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# Sympathy for the devil: A character analysis of Gibreel Farishta in Salman Rushdie's The satanic verses

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Sympathy for the Devil: A Character Analysis of Gibreel Farishta  
in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*

by

Catherine Mary Lafuente

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Juan Mendez Lafuente, 06/27/40 – 09/11/01.  
Never forget September 11th, 2001, and never let it happen again.

“If in God’s opinion, both good and evil were of equal value in the test, then Iblis would possess the same countenance as the moon-faced Gabriel” – Rumi

“To be born again...first you have to die.” – Gibreel Farishta, in Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

“How does newness come into the world? How is it born?  
Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?  
How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals,  
what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the  
exterminating angel, the guillotine?” – Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*

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Catherine Mary Lafuente

ABSTRACT

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* created a major controversy when published in 1988, much like the controversy that Nikos Kazantzakis's novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* caused in 1951. Kazantzakis's work upset many Christians due to the controversial characterization of Jesus, who in the novel engages in sexual activities and other behaviors that many Christians find offensive. *The Satanic Verses* caused a similar uproar in the *Umma*, or Muslim community, resulting in book burnings, death threats, and even a murder. Most of the controversy focused on some the problematic characterizations of the Prophet Muhammad and his wives, such as using their names for a pimp and twelve prostitutes living in a brothel. Another offense was that Ibrahim was called "bastard" for abandoning Hagar and Ismail (Ishmael), in the desert. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie pulls on the historical threads of Pre-Islamic Arabia and uses them to insinuate that Islam, rather than being a total breach from the Pre-Islamic traditions, was not an immediate break from the past but a slow process of change from the former belief system. By re-imagining these historical threads, Rushdie suggests that there is a plurality of possibilities that canonical Islam does not accept. The plurality that Rushdie suggests is anathema to the normative view of Islam, which is a monolithic Islam. These possibilities

cast doubt on the purity of the Prophet, which some fear can cause ordinary Muslims to doubt the truth claims of Islam. These doubts can damage the faith of the believers and the unity of the *Umma*. These and other Islamic themes in the novel remain unexplored in contemporary scholarship of the novel, particularly the theme of struggle between good and evil. Gibreel Farishta, the co-protagonist in the novel, will be the center of this inquiry. I will explore the notion that the plight of Gibreel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses* is similar to the suffering of Iblis in Sufi Islam.

## Introduction

Salman Rushdie's<sup>1</sup> *The Satanic Verses* created a major controversy when published in 1988, much like the controversy that Nikos Kazantzakis's novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* caused in 1951. Kazantzakis's work upset many Christians due to the controversial characterization of Jesus, who in the novel engages in sexual activities and other behaviors that many Christians find offensive. *The Satanic Verses* caused a similar uproar in the *Umma*, or Muslim community, resulting in book burnings, death threats, and even a murder.<sup>2</sup> Most of the controversy focused on some the problematic characterizations of the Prophet Muhammad and his wives, such as using their names for a pimp and twelve prostitutes living in a brothel. Another offense was that Ibrahim was called "bastard" for abandoning Hagar and Isma'il<sup>3</sup> (Ishmael), in the desert.<sup>4</sup>

In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie pulls on the historical threads of Pre-Islamic Arabia and uses them to insinuate that Islam, rather than being a total breach from the Pre-Islamic traditions, was not an immediate break from the past but a slow process of

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie is a British Indian novelist, born in Mumbai (Bombay), India in 1947.

<sup>2</sup> The translators of the novel as well as the author were targeted for murder. Only one of them was successful. Hitoshi Igrashi, who translated the book into Japanese, was stabbed to death on July 11, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> In Islam, it is Isma'il (Ishmael) and not Isaac that Ibrahim (Abraham) was told to sacrifice. The traditional spelling of the name in Islam is Isma'il, known as Ishmael in the Hebrew Bible. The spelling of Gibreel Farishta's birth name in the novel is "Ismail Najmuddin." "Najmuddin" is translated as "the star of faith," alluding to the sura concerning the satanic verses is named The Star. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (Middlesex, England: Viking Penguin Inc, 1989), 17.

<sup>4</sup> M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison, Wisconsin, United States: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 405. For more information about these and the other major controversies, see the *Postscriptural Paregons* chapter of that work.



change from the former belief system. By re-imagining these historical threads, Rushdie suggests that there is a plurality of possibilities that canonical Islam does not accept. The plurality that Rushdie suggests is anathema to the normative view of Islam, which is a monolithic Islam. These possibilities cast doubt on the purity of the Prophet, which some fear can cause ordinary Muslims to doubt the truth claims of Islam. These doubts can damage the faith of the believers and the unity of the *Umma*. These and other Islamic themes in the novel remain unexplored in contemporary scholarship of the novel,<sup>5</sup> particularly the theme of struggle between good and evil. Gibreel Farishta, the co-protagonist in the novel, will be the center of this inquiry.<sup>6</sup> I will explore the notion that the plight of Gibreel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses* is similar to the suffering of Iblis in Sufi Islam.

There are many sources that I will consult to explore the parallels between Gibreel Farishta and Iblis. The primary literary source is Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*. I will also consult scholarly sources about the novel, such as M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi's book *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*. As for religious texts, I will consult the formative religious narratives of Islam: The Qur'an, which is the unmediated word of God as revealed to Muhammad via the Angel Gibra'il;<sup>7</sup> the *Hadith*, which contains the oral record of words and deeds of the

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<sup>5</sup> Much of the scholarship focuses on the major theme of post-colonial and ethnic identity. This is one of the main threads of *The Satanic Verses*. This paper will of course consider the multitude of work that unpacks this theme, but will attempt to focus more on the themes of religion and religious identity.

<sup>6</sup> Although there is a co-protagonist in the novel, Saladin Chamcha, space does not permit a simultaneous inquiry. He also experiences a transmutation that has similarities to Gibreel Farishta. In M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi's book *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*, they assert that Chamcha is cast as the Adam of the novel.

<sup>7</sup> I use this spelling to indicate the angel in an Islamic context, as Gabriel often has a distinctly Christian connotation. Gibra'il (Gabriel) is not named in the Qur'an as the angel that Allah revealed the Qur'an

Prophet; the *Sira Nabawiyya*, the hagiography or sacred biography of the Prophet; and *Tafsir*, which is Qur'anic exegesis. The *Hadith*, *Sira*, and *tafsir* are all threads that weave together to form the ground of meaning in Islam. The majority of the *tafsir* that I will consult is the medieval Islamic discussion of Iblis in Sufi Islam. My approach to the novel is literary analysis and criticism in light of major Islamic themes, which the novel addresses and which have been avoided by other literary critics of the novel. My methodological orientation within the thesis is phenomenology of Islam, comparing and paralleling Gibreel Farishta with Iblis.<sup>8</sup>

When Gibreel Farishta, the co-protagonist of *The Satanic Verses* is sleeping, he has painful dreams that he is the Angel Gibra'il (Gabriel),<sup>9</sup> the angel who revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad. Dreaming in Islam is one of the functions of prophesy during which *wahy*, divine inspiration, can occur. In the novel, Farishta claims that his dream identity is the same as his waking identity, which causes the people around him to question his sanity.

-and the fatal flaw, namely, Gibreel Farishta's imminent realization – or, if you will, *insane idea*, that he truly was nothing less than an archangel in human form, and not just any archangel, but the Angel of the Recitation, the most exalted (now that Shaitan had fallen) of them all.<sup>10</sup>

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through to Muhammad. This is found in *Hadith* in multiple locations, such as in al-Bukhari's *Sahih*, Volume 1, Book 1, Number 4. <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/reference/searchhadith.html> is the source used in this paper for all *Hadith* citations.

<sup>8</sup> There are few phenomenologists of Islam. Henry Corbin is the most notable.

<sup>9</sup> Gibreel is a colloquial spelling of Gibra'il, or Gabriel.

<sup>10</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 315. Rushdie's style of writing often includes unconventional punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and word construction. This is a deliberate effort on behalf of the author to enhance the aural nature of the text. All quotations from the novel are transcribed directly with no alteration.

This change in state, as it plays out in the apparent psychological deterioration of Farishta, calls into question the nature of good and evil as moral categories in Islam. The ambiguity of Farishta's identity leaves the reader wondering if in fact Gibreel Farishta was the entity who revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad hundreds of years ago.

Throughout the history of Islamic thought, particularly Sufi thought, there has been a rich discourse regarding the source of good and evil and how these moral categories relate to the nature of God. Iblis is the devil in Islam, who was cast out of heaven for disobeying God's command. Because of his disobedience, he is accused of infidelity to God. These accusations of infidelity are similar to the infidelities with which jurists accused Sufis. However, Sufi interpretations of Iblis claim that his obedience to God's first command, worshipping only Him, represents paradoxically his fidelity in spite of his arrogant disobedience.<sup>11</sup> Sufis relate to Iblis because their self-perception of extreme fidelity despite belief and practices that jurists often do not accept.<sup>12</sup> Iblis refused God's command to bow to Adam by remaining faithful to God's first command, which is to worship only Him. Bowing, or *sujud*, is the ultimate form of worshipful submission and prayer.<sup>13</sup> In Islam, *sujud* is the apex of *salat*, or prayer. Because Iblis refused to

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<sup>11</sup> Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1983), 127.

<sup>12</sup> Sufis have been executed for statements such as the one uttered by al-Hallaj (d. 922), "*Ana al-Haqa*," trans. "I am God!" or "I am the Truth!" These statements, although intended to reflect the mood of the seeker in the moment of ecstatic union with the divine, can be taken as heretical when context is not carefully examined. F. Rahman, "Baka wa-Fana" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb et al (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1960), Volume 1, 951.

<sup>13</sup> *Sujud* is not the same as "bowing" as it is understood in the English language. In English, to bow is to bend at the waist in respectful greeting, "an inclination of the head or a bending of the body in reverence." Bowing as *sujud* is better described as prostration, "bowing down" to someone or something, "reclining with the face on the ground in humble admiration." Roberto Tottoli. "Bowling and Prostration" in *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2001-2006), Volume I, 254.

prostrate before Adam, he was cast out of heaven and out of God's presence.<sup>14</sup> The "orthodox" interpretation of this event is that Iblis was too proud to bow down to Adam because he was made of fire and Adam was made of clay, which is inferior to fire. However, the Sufis believe that Iblis refused to bow, not because of his pride, but because of his extreme fidelity to God. Iblis was only doing what he had been created to do. The devil in Sufi Islam is not a purely evil figure, because good and evil were both created by God. The ambiguity of good and evil is that they have no independent existence as moral categories. Sufis understand this struggle as the *greater jihad* of Iblis.<sup>15</sup> The ambiguity of the Sufi characterization of Iblis suggests questions about the nature of good and evil in Islamic thought. Is evil an inherent quality of the divine nature? How do humans, as microcosms of God, relate to the divine nature? Is the plight of Iblis fair, and therefore is God just? Salman Rushdie's character, Gibreel Farishta, Bollywood superstar turned angelic messenger of God, struggles with these questions. Farishta finally kills himself because he cannot fulfill his *greater jihad*.

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<sup>14</sup> Q. 2:34; 7:11; 15:31; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116 and 38:74. All Qur'anic citations will be from the translation by Ahmed Ali unless otherwise indicated by the footnotes.

<sup>15</sup> It is commonly accepted in contemporary Islam that there are two types of *jihad*: the *greater jihad* and the *lesser jihad*, although these linguistic distinctions are not specified in the Qur'an. Verses such as Q. 29:6, 69; Q. 9:41; Q. 22:78 and 61:11 are all cited by scholars as verses that concern the greater jihad. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the twelfth century founder of the Sufi Brotherhood of the Qadiriyya, defines the greater jihad as "the jihad of the soul, the passion, the nature, and Satan. It involves repentance from rebelliousness and errors, being steadfast about it, and abandoning the forbidden passions...it involves cutting the forbidden customs of the soul, and exiling them, so as to have as one's example the Divine commands and to cease from what it forbids." Essentially, the greater jihad is a believer's personal struggle against inner weakness, doubt, various temptations, and distractions from their religious duties in the service of God. For more on jihad, see David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (California: University of California Press, 2005.)

## Chapter 1: The Satanic Verses

The motif of the satanic verses as referenced in Rushdie's novel finds its origins in the religious traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia and the period of revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad during the earliest days of the new religion of Islam. In the center of the city of Mecca, the city of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, there is a large, cube-shaped structure called the *ka'aba*. Before Islam became the sole religion in Mecca, the *ka'aba* was a place of pilgrimage for the various Arab tribes who worshipped a variety of local gods, goddesses, and astral deities whose images were housed inside the *ka'aba*. Three goddesses were among the most popular, often referred to as the "daughters of God" in Pre-Islamic Arabia. Their names were *al-Lat*, which means "the Goddess" in Arabic, *al-'Uzza*, which means "the mighty one," and *Manat*.<sup>16</sup> Many people in Pre-Islamic Arabia venerated these deities as high goddesses. Islam came to overturn the worship of anything/anyone other than the one God, Allah. To allow these goddesses to be worshipped would violate *tawhid*, the oneness of God. The passage from the Qur'an below addresses this issue of the Triple Goddess:

Have you considered Lat and 'Uzza,  
And Manat, the other third (of the pagan deities)?  
**Are there sons for you, and daughters for Him?**  
**This is certainly an unjust apportioning.**

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald Hawting, "Pre-Islamic Arabia" in *EQ*, Volume IV, 259.

**There are only names which you and your fathers  
have invented. No authority was sent down by God for them.  
They only follow conjecture and wish-fulfillment, even though  
guidance had come to them already from their Lord. Q 53:19-23**

Islam understands these verses to be abrogating<sup>17</sup> the infamous “satanic verse,” that are now missing, reference to which is found only in the *Sira* literature.<sup>18</sup> The abrogated verses discussed in the *Sira* suggest that the Prophet considered adulterating the principle of *tawhid* to the extent of allowing the pre-Islamic tribes to worship the Triple Goddesses. The notion of accepting these verses is impossible for normative Islam as it violates not only *tawhid* but also the Prophet’s sinlessness. The abrogated verses are found the *Sira*:

Have you thought of al-Lat and ‘Uzza  
and Manat the third, the other?  
**These are the exalted Gharaniq,**<sup>19</sup>  
**whose intercession is approved.**<sup>20</sup>

These verses would allow people to ask the triple goddess for intercession. However, gods and goddesses of Pre-Islamic Arabia were deemed heretical after the rise of Islam(cited above in Q. 53: 19-23, as indicated in the novel.

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<sup>17</sup> In Islam, the verses that have been abrogated are called *mansukh*, and the verses that abrogate are called *naskh*. The *mansukh* (in bold above) above were abrogated in the Qur’an.

<sup>18</sup> These early sources on the Prophet’s life, such as the *Sira Nabawiyya*, suggest that Muhammad recited these verses because Satan tricked him into doing so, casting the verses into his mouth. The angel Gibreel later told Muhammad that he had been tricked into reciting the words of Iblis. Muhammad immediately recanted the verses and replaced them as instructed by the angel Gibreel. For more information see Shahab Ahmed, “Satanic Verses” in *EQ*, Volume IV, 532. This motif of reputed dual goddess and god worship in early Islam parallels the biblical/archaeological evidence of Ashura worshipped simultaneously with YHWH in the ancient Israelite context. cf. Biblical refs. “The Goddess and Asherah” in Raphael Patar, *The Hebrew Goddess*, Detroit: Wayne St. VP, 1990 (1967). Judith M. Hadley, “From Goddess to Literary Construct: The Transformation of Asherah to Hakhmah” in *A Feminist Companion to the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies*. Eds. A. Brenner/C Fontain. England: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Gharaniq can be translated roughly as “ ‘Numidian cranes’ which fly at a great height.”

<sup>20</sup> A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 165-166.

With [Satan's] daughters as his fiendish backing group, yes, the three of them, Lat Manat Uzza, motherless girls laughing with their Abba...<sup>21</sup>

Instead of being the daughters of God, they are now the daughters of Iblis. In the novel, Gibreel physically slays *al-Lat* in one of his prophetic dreams,<sup>22</sup> symbolizing the defeat of the Goddess by the God of Islam.

The study of the “satanic verses” is one of the more controversial areas of Islamic scholarship. The potential for a Muslim writer, author, or scholar to be accused of *takfir*, or being declared as an unbeliever, is great given the sensitive issues this scholarship inevitably raises.<sup>23</sup> By suggesting that Iblis could trick Muhammad into reciting false verses calls into question the purity and judgment of the Prophet and the Qur'an as a whole. This controversial issue is what Rushdie highlights in his novel with the plight of Gibreel Farishta. When Farishta dreams, he is convinced that he is the actual Angel Gibra'il, revealing the word of God to a human being. The more he dreams, the more he changes, and the more he changes the more insane he fears he is becoming. This suggests that the angel through which God communicated the Qur'an to the Prophet was actually a potentially delusional Bollywood superstar, a symbol of all that is secular and illusory, the center of a corrupt industry that produces degraded entertainment, an association that is extremely offensive to Muslims.

The actual satanic verses are referenced numerous times throughout the novel.

One of these examples is found in Rushdie's account of the deliverance in the novel of

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<sup>21</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 215.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed, Shahab, “Satanic Verses,” 531.

the actual verses as found in the *Sira*. Mahound,<sup>24</sup> the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, delivers them on pages 114-115 to the applause of the pre-Islamic and triple-goddess worshipping audience. He abrogates them on page 124 after he exclaims that “Shaitan” was the entity that cast those verses onto his tongue. The revelation of these verses occurs in perfect synchronization with Gibreel Farishta’s dreams, suggesting that it was Gibreel Farishta who was revealing the verses to the actual, historical Prophet Muhammad. At one point in the novel, Gibreel is heard muttering the satanic verses in his sleep.

Gibreel...would still speak, at night, verses in Arabic, a language he did not know: *tilk al-gharaniq al-‘ula wa inna shafa’ata-hunna la turtaja*, for example, which turned out to mean (Allie, woken by his sleeptalk, wrote it down phonetically and went with her scrap of paper to the Brickhall mosque, where her recitation made a mullah’s hair stand on end under his turban): ‘These are the exalted females whose intercession is to be desired’....<sup>25</sup>

The Islamic meaning of dreaming will be addressed further in Chapter Four, and its connection to both prophesy and revelation.

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<sup>24</sup> Naming the Prophet “Mahound” is particularly offensive to Muslims. “Mahound was a medieval Christian term of abuse for the Prophet of Islam. Rushdie adopts this name ‘to turn insults into strength’ (p. 93), rather like the defiant wearing of yellow stars to resist anti-Semites...It could be argued, moreover, that Rushdie’s use of the term Mahound is a dramatically effective tactic to draw Western attention to the way in which Western linguistic usages unthinkingly insult and degrade Muslims: after all, how many Westerners still refer to Islam as Muhammadanism, as in HAR Gibb’s early intro to Islam entitled *Mohammadenism*, a linguistic usage that in its implications is no better than “Mahound.” Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 414. More on the name “Mahound” is discussed in chapter four.

<sup>25</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 340.



## Chapter 2: Gibreel Farishta: Can Men Fly?

Gibreel Farishta was the biggest superstar<sup>26</sup> in all of Bollywood,<sup>27</sup> perhaps the most famous star in all of Bollywood film history. Farishta's character in the novel is based on the Bollywood superstar, Amitabh Bachchan (b. 1942), a prolific actor and all-time enduring Bollywood presence.<sup>28</sup> Farishta worked on "eleven movies simultaneously... a true feature of Bollywood filmmaking."<sup>29</sup> Unlike Bachchan, who was the well-educated son of an eminent poet,<sup>30</sup> Farishta's life off of the set was that of a wealthy, philandering materialist and not someone who slowed down to reflect. He was so busy with filmmaking and constantly assuming the identities of his many roles that he himself had become empty. The pace of his film career set the pace of his life, which was constant motion, much like an aptly named "motion" picture.

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<sup>26</sup> Rushdie plays linguistically with the two definitions of star, one as the movie star and the other as the celestial object. This relates back to Farishta's birth name, Ismial (Isma'il) Najmuddin as noted in the introduction.

<sup>27</sup> "Bollywood" – a tongue-in-cheek term created by the English-language press in India in the late 1970s – has now become the dominant global term to refer to the prolific and box-office oriented Hindi language film industry located in Bombay (renamed Mumbai in 1995). The Bombay film industry is aesthetically and culturally distinct from Hollywood, but as prolific and ubiquitous in its production and circulation of narratives and images." Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*. (UK, US, and Canada: Routledge, 2004), 2.

<sup>28</sup> "Bachchan was frequently referred to as the "One-Man Industry" and the "Number One" star by the press and the film industry as he reigned supreme over the box office for two decades. When he suffered a near-fatal accident in 1982 while shooting for the film, *Coolie*, the press, radio, and television issued daily bulletins on his health. Close family friend Prime Minister Indira Gandhi even cut short her trip to the U.S. to return to India. His stardom provided the model for the protagonist featured in Salman Rushdie's novel, *Satanic Verses*." Ganti, *Bollywood*, 121. These incidents in Bachchan's life mirror incidents in the life of Gibreel Farishta. Farishta gets suddenly ill and is visited by the Prime Minister on his sickbed (pg. 28) as Bachchan was. There are physical resemblances as well. Farishta is described as having "low-slung eyelids" on page 17, comparable to Bachchan's "heavy-lidded" eyes as described in Sumita S. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema, 1947-1987*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 229. It is notable that Amitabh Bachchan is referenced in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*.

<sup>29</sup> Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 422.

<sup>30</sup> Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 231.

Gibreel's superstardom began when he took on the roles of various Gods in movies based on religious myths. "Gibreel had spent the greater part of his unique career incarnating, with absolute conviction, the countless deities of the subcontinent in the popular genre of movies known as "theologicals.""<sup>31</sup> His big break occurred when he was willing to play Ganesha,<sup>32</sup> a role that required the actor to wear a giant elephant mask. This not only made him famous, but also "irresistibly attractive to women,"<sup>33</sup> who perhaps hoped for some of Ganesha's blessings of money and good fortune. His next role, Hanuman,<sup>34</sup> allowed him to take off the mask and simply wear a tail, exposing his face to the public. From that point on, he ascended to superstardom and starred in many films that sold his image for abundant profit. No matter what role he played, his fans always recognized him. He was the "Supreme"<sup>35</sup> among actors, the one who was always recognized no matter what incarnation he was in. Because of this recognition by millions of devotees, his huge visual presence on giant billboards and movie screens, and the deity-roles that he so often played in films, he was described as god-like.<sup>36</sup> His presence was so huge that that when he disappeared from the public eye, Rushdie characterizes it as the death of God:

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<sup>31</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Ganesha is "the elephant-headed god who sits at the threshold of space and time and who blesses all beginnings..." Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 17.

<sup>33</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 24-25. The women who he slept with often asked him to "keep the mask on."

<sup>34</sup> Hanuman is a god who is defined as "the monkey servant of Lord Rama." Eck, *Darsan*, 43. Hanuman is a particularly well-known God because of his major role in the epic Bollywood film *Ramayana*. Johan Manschot and , Marijke De Vos, *Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema: A Visual Journey Through the Heart of Bollywood*. (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005), 75.

<sup>35</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> "The love of film fans for their heroes has been compared to love for Gods." Manschot, *Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema*, 32. Bachchan, Farishta's prototype, had a "career that had made of its star at once a historical and godlike phenomenon." Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 230.

It was the death of God. Or something very like it; for had not that  
outsized face, suspended over its devotees in the artificial cinematic  
night, shone like that of some supernal Entity that had its being at least  
halfway between the mortal and the divine?<sup>37</sup>

The reference to “moral” refers to humans, who in an Islamic context have to make moral choices because they know right from wrong. They have the choice to obey or disobey God’s commands. To place Gibreel in the middle of these two concepts asserts that he is not quite human but not fully angelic. The context that Rushdie placed Farishta in as a star of theodicals, although God-like, is artifice. Both Farishta and the Hindu Gods that he plays are reduced to images in the “artificial cinematic night” that disappear when the film ends and the lights come up. Farishta’s actual, tangible physical presence was unknown to and unnecessary for his fans. He was known to the public only through the films that he starred in and the giant billboards that projected his face like a celestial object floating in the night sky.<sup>38</sup> Both film (which is many pictures on a reel) and billboards are only images of real things, illusion rather than substance. Because of this, Farishta became an icon solely for visual consumption, an image worshipped by millions of fans. His fans, ironically, were blind to his emptiness, reflecting their own lack of substance. Farishta did not receive anything in return for his visual presence from his fans that was meaningful. In Hinduism, *darsan* is a visual exchange between devotee and deity that is two sided.<sup>39</sup> “The central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the

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<sup>37</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> The practice of erecting huge images of Bollywood movie stars as billboards is common in India. Fans express their devotion to the star by placing garlands of flowers on the giant images just as they do in worship of God images. Manshot, *Behind the Scenes of Hindi Cinema*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> Eck, *Darsan*, 3. Italics added.

lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and behold the image with one's own eyes, to see *and be seen* by the deity." For Farishta in his guise as a Hindu film "god," the visual exchange between himself and his devotees was artificial. They were not in his gaze but rather the gaze of his empty image that never actually saw them.

Farishta's movies are filled with the symbols, myths, and Gods of other religions, particularly Hinduism, but have no real depth because of their artificial and illusory nature. Hinduism<sup>40</sup> then is portrayed essentially as a string of images, flashing lights that have no permanent substance. Icons in Hinduism, such as statues made in the image of a God, are empty until the deity is called into them through ritual practice. It is not simply the image or icon of the God that is powerful, but the God that inhabits the icon. Bidding the deity into the icon called *avahana*, and dismissal of the deity is called *visarjana*.<sup>41</sup> The icons used in ritual serve as a vessel for the God to occupy. Farishta is essentially an empty icon. For Muslims, this is simply idolatry, sinful delusion.

Although Farishta was never a devoutly religious man, he does self-identify as a Muslim,<sup>42</sup> ergo Hinduism is essentially meaningless for him. In Islam, moral purity is synonymous with oneness. *Sura*, or chapter, 112 of the Qur'an entitled "*Al-Ikhlās*", which refers to God's oneness, states:

Say: He is God  
the one the most unique,  
God the immanently indispensable.  
He has begotten no one,

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<sup>40</sup> Farishta does play Gautama in one of the theologicals as mentioned on page 16 of the novel, but this role blends into the milieu of Hindu deities that he plays along with "the blue-skinned...Krishna" and the other deities previously mentioned. Gautama is also a human, not a God. Essentially, any religion that is not Islam is blended together as the polytheistic background of Bollywood.

<sup>41</sup> Eck, *Darsan*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 22, in which his religious faith is described as a "low-key thing".

And is begotten by none.  
There is no one comparable to Him. (Q. 112: 1-4)

The religious plurality of Bollywood does not resonate with Islam, and in fact violates the oneness of God, the most important aspect of Islam. The trope of Hinduism as illusory sets up the foil against which Gibreel will appear when he falls ill and calls on the God of Islam for help. He unconsciously moves from meaninglessness into meaning when he moves from Hinduism into Islam. This move will be discussed late in this chapter.

Although Gibreel Farishta is “god-like” on the screen, in person he displays opposite qualities of devilishness. His physical characteristics, such as intense halitosis, belie his Godliness:

Gibreel’s exhalations, those ochre clouds of sulphur [sic] and brimstone, had always given him – when taken together with his pronounced widow’s peak and crowblack hair – an air more saturnine than haloed, in spite of his archangelic name.<sup>43</sup>

The reference to sulfur and brimstone obviously alludes to *Shaitan*/Satan when taken in context with the entire sentence, but there is another layer of meaning in Rushdie’s description of Farishta’s breath. For Muslims, bad breath is indicative of physical corruption, and physical corruption is essentially evil. Bodily substances and bad smells are ritually contaminating, such as sexual fluids, menses, and the byproducts of digestion. Hygiene must be rigorously maintained in order to keep the body pure. According to a *hadith* narrated by Abu Said:

I testify that Allah's Apostle said, "The taking of a bath on Friday is compulsory for every male Muslim who has attained the age of puberty

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<sup>43</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 13.

and (also) the cleaning of his teeth with Siwak, and the using of perfume if it is available."<sup>44</sup>

This and other bathing/purity rituals are compulsory for Muslims, and have been in practice in Muslim countries for centuries. In Islam, evil is defined as a lack of ritual purity. Before a Muslim prays, she or he has to ritually purify her or his body with water. This ritual is called *wudu*. Part of the complex *wudu* ritual is rinsing the mouth with water.<sup>45</sup> The *Siwak* mentioned in the above *hadith* is a toothbrush and is encouraged (sometimes required) in multiple *ahadith* for Muslims to use in order to purify the mouth.<sup>46</sup> Purifying the mouth and the rest of the body not only cleanses the physical, but has a deep spiritual significance based on the *niyya*, the ritual intent, of the practitioner.<sup>47</sup> Gibreel's foul-smelling mouth is a sign of both physical and spiritual impurity, and foreshadows the pork binge that is discussed in chapter three. By endowing Farishta with this characteristic, Rushdie highlights Gibreel Farishta's real corruption under the illusory god-like film personae.

At the very beginning of the novel, Farishta plummets to the earth after the hijacked plane he was on, the Bostan 420,<sup>48</sup> was blown up by hijackers. There is a contemporary Islamic association with plane hijacking, even in the pre-September 11 West. The iconic hijacker is a fanatical Muslim from the Middle East. Rushdie is cognizant of this association, deliberately using popular media imagery (both visual and

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<sup>44</sup> al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Volume 2, Book 13, Number 5.

<sup>45</sup> Syed Ali Ashraf, "The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites: Prayer, Pilgrimage, Fasting, Jihad" in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. (Unites States: Routledge, 2007), 111.

<sup>46</sup> al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Volume 2, Book 13, Number 12 and Al-Bukhari, Volume 2, Book 13, Number 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ashraf, "The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites," 111-112.

<sup>48</sup> Botstan is the name of one of the four gardens of Paradise according to Fischer and Abedi.

verbal) and playing with it. This trope is unpacked by Fischer and Abedi in relation to a real historical hijacking:

Air India Flight 420 (reference to the film “Mr. 420”), a jumbo jet named “Bostan” (a name of one of the four gardens of Paradise), is blown up by Sikh terrorists led by a Canadian-accented woman (shades of the Air India flight blown up from Canada en route to England by Sikh terrorists in revenge for the Indian Government’s 1984 Blue Star invasion of the Golden Temple in Amritsar and killing of separatist Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale).<sup>49</sup>

As Gibreel Farishta falls from Bostan 420, he is cursed by an apparition named Rekha Merchant.<sup>50</sup> The reader later comes to understand that Merchant is Farishta’s jilted lover, who in despair threw herself and her children off of the roof of a building because he deserted her. The ghost of Rekha Merchant damns him to hell, then mentions *al-Lat*, the first Goddess of the famous pre-Islamic triple Goddesses, *al-Lat*, *al-‘Uzza* and *Manat*.

From the very start, Gibreel Farishta is cast as the Iblis of the novel:<sup>51</sup>

Now that I am dead I have forgotten how to forgive. I curse you, my Gibreel, may your life be hell. Hell, because that’s where you sent me, damn you, where you came from, devil, where you’re going, sucker, enjoy the bloody dip. Rekha’s curse; and after that, verses in a language he did not understand, all harshness and sibilance, in which he thought he made out, but maybe not, the name of Al-Lat.<sup>52</sup>

Rekha’s curse not only refers to Gibreel as the devil, but includes other allusions to Satan. The language that Gibreel cannot understand is Arabic because the name *al-Lat* is mentioned, defined as one of the “daughters of Satan” mentioned above in chapter one.

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<sup>49</sup> Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 420.

<sup>50</sup> It is notable that Rekha is the name of the Bollywood star who played opposite Amitabh Bachchan in nine hit films. Ganti, *Bollywood*, 132-133. It is also notable that Bachchan and Rekha had an off-screen romance. Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 201.

<sup>51</sup> Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 406. They refer to his fall as Satan’s fall.

<sup>52</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 8.

Once she is mentioned, the other goddesses, *al-'Uzza* and *Manat*, are implicit. The use of the word “sibilance” is deliberate on Rushdie’s behalf. Sibilance, which is defined as “making or characterized by a hissing sound,” or “sounded with a hissing effect,”<sup>53</sup> alludes to the role of the devil in Islam. In several Qur’anic verses, such as Q. 7:20, Satan whispers temptations to humans:

Thereupon Satan whispered unto the two with a view to making them conscious of their nakedness, of which [hitherto] they had been unaware; and he said: "Your Sustainer has but forbidden you this tree lest you two become [as] angels, or lest you live forever." (Q.7:20)<sup>54</sup>

Further sibilance is found in *Sura* 114 of the Qur’an entitled “*Nas*,” one of the “refuge taking” verses:<sup>55</sup>

Say: I seek refuge with the Sustainer of men,  
The Sovereign of men,  
The God of men,  
from the evil of the whispering, elusive tempter  
who whispers in the hearts of men  
from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men.  
(Q.114: 1-6)<sup>56</sup>

The recited sound of the Arabic *sura* is as follows, showing the sibilance “naas” ending of each line:

Qul a‘uudhu birabb-i-n-naas  
Malik-i-nnaas  
Leaah-I-nnaas  
Min sharr il-waswaas-il-khannaas  
Alladhii yuwaswisu fii suduur-I-nnaas

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<sup>53</sup> The definitions of “sibilance” are from [www.askoxford.com](http://www.askoxford.com), the online Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>54</sup> This verse is from the Asad translation of the Qur’an as the Ahmed Ali translation did not express the whispering aspect present in the Arabic

<sup>55</sup> *Sura* 113 and 114 are described as the refuge-taking verses as they both begin with “I seek refuge with the Lord...”

<sup>56</sup> This verse is the Asad translation of the Qur’an as the Ahmed Ali translation did not express the whispering aspect present in the Arabic.



As the phonetic rendering makes plain, this sura has a distinct sibilance at the end of each *ayat*, or line.<sup>58</sup> The “naas...naas...naas...” endings sound like hissing and whispering. In this verse, God is telling the Prophet to tell people to take refuge from this evil, the “evil of the whisperer.” The idea that Satan whispers inside the self is a common motif in Islam.<sup>59</sup>

As Farishta fell from the exploded plane, he began to flap his arms as if to fly, and surprisingly succeeded in doing so. His ability to fly is the first indicator of his newfound angelic nature. In Q: 35:1, the number of wings that an angel has is an indicator of an angel’s function.<sup>60</sup> Farishta, although wingless, is an angel nonetheless. As he descended he broke into song, another indicator that he is angelic according to Ibn Sina. In Islam, there are angels whose duty it is to sing praise to God as guardians of the throne.<sup>61</sup> Gibreel sings in language that he cannot understand, again alluding to Arabic, the language that God used to reveal the Qur’an. His flying and singing save his life. “The more emphatically Gibreel flapped and sang, sang and flapped, the more pronounced the deceleration, until finally the two of them were floating down to the [English] Channel

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<sup>57</sup> Nnaas as the final rhyme in each line represents a long A vowel which in turn emphasizes the sibilant final S sound.

<sup>58</sup> Sura 114 is composed in *saj’* rhymed prose. “Much of the Qur’an comprises rhymed prose (*saj’*) that consists of two or more short sections of the utterance being linked together by a rhyme and usually without metre.” Farid Esack. *The Qur’an: A User’s Guide*. (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2005),70.

<sup>59</sup> Ashraf, “The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites,” 122.

<sup>60</sup> Gisela Webb, “Angel” in *EQ*, Volume I, 88.

<sup>61</sup> Webb, “Angel” in *EQ*, Volume I, 88.

like scraps of paper in a breeze.”<sup>62</sup> Shortly after he lands, he develops a “distinctly golden, glow” around his head.<sup>63</sup> Ficher and Abedi characterize this glow as a halo, but to make the leap from a “glow” to a “halo” may be an assumption, although the glow is named as such later in the novel on page 448. There are no “haloes” in Islam in the form of golden circles around the head as in Christian iconography. There are, however, images of both the Prophet and the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the People of the Prophet’s House, with tongues of fire and golden light around their head(s) in Islamic iconography. In Islam, light is associated with God and the illumination that He provides:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth.  
The semblance of his light is that of a niche  
in which a lamp, the flame within a glass,  
the glass a glittering star as it were, lit with oil  
of a blessed tree, the olive, neither of the East  
nor of the West, whose oil appears to light up  
even though fire touches it not – light upon light.  
God guides to His light whom He will.  
So does God advance precepts of wisdom for men,  
for God has knowledge of every thing. (Q. 24:35)

To manifest light around the head is to manifest an attribute of God. There are numerous works of art in which the Prophet, his companions, various *imams*, Sufi saints, and other holy people/entities are surrounded by tongues of fire or have light around their head.<sup>64</sup>

According to Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896 CE), a “pillar of light” is formed from the souls of

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<sup>62</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 9. The “two” floating down from the plane are Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Gibreel Farishta is the focus of this paper. Saladin Chamcha, the co-protagonist, will not be examined in depth given the constraints of space. Both men were aboard the Bostan 420, the hijacked plane that exploded in the sky over London.

<sup>63</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 133.

<sup>64</sup> The “Mohammed Image Archive has compiled a number of these works of art on the following website: [http://www.zombietime.com/mohammed\\_image\\_archive/](http://www.zombietime.com/mohammed_image_archive/)

saintly individuals.<sup>65</sup> The luminosity represents the divine energy that the soul is infused with called *baraka*, spiritual power or blessing.<sup>66</sup> *Baraka* can manifest in people and objects, and can also be transferred or absorbed by others.<sup>67</sup> It is this quality that makes people long to be near prophets, saints, and other holy individuals; the more *baraka* a person has, the more attractive they are to others. Gibreel Farishta's acquisition of a golden glow during his fall, as well as his inexplicable appeal to others made manifest during his fall,<sup>68</sup> demonstrates that he has acquired *baraka* during his fall from the plane. His halitosis also vanishes, indicating that he is now in a state of ritual purity.<sup>69</sup> It is at this moment when he physically becomes an angel who has "fallen," in this case, quite literally, out of a plane.

Because the fall from the plane results in the change from physically human to physically angelic, it can be characterized as a birth:

Is birth always a fall?  
Do angels have wings? Can men fly?<sup>70</sup>

The questions above, spoken by an omniscient narrator, refer to Farishta's fall/birth. "To be born again," Farishta says, "first you have to die."<sup>71</sup> This idea is reflected in several rituals in Islam. The first is the ritual of *hajj*, which is the pilgrimage to Mecca. This

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<sup>65</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 56.

<sup>66</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 82.

<sup>67</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 102.

<sup>68</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 133-134.

<sup>69</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 133.

<sup>70</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 8.

<sup>71</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 31.

pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam,<sup>72</sup> which means that it is the duty of every Muslim if they are physically and financially able. Part of the *hajj* ritual involves a ritual/psychological death:

When a person puts on a pilgrim's garb (*ihram*), leaves his house, and proceeds toward the ka'bah, he must behave as if he is a dead man having no control over his life and worldly activities.<sup>73</sup>

*Ihram* stands metaphorically as a burial shroud and thus allows for rebirth into a state of extreme ritual purity. The idea of death being a birth also resonates with the Sufi concept of *fana fi Allah*, which is the annihilation of the self in God. *Fana fi Allah* is an impermanent experience in this life, often described as a momentary flash of union with the divine. It is not permanent until death. *Fana fi Allah* is the ultimate step on a journey best described as a pendulum that swings from stages of *maqam/at*, effort, to states of *hal/ah-wal*, grace. This is a sort of spiritual alchemy that requires experiences of effort, exertion, fear, reliance, etc. in order to attain grace.<sup>74</sup> Because of the shift from unity with God to the normal state, this process is not always pleasurable.

Obedience, as the Sufis understood it, is complete surrender – acceptance of the will of the beloved whether it manifests itself in kindness or in wrath. Love neither diminishes by cruelty nor increases by kindness; and the lover has to remain at the door of the beloved even if driven away – he has “to make his soul a broom at his door.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The other pillars of Islam are as follows: *Shahada*, the statement of belief in one God; *Salat*, which is the five times daily prayer; *Zakat*, which is the giving of alms; and *Saum*, which is fasting during the Islamic lunar month of *Ramadan*.

<sup>73</sup> Ashraf, “The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites,” 120. The *hajj* pilgrim must also wear a special garment, and cannot engage in sexual intercourse, kill insects, or remove body hair in order to remain pure.

<sup>74</sup> Rahman, F. *Baka wa-Fana*, in *EI*, 951.

<sup>75</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 135.

Essentially, the ultimate pleasure or union with God is on the same continuum as pain; they are one and the same. The death in God is the annihilation of the ego. To be born, al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) says the seeker has to die.

If you would say “Die!” I would die in full obedience,  
and would say “Welcome to him who calls me to death.”<sup>76</sup>

For Farishta, it is during his fall from the plane that his human self “dies” and his angelic self is “born.” Like Iblis, he is a fallen angel.<sup>77</sup> This is further supported when Saladin Chamcha, his co-protagonist, exclaims “maybe that’s what’s happening to you, loudmouth, your old self is dying and that dream-angel of yours is trying to be born into your flesh.”<sup>78</sup> Gibreel Farishta “is gigantic, wingless, standing with his feet upon the horizon and his arms around the sun.”<sup>79</sup>

The trope of fall/falling in Rushdie’s novel is a multivalent concept in which physical falling, moral falling, and theological falling flirt with one another. The concept of fall from grace has two contexts in Rushdie’s novel in the characterization of Gibreel Farishta. One is the fall of the angel who becomes Iblis. The other is the fall, or original disobedience, of Adam.<sup>80</sup> Gibreel unites the fall of the angel with the fall of Adam. He is both human and the devil. Unlike Christianity, Islam has no concept of a primal fall from

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<sup>76</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 135.

<sup>77</sup> Angels will be further addressed in chapters four and five.

<sup>78</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 85.

<sup>79</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 91. cf. rabbinic parallels to the idea of the primordial Adam, Adam Qadmon, “whose primordial body was luminous and gigantic spanning the earth (Talmud, Hagigah 12a, Sanhedrin 38b, Baba bathra 58a; “Bereshit rabba” 8.1 and 14.8; Mishnah aboth 3.15; “Pesikta de Rabbi Eliezer,” 1970, p.79; “Tanna debe Eliyyahu rabba” in “Tanna debe Eliyyahu,” 1981, p.3; “Pesikta de Rab Kahana,” 1975, 4.4 and 12.1). Kathleen Malone O’Connor, *The Alchemical Creation of Life (Takwin) and Other Concepts of Genesis in Medieval Islam* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 276.

<sup>80</sup> Fischer and Abedi note that Farishta ‘s fall from the plane is akin to Iblis’ fall and Chamcha’s fall is akin to Adam’s fall.

grace, which Christianity calls “original sin.” In Islam, to sin is to deviate from the “straight path” mentioned in Q. 1: 4-7.<sup>81</sup> The straight path is a metaphor for living your life in accordance with the *sharia*.<sup>82</sup> Falling off the straight path mean “going astray” from the divinely revealed guidelines of the *sharia*. Such a fall from the straight path can result in a physical and spiritual corruption. Gibreel’s physical fall from the exploded 747 is not his moral fall. He has already “fallen” off of the straight path and become *kafir*, unbelieving, signaled by eating forbidden flesh, pork. *Kufr*, doubt or unbelief, is defined in Islam as the rejection of God and the messengerhood of the Prophet Muhammad. Gibreel became *kafir* as he lay on the brink of death in a hospital bed.

Farishta lived in the religiously pluralistic world of Bollywood until he was suddenly struck by a severe illness. Until he fell ill, he lived in a context of constant motion devoid of personal meaning. The illness caused him to step outside of the Hindu narrative and into the Islamic narrative, from polytheism into monotheism, and from illusion into reality. Because Farishta was a Muslim, the Hindu narrative never had spiritual meaning for him, but the Muslim narrative did. He called on the Islamic God the second he got sick, mobilized by trauma into the meaningful action of prayer. In his lucid moments he prays feverishly for recovery, but he experiences a rude awakening when his prayers are unanswered:

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<sup>81</sup> You alone we worship, and to You alone turn for help. Guide us (O Lord) to the path that is straight, the path of those You have blessed, Not of those who have earned Your anger, Nor those who have gone astray. (Q. 1: 4-7)

<sup>82</sup> *Sharia* is the legal code of Islam that is derived from the Qur’an and the *Hadith*.

During his illness he had spent every minute of consciousness calling upon God, every second of every minute. Ya<sup>83</sup> Allah whose servant lies bleeding do not abandon me now after watching over me for so long. Ya Allah show me some sign, some small mark of your favour, that I may find in myself the strength to cure my ills. Oh God most beneficent most merciful,<sup>84</sup> be with me in this my time of need, my most grievous need. Then it occurred to him that he was being punished, and for a time he got angry. Enough, God, his unspoken words demanded, why must I die when I have not killed, are you vengeance or are you love? The anger with God carried him through another day, but then it faded and in its place there came a terrible emptiness, an isolation, as he realized he was talking to *thin air*, that there was nobody there at all, and he began to plead into the emptiness, ya Allah, just be there, damn it, just be. But he felt nothing, nothing nothing, and then one day he found that he no longer needed there to be anything to feel. On that day of metamorphosis the illness changed and his recovery began.<sup>85</sup>

Gibreel prays to God not for healing but for the strength to heal himself. God did not give him this strength, nor did Farishta feel that God was with him in his moment of extreme need. It is only when he lets go of his faith in God that he becomes strong enough to cure himself. His faith made him unable to cure himself, unable to access his own strength. Rushdie's subtext about believing in the post-modern world, perhaps, is that like Farishta, believers put their strength into their faith and not into themselves, something that Rushdie says must be abandoned by the end of the novel. Farishta put his strength into his faith rather than into himself. Thus his faith was an illness unto itself. The second that he lets go of his religious faith, he is no longer reliant on anything but himself for strength. Until he fell ill, he had never questioned his faith as it had never truly been tested. He was a casual believer, a "cultural Muslim," but was seldom preoccupied with

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<sup>83</sup>"Ya" is the equivalent of "oh" in the English language, an Arabic particle of respectful address. W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. (Beruit: Librarie Du Libah, 1074), Volume 1, Part III, Section D, Number 368.

<sup>84</sup>"In the name of Allah, most benevolent, ever-merciful" is part of the "bismala," which is the opening line of the Qur'an.

<sup>85</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 29-30.

religious concerns. However, the experience on the sickbed made him *kafir*, unbelieving. God states (to Iblis): “Verily, thou shalt have no power over My creatures- unless it be such as are [already] lost in grievous error and follow thee [of their own will.]”(Q. 15:42)<sup>86</sup> This *ayat* limits Iblis’ pool of potential “followers.” Farishta had to be “lost in grievous error” before Iblis could attract him. As soon as Farishta became *kafir*, Iblis could proceed to beguile Farishta “with the pleasures of the world and lead [him] astray” (Q. 15:39). There are specific activities during which humans are particularly susceptible to the influence of Iblis. One of these activities is prayer. Iblis puts distracting thoughts into the mind of the believer in order to break the link between the believer and God.<sup>87</sup>

Iblis is a vigilant and tireless creature who is always looking for any opportunity to corrupt the souls of humans.

...Iblis is always there, patiently awaiting one careless move by his victim. It is at that moment that he strikes, dragging his prey to perdition and the everlasting fires.<sup>88</sup>

Farishta’s moment of weakness, his denial of God (*kufir*), opened him up to the influence of Iblis. The disillusionment and despair that followed his unanswered prayer were enough to break his faith altogether. In his isolation, he decided that God did not exist. From a believing Muslim point of view, Farishta’s illness could better be seen as a challenge sent by God and his recovery effected by God’s will, but Farishta does not see this. Farishta, now faithless, emerged from his illness determined to prove the non-

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<sup>86</sup> Asad Translation. The Asad conveys the point in English better than the Ali translation in this instance.

<sup>87</sup> Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*, 71. In this passage, Awn is elucidating on a verse written by Rumi.



existence of God. Farishta went on a perverted *da'wa*,<sup>89</sup> a mission to prove to himself that God does not exist, by testing Islam's most deeply held prohibitions: the barriers between *halal* and *haram*, the permitted and the forbidden.

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<sup>89</sup> A *da'wa* is an invitation, most often an invitation to "heed the qur'anic message." See Q. 7:29, Q. 21:25, Q. 9:33. A.H. Mathias Zahniser, "Invitation" in *EQ*, Volume II, 557. Farishta is on a sort of anti-*da'wa*, in that he seeks to undo his belief in God rather than follow the message of the Qur'an.

### Chapter Three: Faithfulness, Food, and Fornication: Farishta's Fall from Grace

The rules of *halal*, the permitted, and *haram*, the forbidden, form the moral guidelines for Muslim believers and define what is proper and improper behavior. Diet is one of the most basic parameters in which *halal* and *haram* apply. The first thing that Gibreel Farishta does to prove that God does not exist is feast on every kind of pork:

He got out of the limousine at the Taj hotel and without looking left or right went directly into the great dining-room with its buffet table groaning under the weight of forbidden foods, and he loaded his plate with all of it, the pork sausages from Wiltshire and the cured York hams and the rashers of bacon from godknowswhere; with the gammon steaks of his unbelief and the pig's trotters of secularism; and then, standing there in the middle of the hall, while photographers popped up from nowhere, he began to eat as fast as possible, stuffing the dead pigs into his face so rapidly that bacon rashers hung out from the sides of his mouth... And to prove the non-existence of God, he now stood in the dining-hall of the city's most famous hotel with pigs falling out of his face.<sup>90</sup>

These acts of pork consumption are intimate and profound forms of self-pollution and rejection of Islamic laws of purity. The Qur'an requires abstinence from pork<sup>91</sup> because it is both corrupted and corrupting.<sup>92</sup> The origin of the Islamic pork prohibition lies in Jewish *Kashrut* (kosher). The meaning of this pork trope to both religions links physical corruption to ritual impurity. Judaism and Islam offer explanations for the pork

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<sup>90</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 29-30.

<sup>91</sup> Q. 2:173; 5:3; 6:145 and 16:115.

<sup>92</sup> "The meaning of food in the life and identity of a people is more than nutrition, more than economics, it contributes to the boundaries of social and political affinity and alliance, cementing communitas and friendship at the banquet table, underlying separation and danger by projections of "uncleanness" and ritual 'impurity.'" Kathleen Malone O'Connor, "African-American Muslim Foodways: Nutritional Healing and the Construction of Identity" in *Anthropology and Theology: God, Icons, and God-talk*. Walter Randolph Adams and Frank A. Salamone, ed. (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 273.

prohibition: from traditional tests of obedience to God's commands to health concerns including pork contamination by trichinosis, and the meat of the pig being corrupted by its own diet as a carrion eater.

It is not just pork that contaminates the body. According to Sufi theorists such as al-Makki (d. 996 CE) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE), eating in general is an activity that attracts the attention of Iblis.<sup>93</sup> The Sufi interpretation of the *hadith*: "truly Satan flows in man's very bloodstream, make narrow his pathways through hunger and thirst"<sup>94</sup> advises a believer to practice asceticism in order to prevent Satan from permeating the body through "worldly pleasures."<sup>95</sup>

Fasting is set up as the opposite of gluttony. Filling the stomach in a gluttonous fashion corrupts one's morals with greed and makes a person sluggish (especially in hot climate), distracting him or her from prayer.<sup>96</sup> In order to keep Iblis at bay, a Muslim must not only be careful not to overeat but also fast on regular occasions in addition to obligatory month of fast during Ramadan:

The choice between gluttony and fasting is...raised to a plane of momentous spiritual significance, for to choose gluttony is to allow Satan to become flesh of one's flesh and blood of one's blood. Man's only shield is fasting, which starves the evil one and renders him feeble.<sup>97</sup>

The notion that Satan can become a part of one's flesh through food places great importance on what and how much one eats. The successful temptation of Adam and Eve

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<sup>93</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 61.

<sup>94</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 61, quoting Al-Makki.

<sup>95</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 89.

<sup>97</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 61, referring to Al-Ghazali.

by Iblis is the archetype of food prohibition. Iblis tricks them into eating from the forbidden tree (Q 7:20), and thus they are expelled from paradise. “The food prohibitions to Adam’s descendents are offered in the same spirit. ‘Men, eat of what is lawful and wholesome on the earth and do not walk in Satan’s footsteps, for he is your inveterate foe.’(Q.2:168; cf. 6:142).”<sup>98</sup> To eat forbidden food is to invite the devil directly into the body. Farishta not only eats pork, but he stuffs himself with it. The glut of *haram* food then literally becomes part of his body, making the body itself both corrupted and corrupting to others.

When Farishta was a child, he worked alongside his father as a lunch runner in Mumbai (Bombay). At one point, his mother chastised him for mixing up food that he was delivering to Hindus and Muslims, each of whom have different restrictions on eating.<sup>99</sup> He recalls the incident in a dream:

Gibreel when he submits to the inevitable, when he slides heavy-lidded towards visions of his angeling, passes his loving mother who has a different name for him, Shaitan,<sup>100</sup> she calls him, just like Shaitan, same to same, because he has been fooling around with the tiffins<sup>101</sup> to be carried into the city for the office workers’ lunch, mischievous imp, she slices the air with her hand, rascal has been putting Muslim meat

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<sup>98</sup> David Waines, “Food and Drink” in *EQ*, Volume II, 219.

<sup>99</sup> Proper food conduct in Islam is different from proper food conduct in Hinduism. Food consumption in Hinduism does not have universal rules like *halal* and *haram*. The Code of Manu is where food rules are found. Depending on a person’s means, region, status and societal role, their eating guidelines will differ. For more information on food conduct in Hinduism, see Hanns-Peter Schmidt, *Melanges D’Indianisme* in *Publications De L’Institut De Civilisation Indienne*, Serie IN-8, Fascicule 28. (Paris: Editions E. De Boccard, 1968).

<sup>100</sup> “Shaitan” is a common nickname that Muslim mothers will give to their young boys when they exhibit mischievous or impish behavior.

<sup>101</sup> A tiffin is a tea break container.

compartments into Hindu non-veg<sup>102</sup> tiffin carriers, customers are up in arms.<sup>103</sup>

This incident connects his violation of *halal* rules to the actions of *Shaitan* (Satan). For Farishta, there is no more intimate transgression than consuming the *haram* food in abundance. The lack of punishing consequence following his gustatory disobedience proves, at least to him, that God does not exist. He expresses this upon meeting his love interest, Alleluia Cone,<sup>104</sup> for the first time:

He looked up from his plate to find a woman watching him. Her hair was so fair that it was almost white, and her skin possessed the colour and translucency of mountain ice. She laughed at him and turned away.  
'Don't you get it?' he shouted after her, spewing sausage fragments from the corners of his mouth. 'No thunderbolt. That's the point.'<sup>105</sup>

Alleluia Cone was a non-Muslim British woman with white skin, blonde hair, and light blue eyes. Pairing with non-Muslim women, the fairer the better, is a huge theme in post-colonial society and in fiction, such as *The Satanic Verses*. Having a white woman on one's arm and in one's bed is a method of gaining status. However, copulating with her is another kind of *haram* behavior.

Food and sex are connected concepts, as is evident by the Qur'anic verses that discuss Adam and Eve in the garden.<sup>106</sup> It was the act of eating from the forbidden tree

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<sup>102</sup> Contrary to popular belief, not all Hindus are vegetarians. Although vegetarianism may be based on the principle of *ahimsa*, non-injury to living beings, one can still eat meat and not harm the animal it came from, ie. If the animal dies of natural causes. Schmidt, *Melanges D'Indianisme*, 1-2. Hinduism is not like Islam, which has very specific and set rules regarding food and food consumption.

<sup>103</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 91.

<sup>104</sup> Alleluia Cone is the fair-skinned "ice queen" with whom Gibreel Farishta falls in love with after a three-day affair following his pork binge. He later follows her back to London. Her role in Farishta's life will be further discussed later in this paper.

<sup>105</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 30.

that revealed their anatomical differences to one another,<sup>107</sup> subsequently defining their gender differences. In Islam, men are associated with reason and intellect, whereas women are associated with matter and corporeality. This is evident linguistically with the words *aql* (intellect) and *nafs* (breaths/soul); the former is masculine and the latter is feminine.<sup>108</sup> It is further evident in the Sufi thought of Mahmud Shabistari (d. 1320), who equates the right side with spirit and the left side, the side from which Eve was born, with matter.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, all material substances, such as food, are feminine in character. Food is not only a material substance in and of itself; it becomes a part of the body after it is consumed. The body therefore *is* food. This idea aligns with the function of women's bodies as providers of progeny and nourishment with their fertile, fruit-producing wombs and breast milk. In the Qur'an, women are literally the proverbial fields that men sow:

Women are like fields for you;  
so seed them as you intend,  
but plan the future in advance. (Q. 2:223)

Like fields that are farmed, women are fertile soil for men's seed; the ground produces fruit just as the womb does. The process of growing food from the earth has visible changes. Farmland, such as land near rivers that flood annually, is part of a cyclic process. When the soil has been nourished by the flood, it becomes moist and changes color, indicating that the ground has become fertile. The female body also shows visible changes that are related to sex and fertility, such as menstruation. When a woman begins

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<sup>106</sup> I am assuming that the reader has knowledge of the story of Adam and Eve in the Judaic-Christian-Islamic tradition.

<sup>107</sup> See Q.2:35-36, Q.2:222, Q.7:19-20, and Q.20:120-121.

<sup>108</sup> Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>109</sup> Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 166.

to menstruate, she is ready to be tilled just as the land is. This tilling, so to speak, results in another visible change: pregnancy.

Like the womb, which produces progeny often called fruit, the belly is a part of the body associated with both eating and reproduction.

Clearly, the belly of a woman is the location of the womb and other organs of reproduction, but through a common cultural logic, the womb is also connected to organs of nutrition. Thus the womb becomes just one site in a network of connected organs and functions through which women are closely associated with nourishment and sustenance. The anatomical ambiguity of “the belly” represents this network rather than any specific organ.<sup>110</sup>

The belly of a woman is both the space that food fills and the area of the body that swells during pregnancy.<sup>111</sup> The swelling in both cases is the result of an action that produces pleasure, be it from food or sex. In a sense, then, the belly is the link between food and sex, making it a distinctly feminine area.<sup>112</sup>

The belly, as well as the rest of the female body, is dangerous. According to Mary Douglas:

The whole universe is harnessed to men’s attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion...”<sup>113</sup>

There are specific rules of conduct that believers (in this case, men) must follow in order to maintain purity, which apply to both women and food. Both food and the female body

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<sup>110</sup> Scott Kugle, *Sufis & Saints’ Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, & Sacred Power in Islam*. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 82-83.

<sup>111</sup> Kugle, *Sufis & Saints’ Bodies*, 82.

<sup>112</sup> Kugle, *Sufis & Saints’ Bodies*, 94.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Douglas “Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo” in *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: A Selection of Critical Readings*. Carl Olson, ed. (California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003), 307.

evoke strong desire in men, making them easily addictive and/or abused, such as the case is with lust and gluttony. "...Where there is impurity, one finds ash-Shaytan,"<sup>114</sup> stressing that *Shaitan* is directly connected to what is forbidden, therefore requiring vigilance in order to stay pure. When a woman is pregnant, her capacity for corruption is greater given that she is swelling with fluids, like breast milk and uterine lining. Whether or not breast milk is contaminating is ambiguous. It nourishes children and makes them grow, but also is associated with menses:

The association between womb blood and breast milk may not be obvious to contemporary readers. However, it was persistent in Hellenic culture and continued into Arab and Islamic anatomical and medical theories. The female body was imagined as an organ that fused blood and milk, both fluids that flowed beyond the boundaries of her body to sustain and nourish others.<sup>115</sup>

Sexual intercourse, the act that makes women pregnant, has the potential to attract evil into a person and subsequently contaminate them. Although lawful sex is encouraged in Islam both for pleasure and procreation,<sup>116</sup> it makes a person ritually impure because of the fluid contact.<sup>117</sup> Purification with water must be performed after sex, before engaging in prayer or entering sacred space, touching the Qur'an, or in some cases even mentioning the name of God. Water not only cleanses the body, but also regenerates the

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<sup>114</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 52.

<sup>115</sup> Kugle, *Sufis & Saints' Bodies*, 93.

<sup>116</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Natural Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet*. (Pennsylvania: Pearl Publishing House, 1993), 197-198.

<sup>117</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 307.



spirit.<sup>118</sup> Thus the woman's body is a temptation that has the power to condemn a man to hell.

Farishta's attraction and subsequent affair with Alleluia also contaminates his body in the same manner that his pork binge does. Sex with his white girlfriend is the consumption of another kind of white meat: pork. The trope of white flesh as pork is found in African-American Muslim discourse.

The domesticated pig is primarily visualized as the white pig whose pinky white skin, rheumy pale eyes, and huge overfed body is likened iconographically in African American Muslim discourse to the appearance, habits and character of White people and the demonic civilization they engender. The projection of a series of negative stereotypes onto the pig and onto its anthropological representative, the "Caveman" or "Paleman," includes physical greed (being "piggy," "piggish"), rampant sexual lust ("rutting"), covetous meanness ("swinishness"), physical foulness/disease which is both infected (with worms) and infectious (trichinosis), violent/savage/irrational/brutish (police as "pigs" and the prison system as the "beast"), and finally self-destructive in its habits/devouring its own young (self-poisoning via drug trafficking and polluting the land and their own food sources out of commercial interests.<sup>119</sup>

Farishta also noted the impure nature of white individuals. "I sometimes look at these pink people and instead of skin, Spoono, what I see is rotting meat; I smell their putrefaction here...in my nose."<sup>120</sup> Farishta therefore is doubly contaminated because of his consumption of *haram* food and non-marital sex with an impure woman. Although he felt that he was engaging in these behaviors without consequence, the "thunderbolt" was on its way in the form of inescapable nightmares.

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<sup>118</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 96.

<sup>119</sup> O'Connor, "African-American Muslim Foodways," 277.

<sup>120</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 437.

## Chapter Four: Gibreel Farishta and the Devil, Dreaming: It Was Me Both Times, Baba!

The role of dreams in Islam and how they tormented Gibreel Farishta are crucial to understanding the development of the protagonist and his struggle with good and evil and his eventual descent into madness and death. The prophetic tradition classifies dreams into three types: dreams sent by God as true inspiration, dreams from a person's imagination, soul, or body which are merely fantasy, and dreams sent by Iblis to tempt and mislead.<sup>121</sup> Some early manuals of dream interpretation (*ta'bir al-ruya*) state that God must use an angel as an intermediary to send dreams to humans. Anyone can receive a prophetic dream regardless of profession, gender, or age.<sup>122</sup> True dreams are sent by God, or *wahy*, divine inspiration. "Dreams are...the primary mode through which God will communicate with his community following Muhammad's death and the cessation of Koranic revelation."<sup>123</sup>

It is in a dream that God commands Ibrahim (Abraham) to kill his son, Isma'il (Ishmael),<sup>124</sup> providing the archetypal myth of sacrifice that is commemorated annually at the end of hajj as *Eid al-Adha*, the Feast of Sacrifice. This event is visualized in Islamic iconography worldwide.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> John C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 20. If the Prophet appears in a dream, however, it cannot be Satan according to the Hadith.

<sup>122</sup> Lamoreaux, *Dream Interpretation*, 82-83.

<sup>123</sup> Lamoreaux, *Dream Interpretation*, 84.

<sup>124</sup> In Islam, it is Ishmael rather than Isaac that God commands Abraham to sacrifice.

<sup>125</sup> Some iconography includes hajj murals, murals that Muslims paint on their houses when they embark on the pillar of *hajj*, the journey to the ka'aba in Mecca. The murals commemorate the pilgrim's journey as well as protect the home while the pilgrim is away. Jean Eduardo Campo, *The Other Side of Paradise*:

When he was old enough to go about with him,  
he said: "O my son, I dreamt that I was sacrificing you.  
Consider, what you think?"  
He replied: "Father, do as you are commanded.  
If God pleases you will find me firm. (Q. 37:102-105)

Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*) contextualizes Ibrahim's dream as lasting for three consecutive nights. After the first night, he questioned whether his dream was a true vision, *ru'ya*,<sup>126</sup> concerned that Iblis was sending him a false vision, *hulm*. "This differentiation also appears in the *hadith* literature, expressed in the saying 'ru'ya is from God and *hulm* is from Satan.'"<sup>127</sup> The dream also could have been from Ibrahim's own mind. The ability of the mind to conjure fantasy is called *wahm*, imagination. It took having the dream for a second night for Ibrahim to accept the dream as *wahy*, divine inspiration.<sup>128</sup> Farishta's nightmares can be construed as a blending of false visions from Iblis, *hulm*, and Farishta's own delusional imagination, *wahm*. The dreams also fit the category of *adghath ahlam* (Q. 12:44), "frightful nightmares, deceptive dreams, or dreams with a meaning that cannot be interpreted."<sup>129</sup>

In the *Hadith* and the *Sira* literature, the Angel Gibra'il is credited with bringing God's message verbatim to the Prophet. According to some traditions, Muhammad received his first revelations from Gibra'il while he was asleep and dreaming, *wa-ana*

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*Explorations into the Religious Meanings of Domestic Space in Islam*. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>126</sup> Leah Kinberg, "Dreams and Sleep" in *EQ*, Volume I, 547. Kinsburg cites: al-Razi, *Tafsir*, xxvi, 153; Baghawi, *Ma'alim*, iv, 569; Qurtubi, *Jami'*, xv, 101-2; and Suyut, *Durr*, v, 308.

<sup>127</sup> Kinberg, "Dreams and Sleep," 552.

<sup>128</sup> Kinberg, "Dreams and Sleep," 548, citing al-Razi, *Tafsir*, xxvi, 153.

<sup>129</sup> Kinberg, "Dreams and Sleep," 552.

*na'im*.<sup>130</sup> Sura 97 of the Qur'an, entitled *surat al-Qadr*, the "Night of Power," supports the assertion in Hadith that an angel brought the revelation to Muhammad.

We have indeed revealed this is the Night of Power;  
and what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is?  
The Night of Power is better than a thousand months.  
Therein come down the angels and the spirit  
by God's permission, on every errand; Peace!  
This until the rise of morn! (Q. 97)<sup>131</sup>

The Night of Power, *laylat al-qadr*, is celebrated during the month of *Ramadan*,<sup>132</sup> commemorating the first reception of revelation by Muhammad. "This night is described as a night better than a thousand months...in which angels and the spirit [of God, *ruh*] descend by leave of their lord from every command..."<sup>133</sup> The first moment of revelation directs the Prophet to repeat this revelation by commanding him to "recite!" (Q. 96, *surat al 'Alaq*)

As mentioned at the end of chapter three, Gibreel Farishta has been throughout the novel tormented by nightmarish visions in which he became the Angel Gibra'il. He started having these terror-filled dreams after his gluttonous pork binge: "...after he ate the pigs the retribution began, a nocturnal retribution, a punishment of dreams."<sup>134</sup> The dreams began as nightmares, but eventually overtook even his waking moments, as the barrier between his dream self and waking self dissolved.<sup>135</sup> Farishta's dream experiences, which Rushdie satirizes heavily, are nearly identical to *Hadith* narratives of

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<sup>130</sup> Lamoreaux, *Dream Interpretation*, 204.

<sup>131</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans.

<sup>132</sup> Lamoreaux, *Dream Interpretation*, 118.

<sup>133</sup> Roxanne D. Marcotte, "Night of Power" in *EQ*, Volume III, 337.

<sup>134</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 32.

<sup>135</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 304.

the first revelation of the Qur'an as witnessed in the *Sira*.<sup>136</sup> Gibreel's waking visions/nightmares are satirical renderings of the Prophetic narratives. Through dreaming, Gibreel Farishta in his guise as the angel Gibra'il revealed the Qur'an to a human male.

...Gibreel had spoken to nobody about what had happened after he ate the unclean pigs. The dreams had begun that very night. In these visions he was always present, not as himself but as his namesake, and I don't mean interpreting a role, Spoono,<sup>137</sup> I am him, he is me, I am the bloody archangel, Gibreel himself, large as bloody life.<sup>138</sup>

Farishta was terrified of his dreams. They were so realistic that he wondered if the dreams were the reality and his waking life was actually the dream. He had no control over the dreams and could not experience deep, dreamless sleep. The dreams were consecutive, always starting up where the last one left off, increasing his torment. Farishta feared that he was going insane.<sup>139</sup> He found the dreams so powerfully real and extremely overwhelming, as no doubt the historical Prophet did when he received the revelations as accounted in the *Sira*.<sup>140</sup>

The Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) said, I had been standing, but I fell to my knees; then I crept away, my shoulders quaking; then I entered Khadijah's chamber and said, Cover me (zammiluni), cover me, until the terror left me.<sup>141</sup>

This account of the Prophet taking refuge in the arms of his first wife, Khadijah, due to the intensity and overwhelming power of receiving the revelation bears strong

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<sup>136</sup> "The most striking thing about the nightmare chapters on a first superficial reading is their lack of inventiveness: they stick too close to Islamic tradition for comfort." Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 404.

<sup>137</sup> "Spoonno" is one of the nicknames that Gibreel gave to Chamcha, playing on his name as it translates into Urdu.

<sup>138</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 83.

<sup>139</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 83.

<sup>140</sup> Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 431. This references the *Sira* of Ibn Ishaq.

<sup>141</sup> M. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 40.

resemblance to Rudolf Otto's theory of experiencing the sacred or holy as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.<sup>142</sup> To experience God in such a personal and immediate fashion renders the human being one the one hand awestruck and attracted/desiring and on the other, frightened or terrified.<sup>143</sup>

Farishta found these dreams so scary that he would try not to sleep in order to not have them. At one point, he avoided sleep for so long that he collapsed into a sleep that lasted for four days straight. When he woke up, he was so shaken by his dreams that he did not speak for two days.<sup>144</sup> Gibreel's wakefulness resonates with the Sufi practice of voluntary wakefulness in which mystics on the ascetic path sleep as little as possible.<sup>145</sup> They feel that by staying awake, they can ward off Iblis because his influence over humans is more powerful when their consciousness is vulnerable in sleep.<sup>146</sup> This is because humans are in a morally weakened state when they are asleep.<sup>147</sup> The avoidance of sleep is a form of *zuhd*, self-discipline,<sup>148</sup> which is one of the "stations on the [Sufi] Path" to God.<sup>149</sup> *Zuhd* is a *maqam*<sup>150</sup> a station of effort and striving on behalf of the mystic, complimented by *hal*, the grace of God. For Sufis, sleep is dangerous because it

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<sup>142</sup> This experience can be compared to the "fear of God" common to the monotheistic religions. Bible: Genesis 20:11; Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 25:18; 2 Samuel 23:3; 2 Chronicles 20:29; Psalm 36:1; Psalm 55:19; Romans 3:18. Qur'an 2:2; 4:131; 7:56; 67:12; 98:8.

<sup>143</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (England: Oxford University Press, 1958).

<sup>144</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 82.

<sup>145</sup> *Zuhd* is also translated as asceticism. John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*. (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2005), 38.

<sup>146</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 72.

<sup>147</sup> Annemiek Spronk, "God's Good Plan and Evil Forces in the World: The Place of the Devil in Traditional Islam" in *Probing The Depths of Evil and Good: Multireligious Views and Case Studies*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 253.

<sup>148</sup> *Zuhd* is multi-tiered in its meaning. It connotes "... (a) renunciation of the world, (b) renunciation of the happy feeling of having achieved renunciation and (c) the stage in which the ascetic regards the world as so unimportant that he no longer looks at it." Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 1975, 37. It is juxtaposed to *hirs*, greed. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 1975, 111.

<sup>149</sup> Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*, 38.

<sup>150</sup> *Maqam* is discussed in chapter two in the section about *fana fi Allah*.

is a condition in which a person has no control over themselves. Through fantasy Iblis can overtake a person's will while they are asleep and dreaming.<sup>151</sup> Although he struggled, Farishta was not successful in his attempts to stay awake. The more Farishta resisted sleep, the more exhausted he became until psychosis made fantasy bleed into reality, leading him ultimately to madness, despair, and suicide.

The source of Gibreel Farishta's dreams was ambiguous. It is possible that God sent him the dreams. On the surface, the dreams that he had could fit the category of a "glad tiding from God." (Q. 10:62-4)<sup>152</sup> The dreams had a prophetic character and resonated with dream categories in Islamic theology. It is also possible that his subconscious was punishing him with the dreams. A further possibility suggested by Peter Awn is that "wily Iblis"<sup>153</sup> is sending the dreams to him.

Man's confrontation with Satan's disguised form attains its fullest intensity not in a man's everyday conscious life, but in the semi-conscious realm of dream and sleep. The power of the spirit world is felt with far greater force there than in the waking state because Satan can avail himself of the most frightening of nightmarish forms.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Iblis is a multi-dimensional character and will be explored more in the next two chapters. He is not always a negative and evil character.

<sup>152</sup> "Several definitions of 'good tidings' (*busrā*) are adduced in the commentary on this verse, among which 'dream' (*ru'ya*) is one. Dreams are the good tidings in the present world..." Kinberg, "Dreams and Sleep," 550.

<sup>153</sup> The "wily Iblis" refers to one of the several characterizations of Iblis by Sufis. "Occasionally, [Iblis] is given a different name or title that focuses on one or more of his characteristics." Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 57. Other characterizations include "Iblis: the One-Eyed," the "Prideful Iblis," the "Worthless one," "The One Who Flatters with Ruses," the "One Who Slinks Away," "Satan the Stoned," and others. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 57, 59, 75, and 90.

<sup>154</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 49. He also holds superiority over all other angels. <sup>154</sup> Husain Kassim, "Nothing can be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels: Angels and Angelology in Islam and Islamic Literature" in *Angels; The Concept of Celestial Beings; Origins, Development and Reception*, 2007, 648.

It can be argued that the source of Gibreel Farishta's dreams is Iblis. Because Iblis is an opportunistic trickster, the one who whispers in human hearts as in *surat al-Nas* (Q. 114), it makes sense that he would adopt the personae of one of the most celestial beings in order to mislead Farishta. What better form to confuse Farishta and lead him off of the straight path than the Angel Gibra'il? Gibra'il, whose role as vehicle of revelation is recounted in *Hadith*, is highly revered in Islam as one of the most trusted of God's agents.<sup>155</sup> Iblis sent the dream where Farishta became Angel Gibra'il, when in reality, Farishta was the devil. Iblis' role as a trickster is one way that Rushdie uses symbolic inversion of the meaning of the Prophet and revelation in Islam. However, this inversion is part of a longstanding trend in Islamic literature of satirizing sacred tropes with self-mockery. Humor and satire used to be a common practice in Islamic literature. Islam has become more sensitive in post-colonial discourse to such previously accepted and tolerated literary devices.<sup>156</sup> In the case of *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie not only satirized Islam but also invoked tropes outside of the tradition that denigrated Islam such as the medieval era term for Muhammad, Mahound.<sup>157</sup>

Rushdie's novel reverts to the old, disparaging Western name of 'Mahound' for Muhammad and uses motifs drawn from the early European Middle Ages, adding some fictions of his own which proved to be as offensive as those of Voltaire. It is not much consolation to observe that the author relates these as the fantasies of the schizophrenic hero of the novel... The name Mahound or sometimes Mahoun, Mahun, Mahomet, in French Mahon, in German Machmet, which was synonymous with demon, devil, idol, was invented by the writers of Christian play cycles and romances of 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

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<sup>155</sup> Gibra'il is revered as such because he brought the revelation to the Prophets. Kassim, Husain. "Nothing can be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels," 648.

<sup>156</sup> Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Structures of Avarice: The Bukhala' in Medieval Arabic Literature* (The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1985), 120 – 137.

<sup>157</sup> The use of the term "Mahound" by Muslims is an act of reclamation in a similar fashion to women using the word "c\*nt" or "b\*tch", or African-Americans using the word "n\*gger."



In these writings Muhammad does not appear as a prophet or even an anti-prophet, but as a heathen idol worshipped by the Arabs.”<sup>158</sup>

The name of the character Mahound is not the only way in which Rushdie implies that the Prophet is diabolical. Rushdie also inverts the *Hadith* narrative of Muhammad’s first encounter with the Angel Gibra’il. In the *Hadith* narrative from Bukhari’s *Sahih*, the Prophet describes his revelatory experience with the Angel Gibra’il.

The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied, “I do not know how to read.” Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, “I do not know how to read (or what shall I read)?” Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, “Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists) has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.” (Q.96.1, 96.2, 96.3) Then Allah's Apostle returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely. Then he went to Khadija bint Khuwailid and said, "Cover me! Cover me!" They covered him till his fear was over and after that he told her everything that had happened and said, "I fear that something may happen to me." Khadija replied, "Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you...”<sup>159</sup>

Another account of the Prophet’s encounter with the Angel Gibra’il is found in the *Sira* of al-Zuhri, also known as Ibn Shihab.

Then [Angel Gibra’il] said, “Recite.” I said, “I cannot recite” (or “What shall I recite”). He [Muhammad] said, Then he took me and squeezed me vehemently three times until exhaustion overcame me; then he said ‘Recite in the name of thy Lord who created.’ And I recited...And I came to Khadijah and said, “I am filled with anxiety for myself;” and I told her my experience. She said, “Rejoice; by God, never will God bring you to confusion...”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 6, 87.

<sup>159</sup> al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Book 1, Volume 1, Number 3.

<sup>160</sup> Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, 40.

Farishta in his dreams does not have power over Mahound as the Angel Gibra'il has over Muhammad in the *Hadith* and the *Sira*. In the novel, Rushdie inverts the narratives from both the *Hadith* and the *Sira*.

In a cave five hundred feet below the summit of Mount Cone,<sup>161</sup> Mahound wrestles the archangel, hurling him from side to side, and let me tell you he's getting in *everywhere*, his tongue in my ear his fist around my balls, there was never a person with such a rage in him, he has to know he has to K N O W and I have nothing to tell him, he's twice as physically fit as I am and four times as knowledgeable, minimum, we may both have taught ourselves by listening a lot but as is plaintosee he's even a better listener than me; so we roll kick scratch, he's getting cut up quite a bit but of course my skin stays smooth as a baby, you can't snag an angel on a bloody thorn-bush, you can't bruise him on a rock. And they have an audience, there are djinns and afreets and all sorts of spooks sitting on the boulders to watch the fight, and in the sky are those three winged creatures, looking like herons or swans or just women depending on their tricks of light. . . Mahound finishes it. He throws the fight. . . After they had wrestled for hours or even weeks Mahound was pinned down beneath the angel, it's what he wanted, it was his will filling me up and giving me the strength to hold him down, because archangels can't lose such fights, it wouldn't be right, it's only devils who get beaten in such circs, so the moment I got on top of him he started weeping for joy and then he did his old trick, forcing my mouth open and making the voice, the Voice, pour out of me once again, made it pour all over him, like sick.<sup>162</sup>

In Rushdie's account, the two characters are inverted and become their other. The Prophet of the *Hadith* above becomes the bringer of revelation and the angel becomes the Devil who is trying to subvert the Prophet and the angel. In the novel, Mahound becomes the revelator rather than the receiver and Gibreel becomes the Devil rather than an angel.

At the end of his wrestling match with the Archangel Gibreel, the Prophet Mahound falls into his customary, exhausted, post-revelatory sleep, but on this occasion he revives more quickly than usual. When he comes to his senses in that high wilderness there is nobody to be seen,

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<sup>161</sup> Mount Cone deliberately shares a name with Farishta's lover, Alleluia Cone. The implication is that the mountain, like Alleluia, needed to be climbed and perhaps conquered.

<sup>162</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 122-123.

no winged creatures crouch on rocks, and he jumps to his feet, filled with the urgency of the news. 'It was the Devil,' he says aloud to the empty air, making it true by giving it voice. 'The last time, it was Shaitan.' This is what he has *heard* in his *listening*, that he has been tricked, that the Devil came to him in the guise of the archangel, so that the verses he memorized, the ones he recited in the poetry tent, were not the real thing but its diabolic opposite, not godly, but satanic. He returns to the city as quickly as he can, to expunge the foul verses that reek of brimstone and sulphur, to strike them from the record for ever and ever, so that they will survive in just one or two unreliable collections of old traditions and orthodox interpreters will try and unwrite their story...<sup>163</sup>

The verses that “poured out...like sick” were the abrogation of the “satanic verses” discussed in chapter one, in other words the true verses in the Qur’an (Q.53: 19-23) as we have it today. In the above passage, Mahound had just received the revelation that the verses he previously stated were wrong. He set off to correct his mistake, convinced that Shaitan had disguised himself as the Angel Gibra’il and gave him false revelation. However, Mahound only made this true by stating it out loud. The distinction he made between angel and devil was an arbitrary human construction, perhaps even false. The reality of these verses in the novel is that there is no difference between who delivered the *naskh*, the abrogating or true verses, and who delivered the *mansukh*, or abrogated, false verses.

Gibreel, hovering watching from his highest camera angle, knows just one small detail, just one tiny thing that’s a bit of a problem here, namely that *it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me*. From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 123.

<sup>164</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 123.

Gibreel Farishta was the entity that delivered both sets of verses, both of them under the duress and will of Mahound. This turns the Islamic account of events completely on its head. This episode in the novel insinuates that God can be manipulated by the will of an angel/human being, which is absolutely heretical in Islam. The only reason that Gibreel won the battle is because Mahound threw the fight and forced Gibreel to pin him down. If “only devils...get beaten in such circs,” then Gibreel Farishta must be the devil, as Mahound had the power to throw the fight.

## Chapter Five: Devil Talk: The Ambiguous Nature of Iblis

In this chapter, I will discuss several ambiguities regarding Iblis. This subject has been thoroughly examined in the Master's Thesis of Christopher Sickles Hayes,<sup>165</sup> whose work draws on the *tafsir* of many Muslim exegetes. I will be applying his insights as well as others to this work in the exploration of some of the issues concerning Iblis' nature as it is embodied in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

The first ambiguity of Iblis' character in Islam concerns his original status as an angel. Angels act as intermediaries between God and humanity, which gives them a role superior to humans. However, angels must also be submissive to humanity as per God's command to bow to Adam (Q. 2:34, 7:11, 15:31, 17:61, 18:50, 38:74) putting them in a role inferior to humans. To complicate matters further, humans are flawed despite their role as viceregent of God on earth and angels are not flawed. Iblis' struggle with God results from precisely this flawed nature of Adam and God's paradoxical command to the angels to bow to his imperfect creation. The second ambiguity concerns the difference in the character of Iblis/Shaitan in Islam and Christianity. In Islam, Iblis is disobedient, but he does not fall from grace in the way that he does in Christianity. The third ambiguity concerns whether Iblis is an angel or *jinn*. After examining the ambiguities, I suggest that the plight of Iblis is his *greater jihad*.

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<sup>165</sup> Christopher Sickles Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan*. (Texas: The University of Texas at Austin, 2003).

According to the Qur'an, the angels questioned God's motives when He created Adam and appointed him *khalifa Allah*, God's vicegerent or deputy on earth.

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?- whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not."  
(Q. 2:30)<sup>166</sup>

The word *khalifa* is mentioned in the Qur'an nine times both in the singular and in the plural form, *khala'if*.<sup>167</sup> The term can be understood in several different ways, such as "successor, substitute, replacement, deputy." It also can mean "inhabitant, settler on earth" and the "one who exercises authority."<sup>168</sup> All of these definitions apply to Adam's role as God's vicegerent on earth. The title was also bestowed upon King David (Q. 38:26). However, there "is little in the Qur'anic occurrences of the term that prepares it for its politically and theologically charged meaning."<sup>169</sup> The word *khalifa* was also used to denote leadership. The official title of the head of state following Muhammad's death was *khalifa Allah*.<sup>170</sup> Initially, there was no link between the Qur'anic use of the term and the political application of the word. The meaning of the two terms slowly began to merge together in the middle of the eighth century CE. To be *khalifa Allah*, then, is to be God's representative on earth. God made Adam *khalifa Allah*, giving him dominion over all things. With this dominion came responsibility both over the earth and all things on

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<sup>166</sup> Yusuf Ali translation of the Qur'an.

<sup>167</sup> Wadad Kadi, "Caliph" in *EQ*, Volume I, 277.

<sup>168</sup> Kadi, "Caliph," 277.

<sup>169</sup> Kadi, "Caliph," 277.

<sup>170</sup> Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 1986), 11,16.

the earth.<sup>171</sup> Environmental stewardship is an implicit part of this responsibility. In Q. 2:31 God gave Adam the power of naming, which in turn gave him dominion over the things that he named. “In the Islamic interpretation, it meant the names of the Angels, all the species of animals, the sky, the earth, ocean and the seas, and their characteristics and what they do and their usefulness to humanity in religious and secular pursuits.”<sup>172</sup> This includes angels, who cannot name. In Q. 2:31-Q.2:33, God instructed Adam to tell the angels their names and natures. This amplified the dominion that Adam had over the angels, as angels do not have the power to name. The power to name gave Adam knowledge over hidden things (God’s province), *al-ghaib*, “the unseen.”

After Adam had displayed the knowledge which Allah had granted him, the angels were ordered to prostrate themselves before him. This they did. The prostration of the angels to the first human illustrates the dignity which humankind possesses, even though they corrupt earth and shed blood. Humankind was granted a position above the angels, and was given the secret of knowledge and an independent will which permits them to chose their own way. The duality of our nature – the ability to pave our own way together with the duty of viceregency – is the reason for our dignity.<sup>173</sup>

Not all of the angels accepted Adam’s exalted status. In Q. 2:35, Iblis refused to bow down to Adam.

The function of an angel is always a form of servitude, ranging from praising God and singing to acting as God’s messenger. Angels “are messengers, punishers, couriers, helpers: they act only in accordance with God’s will, and function as His instruments.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Mawil Y. Izzi Dien, “Islamic Ethics and the Environment” in *Islam and Ecology*, Fazlun Khalid and Joanne O’Brien, Eds. (London: Cassell Publishers Limited, 1992), 28.

<sup>172</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 20.

<sup>173</sup> Al-Hafiz B.A. Masri, “Islam and Ecology” in *Islam and Ecology*, 20.

<sup>174</sup> Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*, 27.

When Iblis chose not to bow, according to traditional mainstream exegesis, he violated his role as a servant of God. The basic *Sunni* interpretation of the expulsion of Iblis is that when God ordered the angels to bow down in worship (*sujud*)<sup>175</sup> before Adam, Iblis refused to prostrate because of his pride.<sup>176</sup> This refusal reflects the socio-cultural context in which the Qur'an was revealed. "The Qur'an attests that prostration met with strong opposition among Arabs (Q. 25:60; cf. 68:42-3) and that pride (q.v.) was the cause of this opposition (Q. 7:206; 16:49; 32:15)."<sup>177</sup> Proud Iblis, like the *Jahiliyya* Arabs, refused to prostrate, and because of his haughtiness, he was expelled.

Verily We created you and gave you form and shape,  
and ordered the angels to bow  
before Adam in homage;  
and they all owed but Iblis  
who was not among those who bowed.  
"What prevented you" (said God),  
"from bowing (before Adam) at My bidding?"  
"I am better than him," said he.  
You created me from fire, and him from clay."  
So God said: "Descend.  
You have no right to be insolent here.  
Go, and away; you are one of the damned."  
"Grant me respite," said he,  
"till the raising of the dead."  
And God said "You have the respite."  
"Since You led me into error," said Iblis,  
"I shall lie in wait for them along Your straight path.  
And I shall come upon them  
from the front and behind, right and left;  
and You would not find among them many  
who would give thanks."  
"Begone," said (God), "contemptible and rejected!  
As for those who follow you,  
I will fill up Hell with all of you." (Q.7.11-18)

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<sup>175</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, bowing, or *sujud*, is the ultimate form of worshipful submission and prayer.

<sup>176</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 91.

<sup>177</sup> Tottoli, "Bowling and Prostration," 254.



Iblis was thrown off God's straight path for his disobedience, and therefore is no longer one who submits to God, the definition of a "Muslim." The straight path referenced in the verse resonates with Islamic motifs concerning the Day of Resurrection. There is a bridge over hell that people must cross in order to get to paradise.<sup>178</sup> The Unrighteous will be unable to cross the bridge, and will fall off and into hell just as Iblis did. The bridge over hell is the last part of the straight path that leads to God.

The traditional *Sunni* reading of the expulsion of Iblis is that he refused to bow because he was created from fire, a refined and superior substance considered superior to Adam who was made of gross clay (Q. 7:11-13).<sup>179</sup> The less material something is, the "higher" it is; the clay-formed body is the lower part of a person's dual mind/body nature. The spirit that God blew into human beings when He created them is higher than the matter it animates.<sup>180</sup> Fire also has other associations. In Q 20:10-12, God manifests as a burning bush before the prophet Musa (Moses). In both instances, fire is a powerful element that can manifest the divine will, be it for communication or for torment (hellfire). Fire "signifies both danger and security."<sup>181</sup> Rushdie explores the relationship between human and angelic natures through his character Gibreel Farishta.

The human condition, but what of the angelic? Halfway between Allahgod and homosap, did they ever doubt? They did: challenging God's will one day they hid muttering beneath the Throne, daring to ask forbidden things: antiquations. Is it right that. Could it not be argued. Freedom, the old antiquet. He calmed them down, naturally, employing management skills a la god. Flattered them: You will be the instruments of my will on earth, the salvationdamnation of man, all the

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<sup>178</sup> Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (United States: State University of New York Press, 1981), 9.

<sup>179</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 27.

<sup>180</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 27.

<sup>181</sup> Netton, "Nature as Signs," 529.

usual etcetera. And hey presto, end of protest, on with the halos,<sup>182</sup> back to work. Angels are easily pacified; turn them into instruments and they'll play your harpy tune. Human beings are tougher nuts, can doubt anything, even the evidence of their own eyes. Of behind-their-own eyes. Of what, as they sink heavy-lidded, transpires behind their closed peepers...angels, they don't have much in the way of a will. To will is to disagree; not to submit; to dissent.<sup>183</sup>

Humans have the ability to make moral choices, which renders them superior to angels who do not have the ability to make moral choices. According to al-Baydawi (d. 1291 CE), a renowned *Sunni* Qur'anic commentator, angels are simply unable to rebel or disobey.<sup>184</sup> Angels can question God without the risk of falling into unbelief due to their lack of a will. Humans, however, risk falling into doubt and becoming *kafir* if they question God. Here, Farishta's interpretation of the angelic and human natures is similar to that of al-Baydawi. This view is reinforced by Q. 66:6, which states plainly that angels never disobey God's command. The superiority of humanity over angels infuriated Gibreel Farishta, much like it did Iblis. Gibreel Farishta explores this sense of superiority during one of his psychotic-angelic episode.

How astonishing, then, that of all the drivers streaming along the embankment – it was, after all, rush-hour – No one should so much as look in his direction, or acknowledge him! This was in truth a people who had forgotten how to see. And because the relationship between men and angels is an ambiguous one – in which the angels, or mala'ikah, are both the controllers of nature<sup>185</sup> and the intermediaries between the Deity and the human race; but at the same time, as the Quran clearly states, *we said unto the angels, be submissive unto Adam,*

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<sup>182</sup> Harps and halos are characteristic of angels in Christianity, but not of angels in Islam.

<sup>183</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 92-93.

<sup>184</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 27. There is an extensive amount of *Sunni tafsir* of the nature of angels, much of which has been explored in Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan*, 15-20.

<sup>185</sup> Rushdie is conflating angels and jinn in this passage. Jinn are elemental spirits. According to Q. 38:36 and Q. 45:13, human beings have power over nature. King Solomon was given a mastery of material power through the jinn by God. Ibn al-Arabi. *The Bezels of Wisdom*. Austin, R.W.J., trans. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 195.

the point being to symbolize man's ability to master, through knowledge, the forces of nature which the angels represented – there really wasn't much that the ignored and infuriated malak Gibreel could do about it. Archangels could only speak when men chose to listen. What a bunch! Hadn't he warned the Over-Entity at the very beginning about this crew of criminals and evildoers? 'Wilt thou place in the earth such as make mischief in it and shed blood?' he had asked, and the Being, as usual, replied only that he knew better. Well, there they were, the masters of the earth, canned like tuna on wheels and blind as bats, their heads full of mischief and their newspapers of blood.<sup>186</sup>

Gibreel not only reflected on the seeming unfairness of the superiority of humans over angels, but also pointed out the complexity of the role of angels. They are instructed to be submissive to Adam, the viceregent of God on earth, but also must act as intermediaries between God and humans. In one role, they are higher than humanity, and in another role, they are lowlier. These roles can be in conflict with one another. Rushdie refers to Farishta as a *malak*, the Arabic word for angel.<sup>187</sup> Clearly, then, Farishta was an angel, but as previously discussed, angels by nature are capable of questioning but incapable of disobedience, whereas humans can do both. Farishta styled as an angel should be incapable of such disobedience. However, like Iblis, he was in contradiction with himself. His angelic side was incapable of disobedience, but his human side was consciously disobedient. He is similar to Iblis, who was of an angelic nature until he doubted God's will. Both Iblis and Farishta straddle these two natures.

The following passage borrows Christian theological constructs of the fall of Adam and Eve. Some of the language resonates with the Islamic concepts of submission and association. Rushdie uses two approaches that are interwoven.

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<sup>186</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 336.

<sup>187</sup> Kassim, "Nothing can be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels," 646.

The fall of angels, Gibreel reflected, was not the same kettle as the Tumble of Woman and Man. In the case of human persons, the issue had been morality. Of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they shouldst not eat, and ate. Woman first, and at her suggestion man, acquired the verboten ethical standards, tastily apple-flavored: the serpent brought them a value system.<sup>188</sup> Enabling them, among other things, to judge the Deity itself, making possible in good time all the awkward inquiries: why evil? Why suffering? Why death? – So, out they went. It didn't want Its pretty creatures getting above their station. . . . Whereas the angels' crash was a simple matter of power: a straightforward piece of celestial police work, punishment for rebellion, good and tough 'pour encourager les autres',<sup>189</sup> – Then how unconfident of Itself this Deity was, Who didn't want Its finest creations to know right from wrong; and who reigned by terror, insisting upon the unqualified submission of even Its closest associates,<sup>190</sup> packing off all dissidents to Its blazing Siberias, the gulag-infernos of Hell...he checked himself. These were satanic thoughts, put into his head by Iblis-Beelzebub-Shaitan.<sup>191</sup>

The passage from Farishta's waking delirium implies that when humans question God, they come to judge God. However, while angels can question God, they have neither the option nor the ability to judge God. This entire episode is a parallel to that of the reception and subsequent abrogation of the satanic verses as discussed in chapter one. Farishta caught himself having thoughts that were brought to him by Shaitan. In the satanic verses episode in the *Sira*, the Prophet had the same realization after he announced to the Bedouin tribes that they could continue to ask the triple goddess for

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<sup>188</sup> The Qur'an does not specify that Eve took of the fruit first, nor does Islamic tradition. However, given the context of the passage, Rushdie is likely elaborating upon Christian sources rather than Islamic sources on these motifs.

<sup>189</sup> Translated from the French, this means "for the encouragement of others," i.e., to encourage others to avoid the same fate.

<sup>190</sup> The notion that God could have "associates" plays on the Islamic idea of *shirk*, or associating God with anything else. An example of this would be asking the triple-goddess for intercession.

<sup>191</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 332.

intercession. After Muhammad made the announcement, he realized that he had been tricked by Shaitan, who had cast the satanic verses into his mouth.<sup>192</sup>

Farishta doubted the will of God; he found God's will incomprehensible and unfair. Farishta blatantly questioned whether or not God was justified in tossing Iblis out of heaven for refusing to prostrate before Adam. Was Iblis' expulsion from paradise the result of disobedience? How can the nature of Iblis be reconciled in the paradox if he is an angel and yet has disobeyed God?

In the Qur'an, there is one verse in which Iblis is not referred to as an angel, but rather as a *jinn*,<sup>193</sup> a lesser kind of ethereal spirit. *Jinn* are different from and inferior to angels, although there can be some overlap in their function and abilities, particularly their interaction and mediation in the human realm.

When We said to the angels:  
"Bow before Adam in adoration,"  
they all bowed but Iblis.  
He was one of the jinns and rebelled against his Lord's  
command. (Q. 18:50)

Iblis' ambivalent nature has been explored in great detail by al-Tabarsi, a twelfth century *Shi'i* exegete of the Qur'an.<sup>194</sup> Al-Tabarsi provided four points of proof that Iblis is of the *jinn*, and four counterpoints that Iblis is an angel. For example, Iblis is made of fire as *jinn* are, but angels are made of light or wind.<sup>195</sup> However, al-Tabarsi undercut

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<sup>192</sup> Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 165.

<sup>193</sup> "*Jinn*: A category of created beings believed to possess powers for evil and good. Although their existence is never doubted, the jinn (Eng. 'genie') are presented in the Qur'an as figures whose effective role has been considerably curtailed in comparison to that accorded to them by various forms of pre-Islamic religion." Jacqueline Chabbi, "Jinn" in *EQ*, Volume III, 43

<sup>194</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 8.

<sup>195</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 28.

such distinctions by bridging the categories of fire and light.<sup>196</sup> Hayes' work also deals extensively with angel/*jinn* issue.<sup>197</sup>

What are the consequences of categorizing Iblis not as a fallen angel but as a *jinn*?

Rushdie provided one answer, as pondered by Gibreel Farishta.

This Shaitan was no fallen angel. - Forget those son-of-the-morning fictions; this was no good boy gone bad, but pure evil. Truth was, he wasn't an angel at all! - 'He was of the djinn, so he transgressed.' - Quran 18:50, there it was as plain as the day. - How much more straightforward this version was! How much more practical, down-to-earth, comprehensible! - Iblis/Shaitan standing for all the darkness, Gibreel for the light. - Out, out with these sentimentalities: *joining, locking together, love*. Seek and destroy; that was all.<sup>198</sup>

Gibreel Farishta could not understand why God would create an angel who would violate his own nature only to be condemned for disobedience. Why would God create such an angel in the first place? Farishta found it much easier to reconcile the nature of God if Iblis was of the *jinn*.

How right he'd been, for instance, to banish those Satanico-Biblical doubts of his, - those concerning God's unwillingness to permit dissent among his lieutenants, - for as Iblis/Shaitan was no angel, so there had been no angelic dissidents for the Divinity to repress; - and those concerning forbidden fruit, and God's supposed denial of moral choice to his creations; - for nowhere in the entire Recitation was that Tree called (as the bible had it) the root of the knowledge of good and evil. *It was simply a different Tree!* Shaitan, tempting the Edenic couple, called it only 'the Tree of Immortality' - and as he was a liar, so the truth (discovered by inversion) was that the banned fruit (apples were not specified) hung upon the Death-Tree, no less, the slayer of men's souls.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 29.

<sup>197</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 103.

<sup>198</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 353.

<sup>199</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 354.

If Iblis is a *jinn*, then there are no “angelic dissidents.” God did not create an angel, an entity without free will, with the foreknowledge that he would be banished. Farishta wrestled with Iblis’ identity at the end of the novel. What appears to be his conclusion, that Iblis is of the *jinn*, is not shared by any branch of the larger Islamic tradition.

In Islam, there is yet another way to reconcile the nature of Iblis. His paradoxical situation could be understood as his unique form of *greater jihad*. The *greater jihad* demands that all Muslims, regardless of their age, gender, or condition, meet life’s internal challenges of performing the good and avoiding evil. This begs the question: Is Iblis a Muslim? What, then, might be Iblis’ *greater jihad*? What are his internal struggles to perform the good and avoid evil? Iblis is challenged with the struggle to obey God’s commands, to submit to God’s commands, which may be the simplest definition of what it is to be a Muslim. Submission to God requires a Muslim to accept suffering, deprivation, burdens, and helplessness while simultaneously understanding the value of these experiences. Iblis struggles to endure the pain of his separation from God.

The Sufi *tafsir* on the paradoxical struggle of Iblis centers on his apparent disobedience to God’s second command (to bow before Adam), in order to remain faithful to God’s first command to bow to (*sujud*) or worship only God. According to al-Hallaj (d. 922 CE), a famous Baghdad mystic,<sup>200</sup> Iblis is a martyr for God.

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<sup>200</sup> Al-Hallaj was put to death by the caliph for the apparent heresy of making theopathic statements which are the result of the aforementioned unitive experience. Statements such as “I am the Truth!” by al-Hallaj and “Glory be to Me!” by Abu Yazid al-Bistami, while resulting from the Sufi’s ecstatic union with God, appear heretical to jurists, falling into *hulaliyya*, or incarnationism. Such theopathic claims of human divinity contravene Islam’s absolute divine unity, or *tawhid*. Sufis as perceived by jurists parallel the experience of Iblis in that extreme fidelity appeared to be infidelity. For more on this topic, see Carl W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985). For Shi’i Islam, the unitive experience of the *Imams* was labeled as infidelity by jurists.

He was told, 'Do you not bow, O despicable creature?' He replied, 'You say "despicable creature" but I read in a book of evident truths what will come to pass for me, O Powerful, Steadfast One! How could I humble myself before him? You created me from fire and You created him from clay; they are opposites that will never accord. I am older in service, more advanced in virtue, more skilled in knowledge, and more perfect in the way I lead my life.' God said to him, 'The choice is Mine, not yours.' He replied, 'All choices, mine included, belong to You! You have already chosen for me, O Creator.'<sup>201</sup> If you have prevented my bowing to him, You are Preventer. If I have sinned in speech, You do not forsake me, for You are the All-Hearing. If You willed that I bow to him, I would have been the obedient one. I know of no one among the Gnostics who knows You better than me!<sup>202</sup>

Ahmad al-Ghazali<sup>203</sup> also believed that Iblis was a martyr for God. "Ahmad al-Ghazali had great sympathy for Iblis because he believed Iblis' martyrdom was a martyrdom of love; but his martyrdom will only last a while because, for Ahmad al-Ghazali, Iblis is holy."<sup>204</sup>

Is Iblis' *jihad* between obedience and disobedience to God's command? Or, is it his *jihad* to accept the will of God without resentment and accept the opprobrium of others without resentment who do not understand his true obedience? In neither case is Iblis evil; he is one of God's creatures doing God's work. God created Iblis knowing that he would disobey his command to bow to Adam, and it is the job of Iblis to endure God's absence.<sup>205</sup> If all choices belong to God as the above quote by al-Hallaj suggests, than it is impossible for Iblis to disobey God's will. Was it fair then for God to throw Iblis out of

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<sup>201</sup> God predetermines all things, but left human free will intact. Free will is not synonymous with freedom per se, but this does not eliminate the human moral responsibility of choice-making. Here, Iblis participates in this process just as humans do. His choice is predetermined by God even though Iblis also made the choice not to bow.

<sup>202</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 127, quoting from al-Hallaj, *Tawasin*, 52-53 #27-28.

<sup>203</sup> Hayes notes that Ahmad al-Ghazali is "the brother of the renowned and pre-eminent Muslim scholar, theologian, jurist, and mystic, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali." Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 163.

<sup>204</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 163.

<sup>205</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan.*, 173.



heaven for his apparent disobedience? In order to answer that question, it is important to understand why Iblis did not bow. There is the traditional reading, which was previously discussed: Iblis felt that he was created from a superior substance. However, a deeper probe into the plight of Iblis in Sufi Islam reveals deeper issues with regard to why Iblis did what he did. Some readings focus on the fact that Iblis did not bow to Adam because God's command to do so contradicted His will. Awn summarizes Sufi thought on the subject of *irada* (God's will) and *amr* (Allah's command) and the chasm between the two:

There is no denying that in the case of Iblis there seems to be a conflict between God's Will (*irada*) and His actual, concrete command (*amr*). What is debatable, however, is the course of action one should pursue in the face of such a paradox. Iblis chose *irada* and incurred the fatal consequences....But how does one obey a command that contradicts the will of God?<sup>206</sup>

Iblis thus found himself in a seemingly impossible situation when he was told to bow to Adam. Rather than Iblis' disobedience being an issue of pride or ego, it is an issue of monotheism.

One of the central myths of Islam is the story of why Satan was thrown out of heaven: Satan refused to bow to Adam because he styled himself a strict monotheist. He was thrown out of heaven for his pride and his fanatical literalism. Muslims like to point out that human beings are superior to angels because angels have no passion, so there is no moral struggle to overcome desire, and because angels being pure reason possess little doubt, so again no moral struggle nor achievement is possible.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 102.

<sup>207</sup> Fischer, *Debating Muslims*, 430.

Moral struggle for Iblis is to submit to blame and separation in order to serve God and obey His will. Iblis must do God's work and test humanity without hatred or resentment.

Iblis suffers from being denied intimacy with God. For Sufis, the absence of God is the most painful thing that can be experienced. Devotion to God is paramount, and to be denied His presence is pure suffering. However, suffering is not always a negative experience for Sufis. Rather, it is a vital part of the struggle to cultivate intimacy with God. As mentioned in chapter two, suffering is part of a specific process of attaining unity with God, moving from stations of *maqam* (effort) to states of *hal* (grace). These alternating emotional pathways to God swing like a pendulum moving back and forth from “*sukr* (intoxication) and *sahw* (sobriety), *djam*’ or *wahda* (unity) to *tafrika* or *kathra* (separation, plurality), and *nafy* (negation) to *ithbat* (affirmation).”<sup>208</sup> The pendulum can also be understood as moving from *fana* (absorption/annihilation into God) into *baqa* (remaining in the self). When one is in the profoundest meditative state, the mystic realizes that nothing is separate from God. Sufi thinker Ibn al-Arabi’s concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (the Oneness of Being) states that “all distinction, difference, and conflict are but apparent facets of a single and unique reality, the ‘seamless garment’ of Being, whose reality underlies all derivative being and its experience.”<sup>209</sup> *Baqa* then is simply the illusory perception of God’s absence. When one falls out of awareness and oneness with God, God is absent from your mind and heart. In the case of Iblis, his expulsion puts him in a state of *baqa*, which means he has the potential to swing back into *fana*. His apparent

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<sup>208</sup> Rahman, F. *Baka wa-Fana*, 951.

<sup>209</sup> Ibn al-Arabi. *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 25.

infidelity is simply the suffering part of his religious experience that was brought about by his extreme obedience. In this regard, the plight of Iblis evokes sympathy.

Even if one admits culpability on his part for now obeying the command of God, one cannot help but see him also as a tragic victim of noble stature, whose downfall does not blot out completely the strength of his character.<sup>210</sup>

Traditional Sunni theologian al-‘Ashari’s concept of *bila kayf*, or “closing the gates of reasoning,” states that because humans cannot comprehend God’s will, they should not try to do so.<sup>211</sup> However, there is a lively discussion in Sufi and even Shi‘i Islam that tries to understand why God would condemn Iblis to a life of suffering and pain. In Sufi Islam, suffering is not perceived as unfair or cruel. Rather, suffering is a sign of God’s love.

Tribulations and afflictions are a sign that God is near...The more He loves person, the more He will test him, taking away from him every trace of earthly consolation so that the lover has only Him to rely upon. It is small wonder that a hadith about this suffering was very common among the Sufis: “The most afflicted people are the prophets, then the saints, and then so forth.”<sup>212</sup>

As it is in Sufi Islam, suffering is an honorable part of the religious experience in Shi‘i Islam. God afflicts people with suffering according to the strength of their faith; the more loyal to God someone is, the greater their suffering will be.<sup>213</sup> “For the people of God, this world is a world of suffering and sorrow; it is indeed the House of Sorrows.”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*, 103.

<sup>211</sup> *Bila Kayf*, literally translates to “closing the gates of ijtihad (reasoning),” which is accepting that we as humans cannot understand God’s will and should therefore not question it.

<sup>212</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 136.

<sup>213</sup> The Book of Job is an example of this as well.

<sup>214</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Netherlands: Morton Publishers, 1978), 25.

Suffering allows for redemption, serving as a mark of God's chosen people. This is most visible in the veneration of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the seal of the martyrs, and his family. He was chosen by God to be a redemptive martyr for the faith, and remains one of the most honored figures in Shi'i Islam.<sup>215</sup> To remain faithful to God unto death is an honored sacrifice. Like Husayn, Iblis is a servant of God, and is a guide for Muslims to the pathway of redemptive suffering. Iblis guides Muslims by making clear the path of avoiding evil.

Iblis is a tragic hero in Sufi Islam. His plight is one that evokes sympathy given that his destiny is to endure God's absence and be reviled by others. Rather than question God's benevolence, will, or authority, Sufi Islam recognizes Iblis as God's most loyal devotee. It is easy to understand based on the above passages why the suffering of Iblis was of such interest to Sufis. Rather than questioning God's fairness or ignoring the question altogether, Sufis reconciled Iblis' plight based on their understanding of God's nature. This understanding collapses the dichotomy of good and evil as moral categories altogether. All suffering, violence, pain, and chaos in the world are part of the divine plan and part of God Himself; there is no difference between the good and evil of Iblis because God created both.

Good and evil are inseparable for Farishta in his human, angelic, and satanic guises. In *The Satanic Verses*, a textual example of this ambiguity is presented by Rushdie in the first few pages. As Farishta and his companion, Mr. Saladin Chamcha, fall out of the *Bostan 747*, Rushdie writes the following:

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<sup>215</sup> Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 27.

...but for whatever reason, the two men, Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha, condemned to this endless but also angelicdevilish fall, did not become aware of the moment at which the processes of their transmutation began.<sup>216</sup>

The linguistic implications of the statement, when read in context with the rest of the novel, are clear. Here, Rushdie has taken his two protagonists who simultaneously represent “angelic” and “devilish” traits and fused them together by conjoining their names as they plummet to earth. It should be noted that both characters’ attributes are ambiguous in this passage. What is clear is that good and evil are on a continuum, even as they represent two seemingly opposite things. This aligns with the theory of the great Sufi theologian, Ibn al-‘Arabi.

For Ibn al-‘Arabi, good and evil are relative. What appears to be evil to us may actually be good; and what is good according to one standard or situation may be evil in another. Ibn al-‘Arabi, like al-Hallaj, believed that all actions are done in accordance with the Divine Decree, although some actions contradict God’s commands.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 5.

<sup>217</sup> Hayes, *An Ontological Study of Iblis al-Shaytan*, 159.

Like suffering and joy, both good and evil are a part of God's creation.<sup>218</sup> Good and evil for Iblis as for Gibreel Farishta manifest the inability of God's creation to disentangle God's will or decree from His command.

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<sup>218</sup> In contemporary, "orthodox" Islam, evil is God's creation just as everything else is. Iblis is a part of God's plan just as evil is. Evil cannot be a principle in opposition to God because it is God's creation. The same is true for Iblis; the worst that Iblis can be is ambivalent. This conclusion is the result of the Mu'tazilite debate over the createdness of the Qur'an. The Mu'tazilites argued that the Qur'an, God's speech, is one of God's creations and therefore not eternal. The "orthodoxy" disagreed, favoring instead the idea that the Qur'an was eternal and co-existent with God. For the Mu'tazilites, the idea that anything is co-existent with God is *shirk*. The implications of the "orthodox" perspective are that all things are predestined and that humans have no free will in decision making. God predetermines all things. The Mu'tazilites, as they were dubbed by the "orthodoxy," favored the idea that human beings have free will and that the intellect was given to humans by God in order to understand God's will. For more on the *Mihna*, the great persecution of the so-called Mu'tazilites, see J.R. Peters, *God's Created Speech: A study in the speculative theology of the Mu'tazili Qadi l-Qadat Abu l-Hasan 'Abd al-Jabbar bn Ahmad al-Hamadani*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J Brill, 1976).

## Chapter Six: First, You Have to Die: The End of Gibreel Farishta

Like Iblis, Gibreel Farishta constantly suffered. Unlike Iblis, he was unable to properly sustain his role. Whereas Iblis could withstand his *greater jihad*, Farishta was destroyed by it. Farishta's inability to understand God's will and subsequently accept his fate became more apparent as he further detached from reality. The breaking point for Gibreel's sanity mentioned in the previous chapter occurred in a moment of jealous rage. The reason he got onto the *Bostan 747*, the plane that exploded en route to London from Mumbai, was to find his love interest, Alleluia Cone. He met her in the lobby of the Taj Motel as he stuffed his face full of pork and had a three day tryst with her following his meal.

By the time he arrived in London, he had been having his revelatory dreams for several months. The dreams had been triggered by his pork binge shortly before he got on the plane. He had been avoiding sleep for months, leading him into a psychotic state. Sleep deprivation can often lead to insanity. Farishta, now in England, set out looking for his lover. Before he could, however, she found him. He was in a dire state of health when she found him "at her feet, unconscious in the snow, taking her breath away with the impossibility of his being there at all..."<sup>219</sup> They had a passionate reunion, but things soured when it became apparent that Gibreel was an extremely jealous lover. His sleep-deprived paranoia caused him to believe that Alleluia had other lovers or admirers. One night, they fought so badly that Alleluia told him to leave her house. It was at this

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<sup>219</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 301.

moment that Farishta had what can be characterized as a delusional episode/divine visitation.

‘Don’t think I’m coming back,’ he yelled, knowing that his rage was more than sufficient to get him out of the door, waiting for her to begin to calm down, to speak softly, to give him a way of staying. But she shrugged and walked away, and it was then, at that precise moment of his greatest wrath, that the boundaries of the earth broke, he heard a noise like the bursting of a dam, and as the spirits of the world of dreams flooded through the breach into the universe of the quotidian, Gibreel Farishta saw God.<sup>220</sup>

This theophany manifested as a dandruff-ridden, middle-aged balding man with glasses, seated on the bed upon which Gibreel and Alleluia made love. The apparition identified himself to Gibreel as “The Fellow Upstairs.”<sup>221</sup> Gibreel immediately challenged the apparition, asking him if he was not “the Guy from Underneath.”<sup>222</sup> The apparition did not answer right away, but responded with a display of “divine rage,”<sup>223</sup> materializing a storm outside the house.<sup>224</sup>

‘We’re losing patience with you, Gibreel Farishta.<sup>225</sup> You’ve doubted Us just about long enough.’ Gibreel hung his head, blasted by the wrath of God. ‘We are not obliged to explain Our nature to you,’ the dressing-down continued. ‘Whether We be multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridization of such opposites as *Oopar* and *Neechay*,<sup>226</sup> or whether We be pure, stark, extreme, will not be resolved here.’ The disarranged bed upon which his Visitor had rested Its posterior<sup>227</sup> (which, Gibreel now observed, was glowing faintly,<sup>228</sup> like the rest of

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<sup>220</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 318.

<sup>221</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 318.

<sup>222</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 318.

<sup>223</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 319.

<sup>224</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 319.

<sup>225</sup> In the Qur’an, God often speaks in the “We” of divine majesty, and the Bible uses the plural *Elohim* for the same purpose. This speech from the apparition reflects the linguistic character of the divine personae in the Qur’an.

<sup>226</sup> In Hindi, this refers to “up” and “down.”

<sup>227</sup> This is a reference to the encounter between Moses and God in the book of Exodus. Moses sees God, but he only sees the back of Him.

<sup>228</sup> The glow here is the same as the glow noted in chapter two.



the Person) was granted a highly disapproving glance. ‘The point is, there will be no more dilly-dallying. You wanted clear signs of Our existence? We sent Revelation to fill your dreams: in which not only Our nature, but yours also, was clarified. But you fought against it, struggling against the very sleep in which We were awakening you. Your fear of the truth has finally obliged Us to expose Ourselves, at some personal inconvenience, in this woman’s residence at an advanced hour of the night. It is time, now, to shape up. Did We pluck you from the skies so that you could boff and spat with some (no doubt remarkable) flatfoot blonde? There’s work to be done!’<sup>229</sup>

Gibreel, in response to the apparition’s call for “work to be done” said, “I am ready.”<sup>230</sup> At this point, he was “certain...of his archangelic status.”<sup>231</sup> However, Farishta’s lover heard him speaking to what appeared to her as thin air, which convinced her that he was delusional. He left Alleluia’s home in spite of her protests and began to wander the streets of London performing *da’wa*, his mission to bring the God’s message as he understands it to others.<sup>232</sup> Gibreel neither ate nor slept for days at a time, neglecting his body and health and focusing only on his spiritual work. His experience parallels a Sufi ascetic, who deprives him/herself of food and sleep in order to serve God. Everywhere he went he saw *Shaitan*, and was convinced that his *da’wa* was to eradicate *Shaitan*’s presence from the world. The more he wandered, however, the more sympathetic to *Shaitan* he became because humans continued to ignore his angelic mission and went on defying God’s will.

Farishta’s consciousness was permanently transformed from his encounter with the balding visitor from “upstairs.” After Farishta took to the streets, he acquired a new

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<sup>229</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 319. The use of single quotations to indicate direct speech as opposed to double quotations reflects British quotation conventions. CF CMS 11.33.

<sup>230</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 319.

<sup>231</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 320.

<sup>232</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 320.

set of memories and experiences that he attributed to his angelic nature.<sup>233</sup> As he wandered, he was visited by the ghost of Rekha Merchant for a second time, the woman who threw herself out of a window with her children when he left her. The return of her ghost is a reminder of Farishta's failed humanity. Rekha's ghost rejects the notion that he was an angel on a divine mission.

'Archangel my foot. Gibreel janab, you're off your head, take it from me. You played too many winged types for your own good. I wouldn't trust that deity of yours either, if I were you,' she added in a more conspiratorial tone, though Gibreel suspected that her intentions remained satirical. 'He hinted as much himself, fudging the answer to your Oopar-Neechay question like he did. The notion of separation of functions, light verses dark, evil verses good, may be straightforward enough in Islam – *O, children of Adam, let not the Devil seduce you, as he expelled your parents from the garden, pulling off from them their clothing that he might show them their shame* [Q.7:27] – but go back a bit and you see that it's a pretty recent fabrication. Amos, eighth century BC, asks: "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?"<sup>234</sup> Also Jahweh, quoted by the Deutero-Isaiah two hundred years later, remarks: "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things."<sup>235</sup> It isn't until the Book of Chronicles, merely forth century BC, that the word *shaitan* is used to mean a being,<sup>236</sup> and not only an attribute of God.<sup>237</sup>

Rekha points out that the apparition that visited Farishta may not be a benevolent God with good intentions. Rather, she highlights the unity of good and evil in the apparition as in the Hebrew Bible. She then points out that Satan has not always been a part of the monotheistic sacred texts. The divine presence has not always been clearly distinguished

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<sup>233</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 321.

<sup>234</sup> This is from the Book of Amos. Amos of Tekio was an Israelite prophet during the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE who was active in the northern kingdom although he was a Judahite.

<sup>235</sup> This scripture dates ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

<sup>236</sup> In 1 Chronicles 21:1, David made a census of the people. God said to count the people but not for the purposes of taxation or for the draft. David took the census but disobeyed God's command regarding taxes and a draft. Shaitan (Satan) was created in order to explain why David acted in the manner that he did. This text was written after the Babylonian exile which puts it into the Persian period and therefore implies the possibility of Zoroastrian influence.

<sup>237</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 323.

from the demonic. Rekha implied that it is only more recently that evil has been personified as *Shaitan*. Thus evil in the Judaic-Christian-Islamic tradition is a part of God rather than something separately embodied. Understanding evil in this unified way supports the idea that Iblis is not purely evil, but simply the agent whose *greater jihad* of tempting humanity was appointed by God.

According to the Sufi martyr, ‘Ain al-Qudat al-Hamadhani (d. 1131 C.E.), Iblis has a unique duty: to test human beings in order to find out who is worthy of being in the divine presence and who is not.

Iblis was retained to watch over the door to the presence of the Almighty and was told, ‘You are My lover. Be jealous about My threshold and keep strangers out of My presence. And continue to proclaim this: “The Beloved said to me, ‘Sit at My door, do not allow inside anyone who is not in accord with Me. To him who desires Me, say, “Be enraptured!” This state is not suitable for any man unless I find it suitable.’ ”’<sup>238</sup>

The *da’wa* of Iblis as articulated by al-Hamadhani above is strikingly similar to the *da’wa* of Gibreel Farishta, who wanders ceaselessly, attempted to distinguish the moral from immoral, etc. In a daze, Farishta purchased a trumpet,<sup>239</sup> and wandered through the streets:

as if through a dream, because after days of wandering the city without eating or sleeping, with the trumpet named Azrael<sup>240</sup> tucked safely in a

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<sup>238</sup> Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*, 136, citing al-Qudat, *Tamhidat*, p. 228-229, #296.

<sup>239</sup> The sound of the trumpet is the herald of the Final Judgment. The angel Israfil will “sound the horn signaling the arrival of the Hour and will read from the guarded tablet that which is written concerning the lives of all who will then be brought to judgment.” Smith, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 71. There are several verses in the Qur’an that mention the trumpet: Q. 6:73, 23:101, 39:68, 69:13, and 74:8.

<sup>240</sup> The name of the trumpet is significant. Azrael is a colloquial spelling of Izra’il, the angel of death in Islam. Izra’il is not mentioned in the Qur’an by name, but simply as *Malak al-Maut*, Angel of Death. Izra’il

pocket of his greatcoat, he no longer recognizes the distinction between the waking and dreaming states...Gibreel ... walks down the streets of London, trying to understand the will of God. Is he to be the agent of God's wrath?<sup>241</sup> Or of his love? Is he vengeance or forgiveness? Should the fatal trumpet remain in his pocket, or should he take it out and blow?"<sup>242</sup>

Farishta, whose angelic personae shifted as he wandered the streets, assumed the role of *Malak al-Maut*, Angel of Death, on a mission to purge evil from the world.<sup>243</sup> Gibreel Farishta believed that if he blew the trumpet at people who were transgressing that they would experience God's wrath. The above passage must be understood within the context of the eschatological Islamic narrative of the Last Judgment. The Last Judgment refers specifically to "God's final assessment of humankind."<sup>244</sup> God will essentially destroy all of creation: "The trumpet (al-sur) will blow and all creatures including the angels will die except whom god wills. Then, it shall be blown again."<sup>245</sup> The narrative of the events of the Last Judgment that has been constructed based on the Qur'an by scholars and theologians has several sections:

1. the signs of the Hour [*sa'a*] and events heralding the imminent end of the world;
2. the soundings of the trumpet, the resurrection [*qiyama*], and the gathering together of all living beings [*hashr*];
3. the reckoning [*hisab*];

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is mentioned by name in *tafsir* by al-Qazwini Kassim, "Nothing can be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels," 650. Islamic angelology is elaborated through *Hadith*, *Sira*, *Qisas al-Ambiyas*, and *Tafsir* literature.

<sup>241</sup> The prospect of being the agent of God's wrath is daunting. To be an agent of death and destruction would certainly be challenging for a human being such as Gibreel to accept, even in his angelic fugue state.

<sup>242</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 457.

<sup>243</sup> Rushdie is also giving a nod here to Amitabh Bachchan. In 1997, Bachchan starred in his "comeback" film, *Mrityudaata* (Angel of Death) in 1997. Ganti, *Bollywood*, 121. The film, like Farishta's *da'wa*, was a failure.

<sup>244</sup> Isaac Hasson, "Last Judgment," *EQ*, Volume III, 136.

<sup>245</sup> Hasson, "Last Judgment," 139.

4. the crossing of the bridge [sirat], the possibility of intercession [*shafa'a*], and preparation for the final consignment.<sup>246</sup>

The second part of the narrative, the sounding of the trumpet, is where Farishta's perceived angelic duty occurred. Like Iblis, Farishta understood his duty to help God separate the wicked from the righteous at Judgment Day. Unlike Iblis, however, Farishta did not in the end have the strength to fulfill his assigned role. The role of the exterminating angel is not an easy role to assume. He continued to mentally deteriorate until the personae of the Angel of Death consumed him and finally he killed himself, his lover, and a friend in a fit of madness and jealousy. In his delusional guise as the exterminating angel, he thought he was fulfilling God's will.

The novel comes full circle to its own and Rushdie's return to the satanic verses. Here they refer to doggerel rhymes that Farishta's co-protagonist, Saladin Chamcha, anonymously recited to Farishta over the telephone. Chamcha was a close friend of Farishta, and Farishta often confided in Chamcha intimate details concerning his relationship with Alleluia. With this information, Chamcha knew exactly how to torment the jealousy-prone Farishta. Chamcha's motivations were ambiguous, but annoyance at Farishta, revenge, and perhaps an attraction to Alleluia were all contributing factors.

Farishta was unaware that Chamcha was the individual making all of the calls. The "Man of Thousand Voices,"<sup>247</sup> taunted Farishta in a series of obscene crank calls about Alleluia Cone.

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<sup>246</sup> Smith, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 65.

<sup>247</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 443.

*Roses are red, violets are blue,  
Sugar never tasted as sweet as you  
Pass it on....*

*When she's down at Waterloo<sup>248</sup>  
She don't wear no yes she do  
When she's up at Leicester Square  
She don't wear no underwear....*

*Violets are blue, roses are red,  
I've got her right here in my bed.<sup>249</sup>*

Rushdie's novelistic rendition of the satanic verses in the form of ugly little obscenities parallels the historical episode of the satanic verses. That the Prophet could make such a mistake as he did in the *Sura* narrative of the satanic verses is a terrible breach of trust between the *Umma* and its chief guide. If he revealed false verses, then he has gone astray from the straight path (Q 1:7) and neither his judgment nor his example can be trusted. The relationship between Alleluia and Gibreel is also destroyed by a lack of trust. Both breaches result in disillusionment in the most intimate/profound of human relationships relationship.

Farishta in his paranoid psychosis became convinced of the truth of these taunting statements. The crank calls resulted in Gibreel completely mistrusting his lover; he did not know how the crank caller(s) seemed to know about Alleluia. Alleluia, frustrated by Gibreel's unending and mad jealousy, broke off the relationship between them permanently. They do not see one another again until they are brought together by a mutual friend, S.S. Sisodia, a film producer.

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<sup>248</sup> It is of note that here, prostitutes walk the bridge trolling for customers.

<sup>249</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 445-446.

Farishta's death is charged with symbolism. In a delusional state of jealous rage, Farishta murdered Sisodia by shooting him through the heart, and Alleluia by forcing her off of the top of a skyscraper. He fled the scene of the murders, later showing up at Saladin Chamcha's home. Chamcha found Farishta in his study, clad in dirty clothes and holding a lamp in his hands.

'You look awful,' Salahuddin<sup>250</sup> ventured, eliciting from the other man a distant, cynical, unfamiliar smile. 'Sit down and shut up Spoono,'<sup>251</sup> Gibreel Farishta said. 'I'm here to tell you a story.'  
*It was you, then,* Salahuddin understood. *You really did it: you murdered them both.* But Gibreel had closed his eyes, put his fingertips together and embarked upon his story....<sup>252</sup>

Farishta here invoked the role of the storyteller as he prepared to tell Chamcha his recollection of events concerning the double murder. The fashion in which the scene is set-up invokes the imagery of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (1001 Arabian Nights), given the presence of the lamp, the promise of a narrative, and the implicit threat of death.<sup>253</sup> He told Chamcha his tale from his delusional perspective.

Sisodia lecher from somewhere I knew what they were up  
to  
laughing at me in my own home something like that  
I like butter I like toast  
Verses Spoono who do you think makes such damn things  
up  
So I called down the wrath of God I pointed my finger I  
shot him in the heart<sup>254</sup>

<sup>250</sup> "Saladin" is the Western spelling of "Salahuddin." Saladin Chamcha's birth name is in fact Salahuddin Chamchawalla, but he westernized his name until the end of the novel when he "returned to his Indian roots" at the end of the novel.

<sup>251</sup> To repeat, Spoono is one of Chamcha's nicknames. It is a play on his name, which can also mean "spoon" in Urdu.

<sup>252</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 543.

<sup>253</sup> Shaharazad had to tell the narratives every night in order to live to the next.

<sup>254</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 544-545. The author spaced the words in such a way as to indicate Gibreel's delusional state.

His “finger” was in fact a gun, the same gun he used to force Alleluia to the roof of his skyscraper. He murdered Alleluia, claiming that the ghost of Rekha Merchant had made him do it. Alleluia, like Rekha, fell to her death, but clearly by Farishta’s hand. As Farishta told Chamcha about his plight, the police, who had been notified by Chamcha’s house staff, arrived to take him away. Before they could, however, Farishta opened the lamp and withdrew a gun from inside of it. Again, the imagery is evocative of *Alf Layla wa-Layla*.<sup>255</sup>

*He’s hidden a gun inside*, Salahuddin realized. ‘Watch out,’ he shouted. ‘There’s an armed man in here.’ The knocking stopped, and now Gibreel rubbed his hand along the side of the magic lamp: once, twice, thrice.

The revolver jumped up, into his other hand. *A fearsome jinn of monstrous stature appeared*, Salahuddin remembered. ‘*What is your wish? I am the slave of he who holds the lamp.*’ What a limiting thing is a weapon, Salahuddin thought...how few the choices were, now that Gibreel was the *armed man* and he, the *unarmed*; how the universe had shrunk! The true djinns of old<sup>256</sup> had the power to open the gates of the Infinite, to make all things possible, to render all wonders capable of being attained; how banal, in comparison, was this modern spook, this degraded descendant of mighty ancestors, this feeble slave of a twentieth-century lamp.<sup>257</sup>

The above passage is a comment about modernity. Rather than a *jinn*, the lamp yields a gun to its beholder as the most powerful agent of change. Much like the relationship between a *jinn* and the human who rubs his lamp, the power dynamic between the gun and its wielder is ambiguous. With a *jinn*, the holder of the lamp has infinite power.

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<sup>255</sup> The well-known story “Alaeddin; Or, The Wonderful Lamp” from *Alf Layla wa-Layla* is evoked here. Alaeddin finds a lamp that, when rubbed, produces a *jinn* who is the “Slave to whoso holdeth the Lamp” and grants wishes. Richard F. Burton, *The Arabian Nights Entertainments or The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night: A Selection of the Most Famous and Representative of these Tales from the Plain and Literal Translation* (United States: Random House, 1959), 669.

<sup>256</sup> “Although their existence is never doubted, the jinn (Eng. ‘genie’) are presented in the Qur’an as figures whose effective role has been considerably curtailed in comparison to that accorded to them by various forms of pre-Islamic religion.” Jacqueline Chabbi, “Jinn” in *EQ*, Volume III, 43

<sup>257</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 546.



Without the *jinn*, the holder of the lamp is powerless. The holder of the lamp is just as much a slave to the *jinn* as the *jinn* is to the holder. The same holds true for the modern equivalent. With a gun, the modern human is all-powerful. Without a gun, the modern human is defenseless. Magic in modernity, then, is little more than a gun. The latter is “banal in comparison” for sure.

Gibreel at this point was a broken man. He had no career, no lover, was wanted for a double murder, and was still tormented by dreams that were like a sickness he could never escape. Despair led him to his final act of unbelief.

‘I told you a long time back,’ Gibreel Farishta quietly said, ‘that if I thought the sickness would never leave me, that it would always return, I would not be able to bear up to it.’ Then, very quickly, before Salahuddin could move a finger, Gibreel put the barrel of the gun into his own mouth; and pulled the trigger; and was free.<sup>258</sup>

There are many similarities between Gibreel Farishta and Iblis, but it is here that the similarities end. Gibreel took his life, unable to “bear up” to his *greater jihad*, driven insane by the task God gave him. Having abandoned God, he had no one to call on for aid or strength. Iblis, however, remained alert and attentive, always ready to tempt humanity off of the straight path, always ready to separate the moral from the immoral, always submitting to and serving God.

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<sup>258</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 546.

## Conclusion

*Salman Rushdie* employs the novel's central theme of the satanic verses in multiple and overlapping ways throughout the novel. The occasion of the greatest Islamic resonance is, of course, the one recounted by the *Sira* of Ibn Ishaq/Ibn Hisham (written 150 years after the Prophet's death) where Muhammad is credited with accepting worship of the triple goddess along with Islam's one God as true revelation, a serious breach of Islam's absolute monotheistic requirement of believers. Because the novel suggests that the Prophet Muhammad may not be sinless due to this one temporary dilution of *Tawhid* with the goddesses, it is subversive in its character. For the Sunni community, the Prophet serves as a guide to believers with regard to how to live their lives. This is clear in the *hadith*: "The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, only [orders people] to complete that in which there was obedience to Allah and to abandon that in which there was disobedience to Allah."<sup>259</sup> The Prophet's example, then, is always in obedience with God's will. His *'Isma*, or sinlessness, was codified long after his death in order to explain the trustworthiness of character, judgment, and example.

Rushdie runs with the possibility that the Prophet made a huge mistake: the incident of the satanic verses. Drawing upon this incident, Rushdie constructs a textual reality in which the Prophet Muhammad is a false Prophet. Gibreel Farishta, whom Rushdie casts as this false Prophet, is the key character in the landscape of the novel. He is likeable but self-centered and devoid of true substance. He fancies himself to be

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<sup>259</sup> Malik, *al-Muwatta*, Book 22, Number 22.4.6.

divinely inspired, but everyone around him thinks he is insane, as did Muhammad's peers in Mecca. He is a god among humans because of his cinematic popularity and ubiquitous presence, but the cinema is itself illusory. Gibreel is cast as an angel from the start of the novel, but is never fully angelic because of his physical and mental contamination.

Just as Rushdie inverts the Prophet, Sufi Islam inverts Iblis. The "traditional" understanding of Iblis is that he is evil, but this is not the Sufi understanding of Iblis. Iblis is decidedly ambiguous in his nature. Iblis' status rests at the heart of a heated debate within Islam about the nature of good and evil, the source of evil, and the justice of God. If God created all things, then God created Iblis. If Iblis disobeyed, it is because God willed it. Iblis obeyed God's command to worship only Him by disobeying God's command to bow to Adam, thereby fulfilling God's will. This renders Iblis neither disobedient nor evil, but God's most loyal servant. The "traditional" idea of Iblis as wholly evil is turned on its head. Although he whispers temptations to human beings and tries to lure them off of the straight path, he is only doing what God willed. Sufi Islam explored this idea in the same way that Rushdie explored the idea of the Prophet's sinlessness. Hence Iblis and Gibreel Farishta have many things in common. The suicide of Gibreel Farishta, however, is more tragic than the fate of Sufi Islam's tragic hero, Iblis. Iblis fulfills his *greater jihad* whereas Farishta failed.

The novel comes to a close very shortly after Gibreel Farishta kills himself. In the last few paragraphs, Rushdie as novelist and his fictional voices come together. Co-protagonist Saladin Chamcha reflects on the question of faith in the post-modern world.

He stood at the window of his childhood and looked out at the Arabian Sea. The moon was almost full; moonlight, stretching from the rocks at Scandal Point out to the far horizon, created the illusion of a silver pathway, like a parting in the water's shining hair, like a road to miraculous lands. He shook his head. He could no longer believe in fairy-tales. Childhood was over, and the view from this window was no more than an old and sentimental echo. To the devil with it! Let the bulldozers come. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born.<sup>260</sup>

This passage which is the next to the last paragraph of the novel allows Rushdie to come from behind his character. Rushdie speaks here as a post-colonial and post-modern Muslim. The view of the Arabian Sea separating yet linking the Indian Subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula that Chamcha sees from the “window of his childhood” looks out toward Mecca, the *Ka'aba* at its heart. Mecca is the *axis mundi* of Islam, the literal axis linking heaven and earth for Muslims. The “silver pathway” is resonant with the straight path (Q 1:7) of Islam. The illusory nature of the “silver pathway” indicates that the straight path is no longer real for the post-modern, post-colonial person, and no longer commands belief or compliance: “he could no longer believe in fairy tales.” The “road to miraculous lands” can be read as a metaphor for the thousand years old path of the pilgrim doing *Hajj* to Mecca. This is a journey that Rushdie as a post-colonial and post-modern thinker can no longer make. For him, the “road to miraculous lands” that the “silver pathway” leads to is no longer a real or viable goal for the post-modern present or future. Religious faith and the trust that it engenders are possible only in childhood, and “childhood was over.” This passage reflects the post-modern perspective that Islam, like all religions, is simply a fairy tale, which from Rushdie's vantage point “from this window” was “no more than an old and sentimental echo,” a legacy from the past which

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<sup>260</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 546-547.

cannot survive into the future. Through his character, Chamcha, the author rejects Islam: “To the devil with it!” In the last line of the novel, Saladin Chamcha “turned away from the view,”<sup>261</sup> leaving Islam behind forever. Rushdie aggressively discards Islam and its traditional culture and worldview for post-modern secularity and plurality. “Let the bulldozers come. If the old refused to die, the new could not be born.” After all, as Gibreel Farishta said at the opening of *The Satanic Verses*, “to be born again...first you have to die.”<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 547.

<sup>262</sup> Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 3.

## Afterward

The majority of the scholarship about Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* has not dealt with the more theologically subtle aspects of the novel. Much of the novel was overshadowed by the controversy it caused when it was first published in the late 1980s. The obvious offenses of the novel, such as the blatant characterization of the Prophet and his wives as a pimp and prostitutes, have been at the center of scholarship. These sections of the novel, rather than the nuanced experiences of Gibreel Farishta and his dreams, were reprinted, distributed, and discussed all over the world. The rest of the scholarship has been apologia defending the literary and intellectual merit of the novel and its author. This paper has deeply explored the more neglected passages of the novel, revealing perhaps a greater and subtler inversion of Islam by Rushdie. A more informed approach to the novel shows that Rushdie's exegesis of Islamic themes in *The Satanic Verses* more profoundly reflects the complex engagement that post-colonial Muslim cultures have with Islam and Islamic civilization in the post-modern world. For "cultural" Muslims, the novel is an accurate portrayal of their relationship with religion: a mythic past relating to cultural and personal "childhood" with no relevance to modern life. For Muslims, the novel strikes at the heart of personal identity and community cohesion of the *umma* by questioning cherished certainties regarding the probity and purity of the Prophet, the exclusively divine origin of the Qur'an, and the unassailable reputation of the People of the House. This is because of the ambivalence of the Prophet's character as shown by the satanic verses episode. Rushdie also undercuts the certitude and authority of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. Perhaps the chasm in perspective between "cultural" Muslims and

devoutly practicing Muslims is why Rushdie did not anticipate the raging controversy that the novel caused.

The three central methodologies I used in writing this thesis include phenomenology, literary analysis, and the exploration of religion in popular culture. Phenomenology is a method of studying religion that seeks to describe and understand religion and religious phenomena in a deductive fashion, thereby creating a platform from which to do comparative analysis. Of phenomenologists of Islam, Henry Corbin is the most notable, writing extensively about Sufi and Shi'i mysticism. This paper has been in part inspired by Corbin's example, describing many themes and manifestations of the religious life of Islam from theological texts (Qur'an and *Hadith*), ritual (*salat*, *hajj*, etc.), and community (the *Umma*).

The intersection of literature and religion focuses on religious themes in prose, poetry, and fiction. Many religions center around texts, such as the Torah in Judaism or the Qur'an in Islam. These texts can be approached as literature just as a contemporary work of fiction is. One might view *The Satanic Verses* as the hagiography of Gibreel Farishta, compiling his religious experiences from the moment of his awakening, through his transmutation, and up to his death. Secondly, the literary analysis of the novel provides social and political as well as religious insight into the author's context as a post-colonial, post-modern, and perhaps even post-religious human being.

“The analysis of popular culture...can provide insights about how religions change and are changed by the cultures that surround them.”<sup>263</sup> *The Satanic Verses* is a contemporary work of fiction, part of the milieu of popular culture that includes books, television, film, the internet, and various forms of community performance. Within the field of popular culture studies in the Muslim world, this novel is important given its notoriety. It is one of the few pieces of popular culture that transcends borders and is known by Muslims all over the world. My analysis of this novel contributes to the field of religion and popular culture by working with such a pervasive work of fiction in an Islamic frame of reference. The novel’s impact on popular culture is also noteworthy; the controversy surrounding the novel was discussed on television, in newspapers, and in books.

The hagiography of Gibreel Farishta is similar to the plight of Iblis in Sufi Islam. This thesis opens up a discourse about the novel and attempts to expand on the critical issues that it raises. Further scholarship about *The Satanic Verses* can continue the conversation started here, and ultimately provide a greater understanding of the novel, Islam, and other Abrahamic religions. There is a wealth of material to work with given Rushdie’s literary style. It is my hope that the discourse can serve as an educational tool for scholars and critics alike.

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<sup>263</sup> Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (California: University of California Press, 2005), 2.



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