

## Sympathy for the Devil:(Re)Reading *The Satanic Verses* after 9/11 and Learning to Love the Monster (Within)

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*Pleased to meet you  
Hope you guess my name, oh yeah  
But what's puzzling you  
Is the nature of my game, oh yeah  
Pleased to meet you  
Hope you guess my name*  
—The Rolling Stones, “Sympathy for the Devil”

*They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.*  
—Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

Although originally published in 1988 and the subject of considerable controversy and extant criticism, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* becomes even more provocative when read in the context of the so-called War on Terror. Rushdie's novel and, in particular, the character of Saladin Chamcha, offers a challenge to the rhetorical binaries of anti-terrorism discourse that seek to divide the world between innocent victims and terrorist others. More than ten years after the World Trade Center attacks, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror are becoming increasingly mediated by fiction. While there is much contemporary criticism focusing on what the so-called 9/11 novel has to offer our understanding of terror,<sup>1</sup> it also makes sense to look backwards as well, to see what novels such as Rushdie's might offer when they are recast as a possible mediation of our current political climate. Thus, it is within the contemporary arena of British international relations and War on Terror rhetoric that *The Satanic Verses* can be re-read. Rushdie's controversial text has much to offer in terms of how we apprehend unfamiliar others in times of conflict by revealing the demonization of cultural others as a discursive strategy that resonates in War on Terror rhetoric. Moreover, *The Satanic Verses* exposes the instability of the border between human and monster, insider and outsider, and self and other. Rushdie's text works to destabilize these binaries, opening the text and subsequently post-9/11 social relations to ethical critique.

## Demonization and the Discursive Tropes of the War on Terror

Before turning to *The Satanic Verses*, it is useful to provide some brief context on the historical trajectory of otherness in dominant Western discourses and the relationship between monstrosity and the War on Terror. While Rushdie's use of gothic images is well-studied, the trope of the grotesque<sup>2</sup> finds new resonance in contemporary discourses of terror in Britain and abroad and opens up new spaces for thinking about our contemporary political moment. As Richard Devetak notes in his study on the political climate of the War on Terror, international relations is very much a "gothic scene" (621). Such representations find fertile ground in many levels of mainstream social and political life in Britain and reveal the obsession with ghosts and monsters in the imagination of the international social body. In his 2010 testimony to the Chilcot inquiry, for example, Tony Blair issued no apology for his role in the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, choosing instead to highlight the inhumanity of this enemy of the West.<sup>3</sup> The execution of the tyrant was justified because Hussein is perceived, even posthumously, as something other than human. Indeed, in his testimony Blair stresses the benefits of Hussein's death in gothic terms: "I believe he was a monster, that he threatened not just the region but the world" (Prince and Kirkup). Furthermore, for Blair, "the nature of the global threat we face in Britain and round the world is real and existential" ("Tony Blair's Speech"). Blair's emphasis on the simultaneously spectral and monstrous threat of figures such as Hussein and reference to the incorporeality of terrorism resonates with dominant discourses surrounding potential terrorist subjects. This is, of course, a practice of the American press and political world, and countless media images following 9/11 depicted both Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein in varying degrees of monstrosity.<sup>4</sup> As Richard Kearney notes, 9/11 perpetrators were caricatured in the global press as "many-headed beasts whose tentacles were threatening to violate every secure space in the nation" (112). Many of these images bear striking resemblance to earlier media caricatures of other infamous tyrants such as Hitler or Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>5</sup> As Kearney infers, the threat of terrorism is portrayed as not only a security threat, but a threat to the stability of the nation and, implicitly, the national imaginary as well. With that in mind, this essay seeks to understand the extent to which *The Satanic Verses* troubles dominant constructions of the grotesque in order to comprehend whether we can be beckoned or interpellated by lives that are different to our own.

It is this rhetoric of fear and suspicion that has given the War on Terror authorization to extinguish both abstract and material threats. This rhetoric conflates incorporeal monstrosity with dehumanized literal bodies as the racialization of immigrant others that is enabled by anti-terror discourse teaches us to be wary of strangers. What for Blair is an existential fear is actively lived out as the abstraction of terror is projected

onto real bodies that come to represent immediate and proximal threat. As Devetak notes: “A visceral fear of dark forces has become an existential condition, one where tyranny and terror hang together ominously in the air” (638). For Devetak, the association between terror and darkness is characteristic of Gothicism and results in the representation of racial others as monsters. Monsters are the perfect incarnation of spectral and tangible horror; they allow terror to take shape in dehumanized form and allow that form to be the subject of abuse and violence because it is not considered to be precarious in the way human bodies are. Yet monsters also demonstrate what politicians fail to see: “that the gothic scene is the symbolic site of a culture's discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilised, and to abject, or throw off what is seen as other to that civilised self” (Devetak 642). This perception of otherness, as something to be repressed or dislodged from the self, not only reveals the extent to which otherness is a projection of our own anxieties about the self; it might also account for the lengths to which we might go to distance ourselves from this *unheimlich* reality.

Anxieties surrounding otherness and immigration find much resonance in *The Satanic Verses*, in which Saladin Chamcha is remade in the most repugnant and abject image of the demonic and monstrous other. Rushdie's text can be considered a historical moment in the demonization of cultural others and, as such, offers us a glimpse both backward, to a long trajectory of Eastern or Arab alterity, and forward to contemporary discourse on political terrorism. Thus, *The Satanic Verses* and the War on Terror must both be situated within the significant historical context that is the long tradition of othering that has its roots in the Eighteenth Century and posits the unknown Eastern other as a perpetual threat to the West. As Edward Said notes in *Orientalism*, Arabs were thought of as “camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers” and it is the West's prerogative to own the nonwhite world because “‘it’ is not as human as ‘we’ are” (108). While Said's study focuses on a divisive geography, his argument is useful in elucidating forms of othering that occur despite religious distinctions. In other words, racial attitudes towards South Asian immigrants exist as only the most recent manifestations of a latent and long-standing Orientalism more than a more specified Islamophobia. This is an important distinction in that the perpetrators of terrorist attacks such as 9/11 adhere to a more fundamental doctrine of Islamic jihad and do not account for the entire Muslim faith, let alone other Middle Eastern and South Asian religions. Yet Rushdie's text captures the extent to which Eastern others in hegemonic Western discourse are often homogenized into one group regardless of distinct religions and specific cultural practices. As Saladin Chamcha takes on the form of a demonic goat figure, he notices his horns “had grown thicker and longer, twirling themselves into fanciful arabesques, wreathing his head in a turban of darkening bone” (Rushdie 283). While Saladin is not Sikh, the image of his horns forming a turban plays on dominant assumptions about the homogeneity of Eastern religion and exposes the process of othering in

contemporary Britain as inherently racial rather than religious.<sup>6</sup>

While the statements made by those such as Tony Blair reveal a more implicit suspicion of others and framing of terrorism as monstrous, other representations are far more overt. The doctrine of the British National Party provides shocking evidence of the racist discourses surrounding immigration and otherness in the UK. The BNP website lists several strategies to limit immigration, among them: “Offer generous grants to those of foreign descent resident here who wish to leave permanently, [s]top all new immigration except for exceptional cases, [and] [r]eject all asylum seekers who passed safe countries on their way to Britain” (“Immigration”). In regards to specifically South Asian immigrants, the BNP offers this rationale: “India would not tolerate millions of non-Indians taking over that society” (“Immigration”). Not only does this statement single out a specifically racialized community (indeed, the countries which appear to be of the most concern for the BNP are India, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia); it also elides the legacy of violent British colonialism in India itself. While the views of the BNP are perhaps not representative of mainstream Britain, one does not need to look all the way to the far-right to discover less overt but equally problematic representations of South Asian others in British media, politics, and social discourse.

### *The Satanic Verses* and the Representation of Otherness

The birth, or re-birth, of Saladin Chamcha into monstrosity is vividly narrated. After falling from a plane that explodes over the English Channel on its way from India to Britain, Saladin and Gibreel, both Indian actors, emerge out of the water, “across the ocean floor...the sea passing through us as if we were fish or ghosts...” like some primordial creatures born of the deep (Rushdie 136). However, while both experience a mutation in the subsequent chapters, Gibreel’s transformation is angelic while Saladin’s is the exact opposite. As he is questioned and beaten by immigration officials, he grows increasingly grotesque. In addition to his growing horns, he has fluid beaten out of his lungs and, much like one would expect of a monster, he spews this fluid out as green “slime” (176). In his first appearance to his friend, Jumpy, and his own wife, Pamela (who, thinking him dead and herself a widow, found solace in taking Jumpy as her lover), he is seen as not only monstrous but barely living: “a figure covered in mud and ice and blood, the hairiest creature you ever saw, with the shanks and hoofs of a giant goat, a man’s torso covered in goat’s hair, human arms, and a horned but otherwise human head covered in muck and grime” (194). At this sight, Pamela insists: “[n]o survivors . . . I am the widow Chamcha whose spouse is beastly dead” (194). Later in the text, Saladin grows a tail and displays animalist tendencies by “nibbling absently at his bedsheets or old newspapers” (284). His

transformation is a complete sensory experience and he emits “sulphorous smoke” and a “high-pitched vibrato screech” (285). At the height of his monstrosity there appears to be little of the human left in Saladin:

Chamcha had grown to a height of over eight feet, and from his nostrils there emerged smoke of two different colours, yellow from the left, and from the right, black. He was no longer wearing clothes. His bodily hair had grown thick and long, his tail was swishing angrily, his eyes were a pale but luminous red, and he had succeeded in terrifying the entire temporary population of the bed and breakfast establishment to the point of incoherence. (300)

The narration of Saladin’s descent into monstrosity reveals the extent to which monsters are pushed to the periphery. Beyond the borders of understanding, they are left outside the realm of what is familiar and thereby assimilable.

Saladin Chamcha’s slow mutation into a demonic half-man, half-goat figure finds startling resonance in the War on Terror and anti-immigration racism. Rushdie himself makes this link in his essay “The New Empire within Britain” in which he not only compares the British police force to the colonial army in India (132) but refers to the white British fear of immigrants “swamping” the country in large numbers. In this context, Saladin becomes not only a devilish creature upon which the most loathsome elements of humanity are projected; he is also the scapegoat who bears the brunt of our anxiety about the unknown outsider. Saladin thus becomes the sacrificial goat(man), betrayed by Gibreel to take the fall (again) for British anxieties about immigration.<sup>7</sup> The scapegoat becomes an important icon in the work of the state to distinguish British citizens from outsiders. As Pal Ahluwalia notes, “[a]s part of the logic of the ‘clash of civilizations,’ it has become necessary for the West to recreate the figure of the monster and the beast in an attempt to once again establish its superiority, to claim the mantle of the civilized, to be the very repository of humanity itself” (260). Similarly, the conventions of evil employed by the War on Terror also contribute to a rhetoric of otherness that seeks to distinguish self from other. The discourse on “evil” in the War on Terror is effectively used against suspicious others and, while not all are figures of Eastern alterity, they are rendered inhuman by similar processes of abjection. Like monsters and the dead, these figures cannot be entirely extinguished. Instead, they are “death infecting life . . . something rejected from which one does not part” (Kristeva 4). Carefully constructed mythologies of the monster or the Devil reinforce the Self by rendering difference fearsome and abject. It is well documented that hegemonic Western thought “has generally discriminated against the Other in favour of the Same” (Kearney 66), particularly in times of heightened conflict. Thus, as Jennifer Geddes argues, “[t]he evildoer who is a monster is removed from us, placed in a category outside of the human; for if evildoers are demonic monsters, they can be accounted for by jettisoning them from the category of ‘human beings,’ from the ‘we’” (106). In *The Satanic Verses*, as in other real-to-life circumstances, this is accomplished

through violence.

At the same time that Saladin's mutation highlights the preoccupation with monsters in discourses on otherness and the violent lengths to which we go to preserve the seeming stability of the self, the treatment of Saladin also exposes othering as a jettisoning from heteronormativity into abject sexuality. In relation to our contemporary moment, Saladin's incarceration and abuse at the hands of immigration officials bears striking resemblance to the more recent and very real torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in 2003.<sup>8</sup> In this infamous case, images of abuse stage the dehumanization of detainees by highlighting markers of the abject, what Kristeva describes as "a wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay . . . [t]hese bodily fluids, this defilement" (3). By reducing prisoners to their bodily fluids, covered in mud and feces and surrounded by urine and blood, the Abu Ghraib images deny these subjects the properties of life and jettison the prisoners from the human into the abject. Much like in these cases of extra-judicial detainee abuse, Saladin is demonized not only as the suspicious other but as sexually deviant and abject as well. The relationship between aberrant sexuality and monstrosity is an oft-constructed trope. As Kearney notes, Lucifer is often portrayed in various artistic and literary contexts as a monster "with *both* the horns, beard and hairy chest of a goat-man *and* a vagina expelling hideous offspring" (29).<sup>9</sup> This particular attention to the body and deviance serves to reinforce what is a normal and "civilized" corporeality and subscribes to latent Orientalist discourses of Eastern sexuality.

It is via the structures of Orientalism, through which intimate sexuality and violence are connected with colonial and imperial agendas, that sexualized violence can occur. According to Puar and Rai, such representations reveal "that queerness as sexual deviancy is tied to the monstrous figure of the terrorist as a way to otherize and quarantine subjects classified as 'terrorists,' but also to normalize and discipline a population through these very monstrous figures" (126). Indeed, Saladin is constructed as errantly sexual and grotesque by his immigrant captors in order to elide their own hypersexuality: "What's this then?" one of the police officials asks upon seeing Saladin's "greatly enlarged and embarrassingly erect" phallus, "fancy one of us, maybe?" (Rushdie 163). Saladin's transgression is emphasized in order to efface the violence of the guards and *their* excessive pleasure at having disrobed their prisoner. For the immigration officers, violence is an acceptable course of action against racial and sexual others. Or, as Puar and Rai suggest, "the construction of the pathologized psyche of the terrorist-monster enables the practices of normalization, which in today's context often means an aggressive heterosexual patriotism" (117). The more Saladin is treated as an abjected, sexually aberrant other, the better the guards can perform their own hyper-national, masculine identity. As one captor proclaims, "eternal vigilance is the price o' liberty" (Rushdie 167). Not only is Saladin jettisoned from heteronormativity, he is simultaneously emasculated and, as a result, dehumanized according to a gendered and historical trajectory that

conditions humanity as masculine. As Kearney more simply puts it: “[m]en were men because they were not monsters” (115). Later in the text, after an outburst against Gibreel, the horns on Saladin’s head diminish slightly but he is no more a man for his phallus shrinks as well: “lower down his transformed body . . . something else, let us leave it at that, got a little smaller, too” (Rushdie 282). Saladin confronts his descent into animality with “guilt and shame . . . [at] his progress away from manhood and towards—yes—goatishness” (284). Interestingly, Saladin frames his mutation as a loss of masculinity rather than humanity. Yet, what Said shows us, is that racialization and feminization work together to dehumanize Arab others within Orientalist discourse. Thus, the dehumanization of Saladin Chamcha on the basis of a perceived sexual aberrance and jettisoning from humanity serves to reinforce dominant constructions of racial otherness that, although fictionalized in the text, are inextricable from the real materiality of contemporary global discourses on terrorism.

### Creating Otherness

(Re)reading *The Satanic Verses* in the context of the War on Terror not only reveals constructions of monstrous otherness that can be traced historically, and through the text, to the contemporary moment of anti-terrorism rhetoric; it also illustrates the extent to which anti-immigration policy and racial violence is its own form of terror. In the case of Saladin Chamcha, this violence is what *creates* the monster in order to further separate the racial (or terrorist) other from the stability and unity of the familiar self. This separation, of course, is an active disavowal and masking of the other that is not simply nearby but *within*. For Freud, “[t]he unheimlich encounter with the monstrous is a revelation not of the wholly other but of a repressed otherness within the self. The monster, as personification of the unheimlich, stands for that which has broken out of the subterranean basement or the locked closet where it has been hidden and largely forgotten” (qtd. in Kearney 35). In both the War on Terror and *The Satanic Verses*, this repression manifests as a form of racial profiling in which difference and otherness are not simply discovered but, rather, projected violently *onto* others. As Saladin recovers from the injuries suffered at the hands of immigration officials, another patient explains how their monstrous otherness is formed: “[t]hey describe us . . . They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct” (Rushdie 174). This conversation speaks well to the discourse of the War on Terror, which can be considered a *productive* project, creating abject others at the same time it produces docile patriots. It is this description by the immigration officials and the physical and psychological violence with which it is brought forth that gives Saladin his horns and

hooves. It is through this violence that he becomes grotesque and barely recognizable as human.

According to Gaurav Majumdar, violence is intimately connected to the power of description that surrounds the immigrant experience. He argues: “[t]he unfamiliar displays a disorienting, uncontrollable, ‘monstrous’ cooperation of difference and resemblance. It is in this sense of the unfamiliar that the figure of the migrant is a form of the grotesque, and the grotesque is an instance of the migrant form” (34). Indeed, while the splitting of Saladin into two selves offers important possibilities for postcolonial identity studies, it also reveals the violence with which this splitting occurs and “makes palpable this hybridity at the same time as it makes literal the demonization of immigrants” (Gane 27). Importantly, Saladin is not an agent of his own change. That Saladin “did not become aware of the moment at which the processes of [his] transmutation began” (Rushdie 5) suggests that both his initial fall and the mutations that are beaten into him are not something he chose. Rather, this change was forced upon him. It is only when his Britishness—a Britishness that he has worked so diligently to cultivate—is questioned that his mutations increase. Despite his insistence at being a British citizen, Saladin is ultimately betrayed by his own body, albeit not a body of his own making. Pleading his case with the immigration officials he makes the gruesome and encumbering discovery: “[T]here at his temples, growing longer by the moment, and sharp enough to draw blood, were two new, goaty, unarguable horns” (145). While Saladin implores Gibreel to intervene on his behalf, Gibreel betrays his friend and is able to pass as an acceptable citizen, an other who is—to borrow from the rhetorical strategies of George W. Bush—“with us” rather than against. Later in the text, although he embraces his new form and the associations that come with it, the racial assumptions surrounding immigrants and non-white Britons in London increase. Saladin’s appropriation as the Devil-cum-hero of London’s immigrant population inevitably leads to more racial profiling as a string of murders are assumed to be a result of the new racialized “occultist” movement (297). Just as the immigration officials “describe” Saladin into monstrosity, the state equation of immigrants with devil worship reinforces the dominant associations between racial others and terrorist activity.

That Saladin’s transformation comes as a result of violence is eerily emblematic of how others are not discovered but “made” through the discourses of the War on Terror. Again, his incarceration finds startling resonance with the more current incidents of prisoner torture in the War on Terror. Much like Saladin’s fate at the hands of British immigration officials, the construction of terror suspects as uncivilized allows for them to be treated in extra-judicial ways. As pre-modern subjects, they are not entitled to modern laws that govern the protection of human rights and dignity. As Giorgio Agamben argues, “[t]he violence exercised in the state of exception clearly neither preserves nor simply posits law, but rather conserves it in suspending it and posits it in excepting itself from it” (64).



Indeed, that Saladin is literally *beaten* into monstrosity suggests that there is more at work in the rhetoric of otherness than just profiling. This violence places racial others not only outside British national identity and whiteness but outside the law and thereby legal protection as well. Within the rhetoric of anti-terrorism, this excision is not only justified—it is actively encouraged. As Devetak notes on the construction of monsters, “[t]heir defiance of borders is taken as a threat demanding measures to reinforce the borders between the human and inhuman, to defend the civilised against the barbaric, and to uphold good in the face of evil” (624). Thus, dominant approaches to monstrosity highlight rather than reconcile difference and use violence to reinforce a wider separation. If Saladin’s fate can account for the experience of otherness en masse, particularly in times of heightened conflict and patriotism, then it must be recognized that devils are not born; they are *made*. Saladin, of course, was not always a monster. He describes his formerly innocent visage as “a face of exceptional innocence, a face that did not seem ever to have encountered delusion or evil” (Rushdie 139). It is this “cherubic” image that his wife Pamela falls in love with. Only after he experiences violence does he “observ[e] a brace of fearfully discoloured swellings, indications that he must have suffered at some point in his recent adventures, a couple of mighty blows” (139). Unfortunately, Saladin’s case is not an anomaly and detainee torture is commonplace in the fight against global terrorism. It is no secret that the War on Terror gives extraordinary powers of rendition and forceful interrogation to those who apprehend suspected terrorists. Such powers are justified via the abjection of racialized bodies. In the extra-juridical space of the prison these bodies are “at the border of [their] condition” as beings; they are “death infecting life” (Kristeva 3, 4). The violent disavowal of prisoners’ humanity combined with the constitutional power of interrogators to disregard human rights obligations rationalizes torture as an acceptable punishment. That the state of exception can suspend international treaties, including the Geneva Convention, speaks to the power of violence to create the other it seeks to destroy and reinforces the need for an ethics beyond blanket non-violence in order to combat the forces that seek to abject and dehumanize cultural others.

### Monstrosity and the Transgression of Boundaries as an Opening to Ethical Critique

How then, might Saladin Chamcha’s appropriation of his monstrosity provide impetus to an ethics *through* violence and abjection rather than in reaction *to* it? What would it mean to love a monster—horns, hooves and all? What would it mean—not in disavowal but in the very confrontation of the face of this terror—to refuse violence, both physical and that of the representational regime? According to Majumdar, *The Satanic Verses*

“engages the grotesque to pose various ethical questions” (31). While this was certainly the case in 1988 when the novel was published, it is still relevant in the context of the War on Terror as new questions arise about racial profiling, the ethics of military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the treatment of terror suspects. These questions, I would argue, speak to more than migration as a reinvention or rebirth of self; they bring to light the ways in which we are constituted in relation to one another and call into question the basis upon which those relations are established. Thus, the question of interest here concerns the extent to which Saladin appropriates his monstrosity and, if successful, how that appropriation might lead us to consider the grotesque not only as an opening to ethics, but to the possibility of love as well.

While Saladin’s monstrosity may be seen as an end to his humanity, it is also a beginning. Mulling over his new form, Saladin debates theories of mutation from Ovid and Lucretius. While Ovid suggests that despite transformation, the soul remains the same, Lucretius is of a different mind. Muhammad Sufyan, the owner of the Bed and Breakfast where Saladin seeks refuge, translates for Saladin: “‘Whatever by its changing goes out of its frontiers’—that is, bursts its banks,—or, maybe, breaks out of its limitations,—so to speak, disregards its own rules . . . ‘that thing . . . by doing so brings immediate death to the old self’” (Rushdie 285). Here, Saladin experiences another re-birth as the border between human and monster becomes not a limit, but the possibility of a new beginning or, as Heidegger writes in “Building Dwelling Thinking,” a “boundary . . . from which something begins its presencing” (154). Indeed, Saladin reflects on this boundary as a newness rather than an end: “A new dark world had opened for him when he fell from the sky; no matter how assiduously he attempted to re-create his old existence, this was, he now saw, a fact that could not be unmade” (Rushdie 433). At another point he reasons: “*I am*, he accepted, *that I am*. Submission” (298). Like the traumatic opening enabled by Saladin’s fall, a “new dark world” opened after 9/11 in which racial profiling and anti-immigration violence experienced a resurgence. Yet if we think of the word ‘boundary,’ in all of its exclusionary and captive demarcations and of the border dividing “before” 9/11 from “after,” we can view this as either a limit that cannot be breached or as the beginning of the process of being re-made, that is to say, an arrival of Heideggerian presencing. In more simple terms, we might call this the beginning of ethics and even more cogently, the beginning of love.

Saladin submits to his grotesque form at the moment in which his deformity is recognized not in its abjection but in its agency. As a monster effectually created by the anti-immigrant state, Saladin becomes a symbol to all “outsiders” who fall beyond the parameters of Britain’s white, national hegemonic imaginary. This influence extends beyond the South Asian community living in London as “nocturnal browns-and-blacks [find] themselves cheering, in their sleep, this what-else-after-all-but-black-man, maybe a little twisted up by fate class race history, all that, but getting off his behind, bad and mad, to kick a little ass” (Rushdie 295).

Saladin is a hero of the immigrant cause, as evidenced by the T-shirts, buttons, and devil horns worn by what the community police call a “growing devil-cult among young blacks and Asians” (295). Yet is he followed because he is loved or because he is feared? As the text demonstrates, these are not easy to disentangle. Like Allie Cone’s contemplation of the goddess-mountain as alternately “diabolic as well as transcendent” (314), Saladin’s monstrosity is simultaneously desirable and disdained. He is abject, *par excellence*.

*The Satanic Verses* has much to offer to the seeming incommensurable worlds of love and violence, betrayal and forgiveness, and hostility and hospitality. Thus the text can be read (perhaps despite its best intentions and better judgment) as an ethical treatise as it illustrates not only how we come to represent cultural others but also the ways in which the grotesque and monstrosity make possible an opening to love and hospitality. Saladin experiences variances of affection in the text but his experiences of love are often foreclosed by his devilish form. In one case, Saladin is given refuge in the Shaandaar Bed and Breakfast where the Sufyan sisters “[care] for the beast as only Beauties can” (Rushdie 291). While they seem to accept this monster with genuine care and affection, there are consequences for this hospitality. Although they shelter Saladin from those who seek to do him harm, the warnings in the text are clear: “You can’t keep a devil locked up in the attic and expect to keep it to yourself forever” (294). As such, the fear of lost business and accusations about harbouring the source of much anxiety around London prevent the Shaandaar from being a site of ethical hospitality.<sup>10</sup>

Saladin also experiences romantic love. His wife, Pamela, initially loves him for his innocent qualities but disavows his monstrosity when she refuses to believe he is alive after his fall: “I’ve got a confirmed report of his death...what have you got? A billy-goat, a circus freak, nothing to do with me” (Rushdie 288). What Pamela grieves is the loss of the Saladin Chamcha she knew and *recognized*. Despite her marital vows, Pamela rejects her husband in a complete denial of relations and the ethical responsibility they entail. Although he is later welcomed back into Pamela’s home, this time as the houseguest of herself and Jumpy, despite whatever former affection existed between Saladin and his hosts, this invitation is complicated. Jumpy claims to be “able to reconcile the imperatives of love and friendship” (425) but it would seem that the hospitality he extends is born of the guilt of replacing Saladin in Pamela’s bed rather than love. According to Derrida, absolute hospitality

requires that I open my home and that I give not only to the stranger (furnished with a family name and the social status of a stranger etc.) but to the absolute other, unknown and anonymously and that I give place . . . let come, arrive, let him take his place in the place that I offer him, without demanding that he give his name or enter into some reciprocal pact. (qtd. in Kearney 69)

If what Derrida offers is the basis of an absolute hospitality, one that is not subject to duty or obligation, then Jumpy’s hospitality is contaminated

insofar as he not only establishes his hospitality on the condition of a former familiarity; he also opens his home to Saladin in the hopes it will assuage his own guilty conscience. What Derrida seems to suggest is that we owe others hospitality not in spite of their anonymity and singular alterity but precisely because of it.<sup>11</sup>

Can we then, as readers, offer Saladin this “absolute” and unconditional hospitality, if such a thing is possible? Can we forgive him his crimes? It is difficult, of course, to argue that Saladin is owed love and hospitality when he himself is responsible for his own act of vicious betrayal. Is forgiveness, in this context, even ethical? After all, do we not owe more to the “greater good” than we do this stranger? Saladin does not make this easy. After he is corporeally restored to his former shape, he seeks retribution for the abuse he suffered at the hands of the immigration officials owing partially to Gibreel’s failure to intervene. He exploits Gibreel’s jealousy and effectually destroys the love between Gibreel and Allie Cone, a loss that eventually leads to Allie’s death (at Gibreel’s hands) and Gibreel’s own suicide. For Saladin, Gibreel’s betrayal is the “Inexcusable Thing” (Rushdie 440). Are we accountable as well then – those of us who turn our backs on Saladin the moment those horns reveal themselves? Into this cycle of betrayal and revenge the narrator interjects: “What is unforgivable . . . if not the shivering nakedness of being *wholly known* to a person one does not trust?” (441). Here, the image of “shivering nakedness” speaks loudly and viscerally to the possibility of ethics, for what the narrator refers to as the exposed “secrets of the self” (441) also delivers us the precarious alterity of the face of the other, in all of its ultimate vulnerability and absolute, irreducible singularity.

To be sure, there are many things at stake in *The Satanic Verses*: religion, hybridity, double consciousness, desire, and violence, to name only a few. Yet what is it that binds all of these things together, in all their terror and possibility, if not love? What if we allowed Saladin’s grotesque mutation to form the basis of not abjection, but ethical hospitality? What if we permitted an opening up of the borders that foreclose recognition and instead made possible the site of violence as the beginning of ethical responsibility? After all, according to the narrator, “it all boil[s] down to love . . . and the Obscene” (411), an unsettling entanglement, to be sure. In the text, it is the grotesque and not the innocent, the defiled rather than the pure, that calls us into this relation, into this zone, “in which nobody desirous of compiling a human . . . body of experience could afford to shut down operations . . . [that does] you down no question about it, and very probably [does] you in as well” (412). Love is, after all, destructive; it leaves us, for all intents and purposes, *undone*. So too, the act of reading. As Derek Attridge notes in his contribution to the volume *Derrida’s Legacies*, “the literary work is inescapably singular” (13). *The Satanic Verses* call to us then on multiple levels, as readers and as witnesses to violence and otherness. Yet as Kearney notes, “[r]ather than acknowledge that we are deep down answerable to an alterity which unsettles us, we devise all kinds of evasion strategies . . . we refuse to recognize the

stranger before us as a singular other who responds, in turn, to the singular otherness in each of us" (5). Reading the grotesque then, requires an ethical practice of incorporation rather than repression. Clarifying the distinction between variances of the grotesque, Majumdar suggests that an "expressive grotesque does not merely acknowledge the other, but, in its very form, it accommodates the other . . . [it] show[s] an inclusiveness, the presence of difference on its own body, a capacity for transformation, and a welcome to alterity" (35-36). The grotesque is not a reason to repel; it is an invitation to hospitality—a *welcoming* or, in the language of love and desire, an embracing. The grotesque reconciles the monster in all of us.

For a novel that has been the source of so much violence and debate, *The Satanic Verses* has surprisingly much to say about love. It seems it is easier, in many ways, to hate, a recognition that the text does not shy away from: "Salahuddin believed . . . [that] love had shown that it could exert a humanizing power as great as that of hatred; that virtue could transform men as well as vice. But nothing was forever; no cure, it appeared, was complete" (Rushdie 554). Yet although he doubts its permanence, Saladin is certainly transformed by love as it alters not only his form but his identity and his name as well. After so many years attempting to become British, Saladin reclaims his name, *Salahuddin*, and reconciles with his father. He reflects: "To fall in love with one's father after the long angry decades was a serene and beautiful feeling" (537). As he "suck[s] this new life out of his father . . . 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" (537-38). Importantly, however, Saladin is not healed. His splitting of self and the violence he has not forgotten leave him damaged and these losses are not without their tolls.

Yet is precisely in this brokenness that the other makes his address. It is the brokenness that speaks and demands to be loved in all of its purity *and* contamination. Thus, we need not know if Saladin is monster or man; he was always both. Saladin's monstrosity and subsequent return to human form reveals much about the ethics of how we apprehend figures of alterity. For Kearney, hospitality to the other is always in tension and always a risk. He asks: "how could we tell the difference between one kind of other and another—between (a) those aliens and strangers that need our care and hospitality, no matter how monstrous they might first appear, and (b) those others that really do seek to destroy and exterminate?" (10). It seems that Kearney is trying to reconcile what cannot be—that is, the ways in which we are always other to ourselves. In the context of the War on Terror, Kearney's query and Rushdie's text become particularly apt. Following a decade of racial violence and profiling, the suspension of human rights and the attempts to divide global society into those "with" the terrorists and those who are not, a text written 25 years ago has become more relevant than ever. The figure of Saladin Chamcha, then, is so useful, for he opens us to an ethics that accounts for multiple possible relations to the other. While still a monster,

Saladin makes an address that cannot be ignored and although he speaks to Gibreel, we might consider him hailing the reader as well. “Forgive me,” he croaks . . . “Have pity” (Rushdie 482). In this moment Saladin appeals to responsibility and challenges the differential ways in which ethics are allocated. In this moment he pleads, as if to ask: could you really love the monster as much as the man? Gibreel joins this conversation as well and asks “*What happens when you win? When your enemies are at your mercy: how will you act then?*” (482). As Gibreel contemplates saving the monstrous Saladin from the fire that will surely consume him, the question posed at him is posed to us as well: Do we “have a choice?” (483). According to Judith Butler we do not. On the contrary, we have “a susceptibility to others that is unwilling and unchosen” (*Giving* 87). What Saladin’s address reveals is not our freedom to affirm or disavow his precarity; rather, it designates a “nonfreedom” (*Giving* 87). It is to this address, however, unwilling and “nonfree,” that Gibreel responds as he drags Saladin from the burning café in a “small redeeming victory for love” (Rushdie 483).

Monsters are thus the beginning of ethics not only because they exist on the boundaries and borders but because it is these very boundaries that open us to love. As Rushdie himself puts it, in his address to the 2005 PEN World Voices Festival,

[m]ostly we read books and set them aside, or hurl them from us with great force, and pass on. Yet sometimes there is a small residue that has an effect. The reason for this is the always unexpected and unpredictable intervention of that rare and sneaky phenomenon: love . . . When a reader falls in love with a book, it leaves its essence inside him like radioactive fallout in an arable field. And after that there are certain crops that will no longer grow in him, while other stranger, more fantastic growths may occasionally be produced. (“The Power of the Pen”)

For Rushdie, love and violence are often indistinguishable. Love is radioactive; its growths, ethical as they may be, can be monstrous themselves. Love disassembles, terrifies and leaves an indelible mark, a perpetual reminder that one has both lost and gained in the reading. Lost—for there is always a mourning of a self that is no longer (and in hindsight never was) complete—and gained, in the sense that one has incorporated “the enigmatic trace” of the other (Butler, *Precarious* 46). That the self becomes undone and thereby *unknown* to itself through its incorporation of the other, is an opening to and not a foreclosure of ethics. Indeed, as Butler notes, “there is an ethical valence to my unknowingness” (*Precarious* 46). For Kearney, monsters “signal borderline experiences of uncontainable excess, reminding the ego that it is never wholly sovereign . . . the self is never secure in itself” (3). Whether we allow this insecurity to pry open the doors of a long foreclosed recognition of our responsibility to others is the question we must continue to ask of ourselves and of our literature.

*The Satanic Verses* does many things. It is a story of hybridity and migration, of romantic desire and friendship, of familial relations and

disruption, of religion and its discontents, and of the demands made by the other. It is also a love story, but not in the way one might expect. Saladin Chamcha is not a typical leading man. Yet ultimately, he defies the power of description; he submits to monstrosity, not to accept the racial violence and othering discourses of the state, but to challenge us as readers to accept the other in him and in ourselves as well. From one monster to another, Saladin beckons. He makes a demand that cannot be refused. For Rushdie, “[t]hese are the true revolutions of literature, these invisible, intimate communions of strangers, these tiny revolutions inside each reader’s imagination. And the enemies of the imagination, all the different goon squads of gods and power, want to shut these revolutions down and can’t” (“Power of the Pen”). Indeed, in a time of heightened violence due to anti-terrorism rhetoric, racial profiling, and hostility towards cultural others, the figure of Saladin Chamcha reveals the extent to which monsters are created through violence and offers an ethical reclamation of monstrosity that, when read in our contemporary moment, opens us to a new way of apprehending others with hospitality and even love in a post-9/11 world.

## Notes

1. Kristiaan Versluys’ *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (2009) and Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn’s edited volume, *Literature After 9/11* (2008), are two major works within this extant criticism. Both trace the attempts of numerous authors to make meaning out of the attacks but make only rare and fleeting references to otherness in their volumes. These two major studies both question the ability of fiction to adequately represent trauma but neither interrogates the construction of otherness within fictional texts.

2. For the purposes and scope of this paper, I take the grotesque in this instance to be the ways in which Saladin Chamcha elicits both sympathy and disgust on the part of the reader. While the grotesque will not be explored in all of its complexity, the emphasis in this paper will be on the grotesque *body*—that is, the ways in which the primal materiality of Saladin’s body is mobilized in order to enact social transformation.

3. The Chilcot inquiry was a public British inquiry into Britain’s role in the invasion of Iraq. It consisted of hearings held between 2009 and 2011. Tony Blair was one of many former government officials who testified to the inquiry. According to Blair, the 9/11 attacks “changed everything” and he used his testimony to repeatedly assert his “responsibility but not regret” over going to war in Iraq (Prince and Kirkup).

4. For example, the November 25, 2002, cover of TIME Magazine features an almost transparent Bin Laden, fading into an all-white background under the title “Why Can’t we Catch Him?” Such ghostly imagery draws attention to Bin Laden’s presence as a spectral terror who cannot be caught because he is neither living nor dead. Similarly, Saddam Hussein is often portrayed as a devil, monster, or ghost. Devetak notes, for example, that American media often alluded to Hussein’s “mansion of gloom” (634), a phrase that references Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” at the same time that it represents Hussein’s non-political life as haunted and otherworldly.

5. See Sam Keen’s discussion in *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*.

6. Since 9/11, members of the Sikh faith have reported an increase in prejudice and racial profiling as they are (erroneously) mistaken for Muslims. Shortly after 9/11, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a gas station owner and member of the Sikh community in Mesa, Arizona, was shot dead. Far more recently, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, a gunman entered a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, killing seven people. In both cases, the violence appears to be racially motivated and both gunmen have been characterized as mentally ill. These cases illustrate the reality that by virtue of their appearance, Sikhs of Arabic descent have, in novelist Laila Halaby’s words, “nothing and everything” to do with terrorism (viii). In contrast, the representation of white perpetrators is vastly different than the representation of cultural others. As these stories reveal, there are white suspects of terrorism. Timothy McVeigh, after all, was the army veteran responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing. Yet McVeigh’s guilt, along with that of Frank Roque and Wade Michael Page, is understood to be an anomaly, a tragic but unusual blemish on an otherwise spotless performance of white American citizenship.

7. The scapegoat has long been a figure associated with guilt and sin. Like the other, the scapegoat is meant to bear the burden of all that is pushed outside the self. In the Bible, the scapegoat is a recurring figure most notably in the Old Testament where it is often used in sacrifice and made to atone for the people’s transgressions: “Aaron will then lay both his hands on its head and over it confess all the guilt of the Israelites, all their acts of rebellion and all their sins. Having thus laid them on the goat’s head, he will send it out into the desert under the charge of a man waiting ready, and the goat will bear all their guilt away into some desolate place” (*Jerusalem Bible*, Lev. 16.21-22).

8. The photographs taken of prisoner torture at Abu Ghraib speak overwhelmingly of the intersections between race, sexuality, and violence in the War on Terror. Or, in Sherene Razack’s words: “it is through the sexual that racial power is violently articulated” (345). In the photographs,



as in many instances of racial violence, the suffering of the victim is elided by their dehumanization. In the case of Abu Ghraib, the photos offer a depiction of a *staged* event, specifically orchestrated to highlight sexual deviance and Muslim sensitivities about sexuality rather than actual human suffering.

9. In another example of the association between sexuality and evil, Saddam Hussein is the subject of demonized parody in the animated film *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999), which includes a scene of Hussein in bed with the devil himself. The construction of Saddam Hussein as Satan's gay lover causes not only a dis-identification but a dehumanization as well. The parodic representation of Hussein as sexually virile and homosexual perpetuates the myth of an obsessed and errant Arab sexuality. Such an example might remain in the realm of parody were it not so similar to more serious discussions of Hussein's sexual behavior that also focus on his deviance from dominant Western norms, as is the case in the many accounts of the misogyny and rape carried out by Hussein and his sons. In either representation, whether portrayed as sexual predator or as a feminized caricature submitting to Satan's sexual whims, Hussein is found outside normative conceptions of humanity, masculinity, and heterosexuality.

10. Interestingly, the UK Home Office, the branch of the government responsible for crafting immigration and anti-terror legislation, imposes stiff penalties for those who harbor potential terrorists. Of the four "workstreams" designated to combat terrorism in the UK, the second is to "stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism" ("Counter-Terrorism Strategy"). In fact, throughout the Counter-Terrorism Strategy document (*CONTEST*), "supporting" terrorism is seen as being just as dangerous and indictable as actual terrorist activity (*CONTEST*).

11. This kind of unconditional hospitality, of course, also requires some measure of risk for it requires a host who is master of his or her house yet simultaneously willing to relinquish that mastery in order to welcome the stranger, whoever or whatever they may be. This is a paradox, an aporia to be sure, but one that requires more space than this current analysis allows.

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