means that his framework from which he views the world, and with that his ability to sort himself out diminishes and disappears almost entirely. The gaps in his system represent the absence of his mother's narrative guidance, and are really a manifestation of his inability to link elements of his person (what he experiences as separate fragments) together. Similar as to Gibreel's situation, this unhinges him severely.

Rushdie's "In God We Trust" argues that this loss of faith can have the force of a nuclear reaction. To him, it means that several worlds or realities collide and start changing and transforming. A person subjected to processes of fusion and disintegration is really also *becoming*, in a clash of worlds only one can win out. The old must die to bring newness into the world. The short story "Headcase" attempts to convey what transformation, or the refusal to change can entail for a person.

Names

Marta - Martha in the Bible is the sister of Lazarus and Mary of Bethany, and is described as the perfect example of hospitality. Apparently, Jesus and his disciples were welcomed into her home and while her sister Mary sat down at Jesus' feet to listen to his stories, Martha busied herself with household chores and dinner-preparations. The main idea in picking that particular name for her was really that she needed to be a character who in her relationship with Solian, busied herself with a number of different things, without taking the time to sit down and actually listen. She is caught up in her art and in continually fortifying her emotional defenses, and it is only when her eyesight has become impaired that she lays down on her living room floor next to Solian and

actually *hears* what Solian has been telling her all along, and most importantly, understands the implications.

Furthermore, for this character the 'h' in Martha has been left out. This is done deliberately because MARTA is the classification of anti psychotic drugs that target several systems, Multi-Acting Receptor-Targeted Antipsychotics (Classman and Hadad, 370). The meaning of that name is contrastive to the function she has for Solian, for though she can be seen as acting as some kind of sedative for him (she manages to take him away from the wall, and to bring him down somewhat from his psychotic high) her artistic work is also the focus of his obsession. During their relationship, Solian becomes increasingly obsessed with her paintings, and although it remains unclear what has taken place in that "missing time" preceding the final passage, the notion that "a woman was tried for lovelessness and had been found guilty" does not bode well. He has been pushed over an edge somehow, from becoming unhinged to having lost the plot entirely.

Also, I worked in a characteristic of lovelessness in Marta because it seemed to go well with the general side effects of antipsychotic drugs (Classman and Hadad, 382). One of the most common reasons that people stop taking such medication is not only that they believe themselves to be fine and that they can do without, but also, people hate that it turns them numb. It results in an emotional life without vicissitude. Sadness is flattened, but so is happiness, and with that the sensation of loving, or feeling oneself to be loved.

Solian - Solian is an atypical antipsychotic used to treat schizophrenia. It contains the ingredient amisulpride, which affects the neurotransmitter dopamine. Neurotransmitters are chemicals stored in the nerve cells of the brain and basically function as transmitters. The malfunctioning of the messaging system of the brain can cause delusions and hallucinations (Classman and Hadad, 397-8). Essentially, Solian's name is the treatment of his illness.

His mother nicknames him Howard Carter, which as with Gibreel Farishta becomes his undoing because of his inability to live up to it. Carter is perhaps one of the more well-known archaeologists for discovering the tomb of Tutankhamun. At the early age of 17 he was sent to Egypt to assist in excavations. He copied down tomb decorations and recorded wall reliefs. This central element to Carter's life of digging up amazing treasure, and not just gold but *history*, is something Solian cannot ever match. He cannot even locate himself between all the imaginary histories and selves.

The recording of hieroglyphs on walls seemed a useful medium for Solian to receive his messages. It is as if his madness is answering the deep need for guidance that he has felt to be missing ever since his mother died. Decoding images from the graffiti on the Wall of the old abandoned factory and Marta's paintings can be viewed as a kind of attempt to fill up empty space inside of him. Furthermore, it shows that Solian is very much, in his own way, trying to live up to the demands of his name, and his mother's expectations of him.

Fabel - Solian's mother, using Dutch spelling, is named Fabel. Fables are short stories that usually address human weakness and contain moralistic lessons. They are designed to hold up a mirror (Abrams, 7). Fabel has from a very early age told Solian stories which featured him as the main character. In doing so she has distilled elements (real or imaginary) of his person and built fictional characters on them. What to her was a way of controlling life by the ongoing description and definition of its constituents, to him meant a sense of disorder. For him, the components fail to make up a whole. Solian believes that with her words Fabel reinvented him over and over again and transformed him into a being made up of many different selves. She was the narrator of his story, and when she died, the order she had imposed on his multiplicity slowly disintegrated, until he felt himself to be merely a collection of stories from which the guiding thread was missing.

I have wondered what it could mean for a person to continually rewrite their life to suit what they want it to be, and what it could mean for another to be subjected to continual rewriting. In Rushdie, it seems the power of description, and therefore also of names, is of vast importance to a person's sense of self. Saladin Chamcha and his fellow escapees from the hospital are literally

turned into the description of the migrant. "'They describe us,' the other whispered solemnly. 'That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct'" (168).

Solian experiences a similar thing, though not entirely the same. Whereas Saladin has through his life constructed several new Chamcha's, "each one reassuringly temporary", as he puts it, Solian collects his mother's constructs and trusts her to navigate through them. The old selves do not die when he does not need them anymore, instead, they make up another face in the crowd.

Doubling

The story is set in an undisclosed location. We know that it takes place in a city, the aforementioned "classicus locus of incompatible realities," and proves to be a useful playground for worlds to clash, and in that process, to undergo severe transformation. It has become clear by now that even though Marta and Solian live in the same place, they inhabit decidedly different realities.

As Rushdie has done with his Mountain Everest and Everest Villas, and Mount Cone and Ally Cone, I have similarly tried to work in a doubling of places. First of all, Solian primarily receives his messages from the graffiti on a wall of an old manufacturer of stone tablets, which I have named Sinai, after Mt. Sinai where Moses received his Ten Commandments. It is a place of revelation in the sense that Solian undergoes a very genuine experience of sudden insight, and through communication (decoding the messages) achieves a momentary connection with something, and that something could be be god-like, a secret government facility or perhaps even his dead mother. Mt. Sinai fit especially well as a location for Solian to have his visions, because both Moses and Solian are dealing with written messages from whatever they put their faith in.

Also, at some point, when Solian becomes increasingly obsessed with Marta's paintings, he names one of her paintings 'Holy Peak', which is another name for Mount Sinai. It serves to show Solian's gradual mental disintegration by suggesting that like at the Wall, he is seeing messages in her paintings. The Wall is really the ultimate message board, but we learn that his occupation with hidden messages reaches further back and was a long way in the making.

Here, it deserves to be mentioned that I am indebted to Michel Faber for his feedback on the story. I have incorporated his notes on where the prose turned unnecessarily heavy, and have pruned back some parts that were overwritten, which instead of aiding in understanding as I had meant them to, were wearying. However, there is one instance in which I have chosen to set aside Mr. Faber's criticism. I do agree wholeheartedly with him that the prose contains a number of Latin-derived terms (plurality, manifold) that take longer to wrap the mind around than regular Anglo-Saxon words, and could cause a reader to lose motivation, but I believe these terms to be relevant to the subject of my thesis to such an extent that it would weaken the story were I to leave them out.

To return to doubling, Marta lives in an old restored Library. The 'P' and 'L' letters on the front could be an abbreviation of 'Public Library', or of 'Place to Live', as Marta only half-jokingly calls it, but Solian sees those letters spell out 'The Promised Land'. The Bible describes that Moses at the age of 120 died in the desert, within sight of the Promised Land. At the very end, in Marta's studio, Solian makes his own painting and presses it against the wall to see it mirrored. The image presents a vision of wholeness of sorts. In a sense, he is making that wall another wall of revelation, similar to the factory wall, let us call this studio wall Sinai II, but it is debatable whether Solian reaches the Promised Land. After all, it seems he's rather lost the plot, and being ruled by fears, paranoia and odd delusions bears more resemblance to being lost in a desert than it does to reaching a desired location.

Recursiveness

The story is structured to reflect the device of *external analepsis* Rushdie uses in *The Satanic Verses*. We jump back into time to a moment which functions as a supplement to the main narrative, and also starts and ends before the start of the main narrative. This is the past of the character in which we alternate from childhood memories to more recent events. These memories of

events are not structured after their chronological occurrence, but rather are linked together on the basis of their significance. The jump back into the past is used by Rushdie to allow some insight into what has made the character into who he/she is, but also, it hands the reader new information, or rather uncovers an alternate angle on what has already come to pass, and allows for reinterpretation of those events.

Then, we move away from the past and jump forward (or back), where we left off in the present time of the character and move forward in linear direction. Further, we make a shift in point of view, and start the whole recursive process again with another character.

In *The Satanic Verses*, the analepsis can be considered external in additional ways, for in Gibreel's dreams, he experiences a difference in time, in space, but also in selves. The flashbacks of one man are really lapses into radically different people. This ontological difference makes it possible to bridge the chasm between relative reality and the things contained in folk memories. Rushdie has successfully created a form "which allows the miraculous and the mundane to co-exist at the same level – as the same order of event" (Rushdie, 1991, 376)

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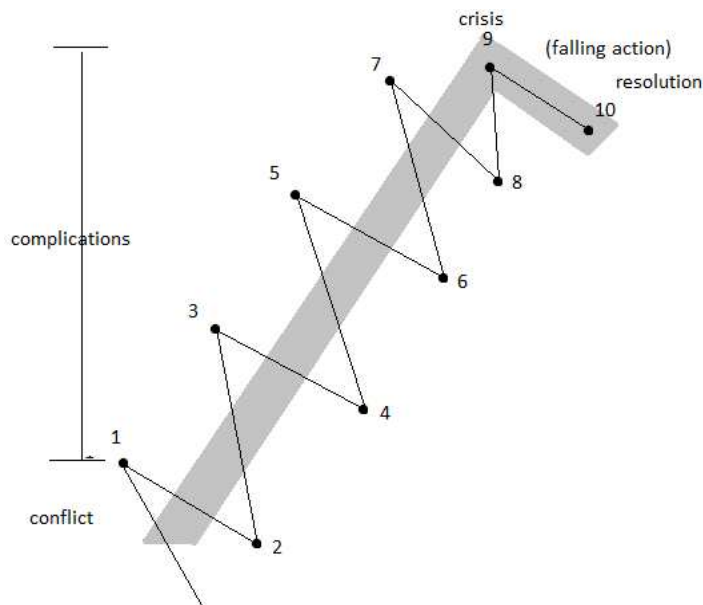
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Appendix: Plot

To outline the plot, I've provided a plot diagram in which steadily rising action is observable. The numbers correspond to the parts of the narrative I will discuss shortly below.

Figure 2 Plot diagram



1 – Rising action, Solian wakes and receives a message from a cockroach.

2 – Slight falling action from "Frantically, he searched his brain" (9) to "and that skateboarding guy and and and..." (10).

3 – Rising action from "Solian jumped to his feet" (10) to "The stories had been meant to prepare him for exactly this day" (10). In this part he is unscrewing a lightbulb (suspected spying device) and escapes the house.

4 – Falling action in flashback from "Little Howard Carter, she had called him" (10) to "Of all those dreams, the only ones that had come true was the one of growing older" (11).

5 – Rising action from "Solian limped towards the boarded up frame of Sinai" (11) to "that there was a woman pulling at him" (11). He is at the Wall and has his revelation.

6 – Point of view shift, we move from Solian to Marta. From "Marta shifted her sunglasses higher up her nose" (11) to "where it remained, tight and dried out by disuse" (12).

7- Falling action from "He had insulted that about her" (12). Here, we go back in time to the moment when Marta and Solian first met, moving on to the development of their relationship. Then, in that time frame, we move even further back to Marta's childhood, which explains in part the disintegration of her relationship with Solian. In time, we move up to a few months before the start of the main narrative.

8 – Rising action, from "He was calm now, eyes half-lidded" (14). Marta and Solian are lying on their backs on the floor, staring at the ceiling and he tells her what he's told her numerous times before. Essentially, this is also where Marta finally really understands what's wrong with him.

9 – Crisis from "The firmament trembled" (15). Again, there is a shift in point of view. We are back in Solian's rather disturbed mind.

10 – Resolution. Solian contemplates repainting the wall.