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Postcolonial Melodrama:  
*The Satanic Verses, The Mimic Men, The Namesake*

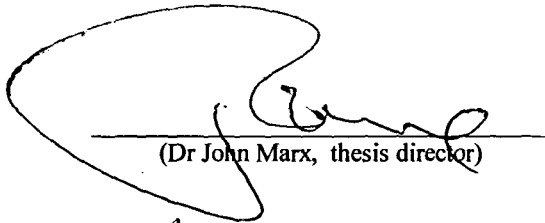
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Honors Thesis  
Department of English  
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The signatures below certify that with this essay Jason Przybylski has satisfied the thesis requirement for Honors in English.



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The goal of this project is to explain the appropriateness of the genre of melodrama for understanding postcolonial literature. Throughout this paper I examine how reading postcolonial fiction as melodrama may help us both to understand postcolonial issues in new ways and, at the same time, to grasp how postcolonial literature changes and enhances the notion of melodrama.

By describing postcolonial literature as melodrama, I am in no way attempting to make light of postcolonial concerns. Treating these texts as melodrama does quite the opposite, as I show that the issues these texts raise can be most fully explored only if we read them in light of their presentation as melodrama. I recognize that the use of melodrama requires some defense, as it is often associated with only low art. As Peter Brooks acknowledges in *The Melodramatic Imagination* (the study of melodrama that, to the present, remains one of the few comprehensive and in-depth analyses of the genre), melodrama as an adjective is typically “used pejoratively, and its rehabilitation as a descriptive critical category requires some argument . . .” (xi). This, however, is a misunderstanding of the genre. Brooks argues:

That the term covers and, in common usage, most often refers to a cheap banal melodrama – to soap opera – need not decrease its usefulness: there is a range from high to low examples in any literary field, and the most successful melodrama belongs to a coherent mode that rewards attention, in its literal as well as in its ‘extrapolated’ forms. . . . [A]s in all art, the low [melodrama] is attempting less, risking less, is more conventional and less self-conscious. (12)

Brooks discusses Henry James and Honoré de Balzac as melodramatic writers, while also making reference to Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky as writers in this tradition. In film, Douglas Sirk is one of many noted for his work in melodrama. This is not bad company at all. The genre of melodrama need not be bound to day-time soaps and books

sold in grocery store cash register aisles, as it carries the potential to legitimately expand and change the understanding of literature and, more broadly, the arts.

I begin with an overview of postcolonial literature that considers the immigrant narrative as a species of historical melodrama. I make connections between the melodramatic form and postcolonial content of such fiction to clarify how they work together. I show how melodrama provides an ideal way for understanding the movements of the postcolonial immigrant, as his/her travels are mirrored by the movement of melodrama's three-stage form, opening up the question of what movement means for the immigrant, what being uprooted and traveling around the world does to a postcolonial subject.

In the following section, I read Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as a melodrama. I consider the text as a paradigmatic example of the postcolonial incarnation of this form. It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that this complex text is a paradigm of any single genre, but my contention is that everything within the text can be understood in terms of the melodrama. Again, the emphasis is placed on the significance of movement, understanding the actions and events the characters undergo in terms of their movement through melodrama's form. I focus on the final scene in particular, which I interpret as a moment of tension. The narrative's happy ending attempts to repress issues brought up throughout the text and, in this way, provide melodrama's traditional conservative conclusion and closed system. *The Satanic Verses* gives us every reason to imagine that what has been repressed will eventually return, however. As the novel examines what it means to be a postcolonial immigrant, it questions the ability of

the immigrant to return home and to simply forget the alterations brought about by his/her movement.

Having relied on *The Satanic Verses* to establish the normative shape of postcolonial melodrama, I turn to an earlier instance – V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. My examination of *The Mimic Men* serves several functions. Most overtly, showing that this text is a melodrama provides an example of an older (1967) and, perhaps more, canonical work utilizing the genre, which furthers my claim that the genre has long been a part of postcolonial fiction. This text also provides an example of postcolonial melodrama operating in a different geography, as the main character is native to Isabella, a small and tumultuous Caribbean island. Furthermore, Naipaul highlights the genre's adaptability and mutability, which I demonstrate by attending to his characters' movements between Isabella and London and, simultaneously, through melodrama's form. Most notably, I observe that the main character cannot return home, which means the melodrama is unable to provide the neat and tidy resolution of return offered – even while complicated – in *The Satanic Verses*. The result is a melodrama that deviates from the predictable happy ending in which the turmoil and issues raised throughout the text are neatly solved. As far as Naipaul is concerned, the experience of immigration becomes one of being permanently unrooted – Ralph finds himself unable to find stability in either Isabella or London. As a result of this text's more unsettling conclusion and insistence on deracinating its main character, my reading of postcolonial melodrama shifts to an emphasis on the immigrant who is always in motion, living more like a nomad than a settler.

I conclude with a look at Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*, which picks up where Naipaul leaves off. Just as *The Mimic Men* provides a canonical example of postcolonial melodrama, this text provides an example of contemporary postcolonial melodrama, suggesting that this continues to be a relevant way of approaching the field. Following the trend of the previous two analyses, my examination of *The Namesake* focuses on the characters' movement, which I interpret in terms of the melodramatic form. I consider how Lahiri manipulates the generic expectations of a return home that might resolve her text's issues. *The Namesake* offers a particularly interesting innovation when it refuses both of the endings offered by the previous texts and provides one of its migrants with a life of movement. In this way, Lahiri exacerbates the perpetual nomadism of *The Mimic Men*. One might say her character, Ashima, actually embraces the nomadic lifestyle, choosing to live without roots or settlement and accepting what the characters in the previous texts had so desperately fought against. This text also provides an examination of how the condition of the immigrant gets reproduced, as the children of immigrants learn to live much like their immigrant parents. The novel helps us to reconsider what it means to be an immigrant by encouraging us to question whether a tendency towards migration can be handed down.<sup>1</sup>

My investigation of postcolonial melodrama works through three distinct texts, spanning three and a half decades, to show how both postcolonial literature and the genre of melodrama adapt to each other, work together, and, thereby, address changing issues. This project in no way attempts to cover all of the postcolonial melodrama, of course. Rather, I hope it will serve as a beginning to understanding both the postcolonial field

and the melodramatic genre in new ways, opening up opportunities for both to be re-evaluated.

### **Postcolonialism & Melodrama**

The traditional postcolonial immigrant narrative (very roughly speaking) tells the story of a postcolonial subject who begins at 'home' (in his/her native country) with a certain amount of stability and peacefulness, which is later brought into question, often as a result of the colonization process. This brings about the immigrant's movement to another country (most typically the country of the colonizers), where he/she finds him/herself questioned and is unable to successfully settle down. This chaos is only finally quelled by the immigrant's return home, at which point the steadiness and peacefulness promise to return. Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, for example, follows this pattern, as the main character travels from Africa to Europe, where she experiences instability and an inability to fit in, which is only resolved by her eventual return home. The same form is suggested even in narratives that remain primarily in one location, such as *The Lonely Londoners*. Though the entirety of the narrative takes place in London, the text captures the instability and chaotic nature of the middle stage of the melodrama, as the characters are continually unable to settle down, living like people on the move and without a fixed home. Ultimately, this postcolonial immigrant narrative appears to be a study of movement and what results from this movement.

Melodrama's most unique feature and what makes it so appropriate for the postcolonial immigrant narrative is its tripartite form.<sup>2</sup> The first section presents a stable



status quo, in which there do not appear to be any problems. Brooks describes this opening section in terms of virtue's place in the narrative: the work "typically opens with a presentation of virtue and innocence . . . . We see this virtue, momentarily, in a state of taking pleasure in itself, aided by those who recognize and support it" (29). This peaceful opening is short-lived, however, as the second stage of the melodrama – where most of the narrative will take place – is quickly ushered in. This section can be best described as a period of chaos, in which everything – particularly the dominance of the standards in place during the first section – is thrown up into the air and brought into question, tested, and thoroughly examined. Following his discussion of virtue through the melodramatic form, Brooks describes this second stage, "[The] melodramatic structure moves from the presentation of virtue-as-innocence to the introduction of menace or obstacle, which places virtue in a situation of extreme peril" (31). In this section of the melodrama, aspects of society or the individual that are usually repressed rise up and wrest for dominance. This results in a loss of the usual order, muddling of distinctions (for example, good and evil become conflated, as they battle for control), questioning of societal standards, and an overall sense of chaos and instability. The third and final stage brings about the resolution of this period of upheaval and, thus, a resettling of the battling forces. Brooks explains the movement from the second to final stage as "[a] blockage and a victory over blockage," so that the conclusion can be understood as a clearing away of what initially disturbed the peace of the first stage (32). Completing his analysis of virtue in melodrama's form, Brooks describes this final stage, "This violent action of the last act is possibly melodrama's version of the tragic catharsis, the ritual by which virtue is freed from what blocked the realization of its desire, and evil

is expelled from the universe” (32). In the traditional melodrama, this ending re-institutes the status quo of the first stage; it is, “a reforming of the old society of innocence, which has now driven out the threat to its existence and reaffirmed its values. . . . There is . . . confirmation and restoration” (32). This form is not dialectical, as it presents a narrative of containment as opposed to advancement.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the melodrama is traditionally a conservative genre, by the end reinforcing the status quo the beginning.

This seemingly simplistic ending is a trademark of the genre, often leaving its audience frustrated. This ending offers a tidy, neatly packaged, and happy ending, in which the recently (re)imposed standards appear unquestioned and stalwart, often without even a hint that just pages or moments ago they were involved in a period of chaos in which everything was questioned and nothing was absolute. However, it seems that a more reserved reading of melodrama’s ending can be appropriate, as the melodramatic form resists such a simple understanding of its conclusion. As this three-part form suggests, no happy-ending or status quo should ever be considered unquestionable or unchallenge-able, as the chaos of the middle stage can always rise up again, potentially undermining the text’s closure. Marcia Landy, in her introduction to *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film & Television Melodrama*, refers to this ending, as the, “‘happy, unhappy ending’ in Douglas Sirk’s terms” (14).<sup>4</sup>

When utilized by the immigrant narrative, what happens to melodrama is that the movement from stage to stage literally becomes about movement – the motion that carries the narrative through the stages from location to location. The middle stage then, in addition to being a period of upheaval, also becomes a period dedicated to motion.

Whereas the first stage offers initial stability and the final stage offers resolution and a resting place, the middle stage is a sort of go-between, not an end in itself, but a period that is moved through, so as to reach the final stage. To be in the middle is to be in transit, to be going somewhere else. In this way, melodrama's association with the postcolonial immigrant narrative also alters melodrama, opening up the ways in which the genre can be utilized and the sorts of issues it can address.

Another relevant postcolonial issue that melodrama is well equipped to address is the ability to question, throw doubt on, and undermine certain aspects of the hegemonic imperialist cultures. The aims of this project include the necessity of not accepting the standards imposed onto the colonial cultures by their colonizers and, along with this, validating the colonial cultures. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, for instance, in "The Writer and His Past," explains the job of the African writer, "He sees his task as helping his society to regain its belief in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration" (43 - 44). This means, for example, not accepting Western languages or thought as superior or as the only way to go about doing things, rather allowing for the existence of localized versions of language or knowledge and sometimes even examining the interplay of these various systems, the conflation of colonizer and colonized's cultures.

Melodrama's abilities for revisionism make it particularly suited for these postcolonial goals. Attached to melodrama's distinctive form is the genre's investment in the abilities and necessities of change. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, in their introduction to *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, describe melodrama as, "... a process-like genre, that is, a genre that does not come to rest in

fulfillment but, rather, presents a continually renewed realization” (xi). This is to say, melodrama does not present a static world; rather, it presents a dynamic world that is always open to change. As discussed above, melodrama believes there are always forces that can rise to challenge the status quo during the chaos and questioning of the middle stage. What gets challenged can be as simplistic as the example of virtue, discussed by Brooks, so that the battling forces are good and evil. However, it can also be a much more complex value, belief, system, or culture that gets challenged, so that virtually any aspect of life can be brought into question. Hays and Nikolopoulou refer to melodrama’s ability to “[revise] notions” of value, behavior, nation, and class (xi). In the 1950’s Hollywood melodramas, for example, it was often the societally imposed views on sexual roles that got put into question. The genre accomplishes these goals through its emphasis on questioning versions of ‘official’ history, ‘official’ versus local knowledge, the interaction of cultures, et cetera. It is for these very issues that postcolonial texts can utilize melodrama, as “it could be put to use either to imagine alternatives or to enforce the cultural paradigms that dominate its thematic conflicts” (Hays and Nikolopoulou xiv). For melodrama, change and revision are always possibilities; nothing can ever be unquestioned and nothing is ever stable.<sup>5</sup>

The notion of alternate versions of language and the necessity of creating meaning in new and different ways, as mentioned above, is reflected throughout postcolonial literature. For example, *Our Sister Killjoy* struggles with the different usages of language throughout its narrative, often times utilizing a more verse-like style of writing. Even in its sections of more prose-like writing, the text appears to utilize language in a manner different from the typical realist novel. This is apparent even in works that appear to

belong more clearly to the form of the canonical postcolonial narrative, such as Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, which exhibits a commitment to the use of pidgin English, showing a clear investment in locating forms of expression in a space outside the dominant culture that can appropriately capture the postcolonial subject. This is an issue that remains prevalent throughout postcolonial literature, including some of the most current work.<sup>6</sup>

Melodrama offers postcolonial fiction a way of expression and meaning making that lies outside the bounds of a culture's 'official' regulations, as it is interested in locating alternate versions of language and communication. Technically, melodrama can be broken into two parts: 'melos' (music) and 'drama,' which can be used to create a rough definition of the genre, including any work that combines these two components (Schatz 148). This simple definition suggests the genre's investment in creating meaning in ways outside of 'official' language. As a result of the historical conditions of melodrama's formation<sup>7</sup>, the genre is invested in the notion of finding alternative forms of communication, to the extent that it actually views official language as restrictive and with a certain amount of skepticism.

This is why, for example, melodrama utilizes music as a fundamental way for creating meaning. This does not necessarily mean music in its purely definitional sense, either. As Brooks describes:

The emotional drama needs the . . . language of music, its evocation of the 'ineffable,' its tones and registers. Style, thematic structuring, modulations of tone and rhythm and voice – musical patterning in a metaphorical sense – are called upon to invest plot with some of the inexorability and necessity that in pre-modern literature derived from the substratum of myth. (14)

Thus, even melodramatic literature can maintain the genre's association with music. Because of this, the term 'music' should be expanded upon to include verse, poetry, and any other forms of 'unofficial' language. Melodrama also creates language in the visual space – in the bodily forms of its characters and objects. Brooks describes this tendency, “. . . the body has ceased to function in its normal postures and gestures, to become nothing but text, nothing but the place of representation” (xii). The visual landscape – gestures, objects, et cetera – becomes “text.” Melodrama utilizes this visual text in an indexical way, attempting to point to what could otherwise not be communicated. This is, in general, how melodrama's utilization of 'unofficial' languages can be understood, “as containing such meanings because [they are] postulated as the metaphorical approach to what cannot be said,” articulating what 'official' language cannot (11).

Another dominant aspect of melodrama's attempt to create meaning in alternative ways (also expressed in the initial description of the genre as the combination of music and drama) is its investment in drama – in actions that could be described by the common use of the adjective 'melodramatic.' Landy provides some examples of the type of drama typically found in melodrama:

Melodramatic narratives are driven by the experience of one crisis after another, crises involving severed familial ties, separation and loss, misrecognition of one's place, person, and propriety. Seduction, betrayal, abandonment, extortion, murder, suicide, revenge, jealousy, incurable illness, obsession, and compulsion—these are part of the familiar terrain of melodrama. (14)

It is not just that this type of drama is present in the narrative, but this is what 'drives' the narrative. Melodrama's utilization of intense drama stems from the same kind of belief that explains its interest in alternative forms of language, which is the attempt to break

free of the repression of the typical everyday life and express what otherwise could not be. Brooks explains melodrama's efforts in this way:

. . . melodramatic rhetoric, and the whole expressive enterprise of the genre, represents a victory over repression. We could conceive this repression as simultaneously social, psychological, historical, and conventional: what could not be said on an earlier stage, nor still on a 'nobler' stage, nor within the codes of society. (41)

For melodrama, this kind of hyperbolic and intense drama is an aspect of reality often left unexpressed (or inexpressible) through other mediums. This is part of melodrama's attempts to 'say everything,' to express the realities of life that 'official' language leaves ineffable.<sup>8</sup>

It is this commitment to change and the ability to question the authoritative or 'official' culture that makes melodrama so ideal for periods of revolution and social upheaval – in fact, Landy notes, "Some critics argue . . . that the impetus to melodrama is stronger during times of ideological crisis" (15)<sup>9</sup> –, as it seeks to help new cultures, societies, groups, and individuals that are looking to define and articulate themselves and attempting to locate new belief systems and ways of understanding. As Brooks explains, "[Melodrama] comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern" (15). It is this ability of melodrama to help locate, define, and understand new and revolutionary societies that accounts for its continual usage during periods of upheaval.<sup>10</sup> This paper will claim that the issues of postcolonial societies can – and should – be added to this list of societies that have attempted to re-understand themselves and their

situations through the use of melodrama, precisely because of the distinctive characteristics of the genre just described.

### **The Satanic Verses**

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is commonly accepted as a seminal work in the postcolonial field. Therefore, successfully demonstrating that this text should be understood as melodrama carries potential ramifications for the entire postcolonial field and the understanding of its issues. Because *The Satanic Verses* provides a paradigmatic example of melodrama in postcolonial literature, it provides the best introduction to the ways in which melodrama operates within the postcolonial context, providing a standard by which other melodramas and important deviations and changes in the melodrama within the postcolonial context can be understood.

Though I am primarily interested in understanding how *The Satanic Verses* functions as melodrama in terms of melodrama's form, I will take a moment to point out some other ways in which the text displays melodrama's characteristics, in an attempt to further legitimate the understanding of *The Satanic Verses* as melodrama. *The Satanic Verses* traffics in the melodrama in several ways, primarily through the genre's investment in alternative forms of language and meaning making. For example, musical language permeates the text, acting not as a mere adjunct to the narrative but playing an operative role and utilizing the unique ability of music and verse to lead the narrative in ways that prose alone could not do.<sup>11</sup> Other commentators have also noted this utilization



of alternate forms of language. In “‘Being God’s Postman is No Fun, Yaar’: Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*,” Srinivas Aravamudan stresses satire’s role in the text and, in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses the narrative as gossip, making reference to Rukmini Bhaya Nair’s reading of the text (10; 227).<sup>12</sup> Furthering this role of unofficial language, *The Satanic Verses* utilizes a kind of visual text, where objects, landscapes, actions, et cetera demand to be read, just as written language is read.<sup>13</sup> The text also employs the role of an active narrator (a practice often found in melodrama, though typically rejected by more ‘legitimate’ genres, particularly realism) to help gain access to the layers of reality, by “[applying] pressure” to the narrative (Brooks 1).<sup>14</sup> Finally, the text utilizes melodrama’s investment in drama in an attempt to break through repression, articulate everything, and make evident what other – less dramatic – genres neglect.<sup>15</sup>

Most significantly, however, *The Satanic Verses* is an examination of and rumination on what happens during migrancy. Reading the narrative through melodrama’s three-stage form establishes this understanding of the text. Though told in retrospect, Chamcha contentedly living in England with a wife and a successful career doing voices and Gibreel living in India enjoying success and stardom with a film career presents the stasis and fixed status quo of the first stage. The stability of this beginning, however, soon begins to give way to the dynamism of the middle stage, as the characters’ lives move toward instability. For Gibreel, this movement begins with his sickness, which brings his film career into question and marks the beginning of his adventures. Chamcha’s movement begins with the return of his Indian-ness during a visit to India.

The *Bostan* plane crash, which the narrative opens with, marks the full-fledged entrance into melodrama's second stage. The sky is established as a site conducive to this middle stage, "Up there in air-space . . . most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic – because when you throw everything up in the air anything becomes possible" (Rushdie 5 – 6). This space of insecurity, transition, and metamorphosis, in which it is possible to "throw everything up in the air," allows the mutability of melodrama's middle section to begin. This beginning is described:

The aircraft cracked in half, a seed-pod giving up its spores, an egg yielding its mystery. Two actors . . . fell like titbits of tobacco from a broken old cigar. Above, behind, below them in the void there hung: reclining seats, stereophonic headsets, drinks trolleys, motion discomfort receptacles, disembarkation cards, duty-free video games, braided caps, paper cups, blankets, oxygen masks. Also – for there had been more than a few immigrants aboard . . . mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*. (4 - 5)

The plane's outer surface breaks, releasing its once neatly ordered insides. Once this break occurs, the insides rush to the surface, becoming chaotic and jumbled together. Everything is literally thrown up in the air – from "reclining seats" and "paper cups" to "the debris of the soul," "memories," and 'rejected selves.' Gibreel and Chamcha are described during the fall as obtaining "a fluidity, an indistinctness, at the edges of them," so that their once clearly marked surfaces and boundaries are transgressed and able to be brought into question (8). All this 'stuff' becomes mixed together, losing the division, definitiveness, and stasis that characterizes the first section of melodrama. With this middle section begun, the text devotes the majority of its narrative to the exploration of these forces, histories, objects, et cetera that have risen to the surface.

Chamcha's final return to India marks the text's resolution in a neatly closed and happy ending, bringing about the final stage. Establishing this tidy ending: Chamcha, the "prodigal son," successfully returns home, returns to his original name – Salahuddin Chamchawala –, makes peace with his father, and reunites with Zeeny (529, 538, 540 – 1, 548). The chaos of the middle section is similarly resolved, as the text returns to a static state, "[Chamcha's] old English life, its bizarreries, its evils, now seemed very remote, even irrelevant, like his truncated stage-name" (548 – 9). The "bizarreries" and the "evil" of the middle section and the English-ness of his prior life are quelled, so that Chamcha returns to "old, rejected selves" – his Indian-ness (538). Gibreel's final return to Chamcha and eventual suicide marks the narrative's ultimate resolution, as Chamcha, having finally obtained peaceable stasis, walks off with his love (561). Chamcha comments, during this final section, "Today feels like a new start for me;" perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that he has finally achieved re-birth (530).

In addition to this primary form of the narrative, this melodramatic movement is repeated throughout the text.<sup>16</sup> As a result, *The Satanic Verses* suggests that the larger melodramatic narratives of the text are constituted of smaller melodramatic movements, so that everything must be understood melodramatically. This insistence upon the melodramatic form suggests that these issues *must* be – or *can only* be – grasped through the framework of the melodrama. This kind of movement has saturated the narrative, suggesting its essential role in understanding the text and, hence, the postcolonial issues raised through it.

This melodramatic form implies a layered understanding of reality and the forces operant in it. The middle section, in which all is thrown up for grabs, suggests that there is more to reality than what exists on the surface – the “official” truths, particular versions of history, the way a person presents him/herself, et cetera. In some sense, there must be a kind of latent reality, not typically present or visible on the surface, but that rises up in the middle of the melodrama to challenge those typically accepted status quos.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, reality, in this melodramatic understanding of it, takes on a sort of layered existence. Part of melodrama’s project, then, is an investigation of these layers. *The Satanic Verses* is interested in and utilizes melodrama for a re-opening and examination of these layers of reality. The text establishes an investment in this layered understanding of reality, when describing Gibreel as a child:

Sometimes when he looked around him . . . the visible world, its features and inhabitants and things, seemed to be sticking up through the atmosphere like a profusion of hot icebergs, and he had the idea that everything continued down below the surface of the soupy air: people, motor-cars, dogs, movie billboards, trees, nine-tenths of their reality concealed from his eyes. (Rushdie 22)

This presents an understanding of a sort of latent reality, suggesting that a majority of what composes a society exists in a “world beneath.”<sup>18</sup>

*The Satanic Verses* focuses on this layering in two primary ways – in places and people. The layering of sites is evidenced through the creation of layered terrain. This is utilized, for example, in the description of cities, “See, there, at the Willingdon Club golf links . . . skyscrapers having sprouted out of the other nine [holes] like giant weeds, or, let’s say, like tombstones marking the sites where the torn corpse of the old city lay . . .” (12). The golf course exists on one layer, with skyscrapers that climb upward, creating

layers above ground, and that also travel downward, creating layers below ground.

Layers exist in spaces other than the city, as well. The recurring usage of mountains, for example, further establishes a reality with multiple levels.

The role of this layering in people is established in multiple ways, as the text focuses on the importance of what exists beneath the immediately visible surface. constantly reminding the reader that there are layers beneath. This is accomplished, in part, by emphasizing disease's capability to attack the body from within, as evidenced with Mishal Saeed's and Changez's battles with cancer. The text also utilizes the language of disease and infection to deal with the ways in which more abstract forces exist beneath the visible reality.<sup>19</sup> Furthering this importance of what goes on beneath the surface, the text shows an interest in the consumption of food. This significance of food is evidenced in Chamcha's encounter with the bony kipper. At first, he does not know how to eat it because of his unfamiliarity with the fish – he is not yet English enough (44). By eventually digesting the English fish, however, he digests its accompanying English-ness. The consumption of food is accompanied by the consumption of its heritage. This imagery is again noticed with the motif of eating earth upon arrival to a new land: "William the Conqueror, it is said, began by eating a mouthful of English sand," and Gibreel, "awoke with a mouth full of, no, not sand. Snow," upon falling to England (44, 135). To eat a bony English fish is to make English-ness part of one's layered-self and to eat the land is to make that part of one's self, as well.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to these more literal examples, the existence of a layered reality also incorporates more abstract types of issues, such as history. Mirza Saeed, for example, is described as being "full of . . . the memory [or history] of the tribulations of the march,"

so that history fills his internal layers (511). A significant aspect of this investment in historical layers is the presence of ulterior selves. The text makes reference to this notion when it refers to Chamcha's rejected selves, "which had split off from himself as he made his various life choices, but which had apparently continued to exist, perhaps in parallel universes of quantum theory," or in other layers of reality (538). These other selves are composed of the memories that have been tucked beneath the surface, cultures the subject has once been immersed in, et cetera. In a sense, a person's multiple layers are compilations of different versions of the self.

The text further supports the importance of understanding the layered nature of reality by challenging the hegemony of the surface reality, emphasizing that, "Appearances deceive; the cover is not the best guide to the book" (266). This notion of false surfaces is particularly evident with Chamcha, who attempts to manipulate his surface to fit into English society. The narrative comments that he "began to act, to find masks that [the English] would recognize . . ." (44). This surface alteration is also accompanied by his name change – Salahuddin Chamchawala to Saladin Chamcha (37).<sup>21</sup> These changes, however, are nothing more than an elaborate system of "masks," with Chamcha's different versions of himself continuing to exist below (27).<sup>22</sup>

All of this goes to suggest that to fully understand reality as melodrama understands it and the issues that accompany it – particularly the postcolonial issues of this text – one must view reality in this stratified sort of way.

With this understanding of melodrama's movement and investment in a layered reality established, it is possible to make sense of what is going on in the middle stage of

this text, the site at which the components of the layers of reality rise up to manifest on the surface. In the middle stage of the melodrama, the range of layers are flattened together and brought to cohabit a single plane, where they question each other and battle for control. This middle stage of the text puts everything on display, just as the Granny Ripper, “who invariably arranged his victims’ internal organs neatly around their corpses,” also takes everything out for display (297). These layers rising up and muddling the distinctions that once kept them separated is what so much of *The Satanic Verses* is devoted to – examining and questioning them to see which will win control.

This rising up of layers manifests itself in several distinct ways. One of the primary systems of opposing layers that is brought together in the individual (and which Brooks emphasizes in his study of melodrama) is good and evil, so that in many ways the struggle of the middle section of this text comes down to these two battling forces. Chamcha, for example, becomes evil incarnate, “[metamorphosing] into some species of bottled djinn” (284). Opposite this, Gibreel morphs into an angelic figure (137).<sup>23</sup> Whereas the layers of ‘good’ manifest themselves through Gibreel, the layers of ‘evil’ become apparent through Chamcha (366, 265). The middle section of *The Satanic Verses* allows these opposing layers of Gibreel and Chamcha to become active, questioning who these characters really are and, in the postcolonial context of the text, what happens to immigrants who come to England.

At the same time, more complex series of layers come together, in both the individual and society. For instance, the multiple layers of history manifest themselves, compacting linear history and opposing versions of history into a single site. As the narrative explains, “The past, it seems, returns” (158). The layout of the narrative also

reinforces this coexistence of different points in history, constantly moving between past and present, so that past and present commingle. Ghost imagery is utilized to bring layers of history together, as well, as they are the manifestation of history, allowing present and past to coexist. Rosa Diamond explains, “I know what a ghost is . . . . Unfinished business . . . . At which the old lady . . . closed, for a moment, her sleepless eyes, to pray for the past’s return” (133). The best example of this coming together of layers through ghosts is Rosa’s house, which exists in the same space as the ghosts of the Norman ships (134). During this middle section, the layers of linear history are compacted together, all becoming active in the present tense.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of this coming together of once distinct layers, reality loses its distinctions and becomes somewhat muddled. The text utilizes dreams to make this loss of boundaries and distinctions evident. It does this through a “confident breaching of the boundaries between dream and waking . . .” (Spivak 226).<sup>25</sup> Even the text’s attempts to establish a distinction between the dream and waking states, by sanctioning Gibreel’s dreams into their own neatly delineated sections, become muddled when Gibreel’s dreams become part of his waking self, “the world of dreams was leaking into that of the waking hours, . . . the seals dividing the two were breaking, and . . . at any moment the two firmaments could be joined . . .” (Rushdie 314 – 5).<sup>26</sup> This loss of distinctions is further reinforced by the landscape. Jahilia, built of sand, lacks any sense of fixed-ness, as it is composed of “the very stuff of inconstancy, – the quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack-of-form,” so there is no definition or clearly visible boundaries, but a state in which everything is shifting (96). Similarly, London is described as “vague, amorphous,” “protean and chameleon,” and Gibreel senses “that it kept changing shape”



(474, 207).<sup>27</sup> This muddling of distinctions caused by the coming together of layers is also evidenced in the text's physical appearance. Words are often combined, such as "angelicdevilish" and "salvationdamnation," so that the physical aspect of the words loses its distinct boundaries and limits, actually blending together with other words (5. 94). This is evidenced to the extreme just before Gibreel commits suicide, in which even the punctuation is removed, so that sentences muddle together, once again destroying any sort of boundary during the middle stage of the melodrama (558 – 9).<sup>28</sup>

It is the re-stratification and redefinition of these distinctions and layers during the final section of the melodrama that create the potential for transformation, accounting for the text's investment in change. The melodramatic form can be understood as a method for achieving transformation, with the middle section as a sort of radical and violent gestation period:

It was now being argued that major changes in species happened not in the stumbling, hit-and-miss manner first envisaged, but in great, radical leaps [melodrama's middle stage]. The history of life was . . . violent, a thing of dramatic, cumulative transformations . . . (432)

Melodrama understands change as an inevitable process – the text comments, "the laws of nature are the laws of its transformation" – as the layers of reality can at any moment rise to the surface and resettle (363).<sup>29</sup> As a result, nothing in the text is permanent, "The inconstant soul, the mutability of everything . . . . A being going through life can become so other to himself as to *be another*," as the surface reality can always be reconfigured or born-again (297).<sup>30</sup> There can never be an official or unquestioned version when there is the constant ability for everything to be thrown up in the air and reconfigured.

This constant potential for the rising up of repressed layers and, hence, change allows for the questioning of 'Truths' and official knowledge and histories, which is a pressing issue for the postcolonial field (as discussed in the preceding section). With its investment in latent and mutable realities and the constant potential for everything to be questioned and, hence, changed, melodrama allows this goal to be more easily obtained than genres such as realism that believe in the unquestionable 'Truth' of what they display. The colonizers' ability to create historical truths is witnessed in Chamcha's encounter with Stein, the immigration officer, after being mistreated by the police:

'Damn decent of you to come down with the lung thing,' Stein added, with the gratitude of an author whose character had unexpectedly solved a ticklish technical problem. 'Makes the story much more convincing. Seems you were that sick, you did pass out on us after all. Nine of us remember it well. . . . In conclusion . . . I suggest . . . that you dinna trouble with a complaint. You'll forgive me for speaking plain, but with your wee horns and your great hoofs you wouldna look the most reliable of witnesses.' (172)

Because of their numbers and appearance of reliability, the immigration officers are able to create a historical account, like an "author," concerning Chamcha's arrest, which will become the 'Official Truth' of the event, in the same way the colonizers created the 'Truth' of the colonized cultures. Because of melodrama's belief in a layered reality, however, the other 'unofficial histories' (Chamcha's version of the events in the police van) do not disappear, but become latent historical versions always with the potential to challenge the 'Official Truth' – the surface reality. Therefore, melodrama recognizes that just because Stein's version of the events is initially accepted, this does not preclude other challenging versions, such as Chamcha's, from rising to the forefront. Melodrama

does not allow history or truth to exist as static and unquestionable; rather, it shows them as constantly challengeable and changeable.

Similarly, by inserting religion into this melodramatic structure, *The Satanic Verses* questions the 'Truths' of religion, a system that typically presents itself as closed to change. As the text explains, "the sum of knowledge was complete on the day Al-lah finished his revelation to Mahound;" religion was finished and, hence, could be presented as a stable and unchallengeable 'Truth' (217). *The Satanic Verses* as melodrama, however, does not allow religion to exist in this manner. As the text goes through its middle section of the melodrama, it drags religion along, opening it up and revealing its layers of history, roots, selves, et cetera, so that the creation of religious 'Truths' is shown to have an underside to it.<sup>31</sup>

Most importantly for postcolonialism, *The Satanic Verses'* utilization of melodrama makes the text particularly well-equipped to question the status of the postcolonial immigrant – to ask what it means to be constantly on the move, especially between 'home' and 'not home,' which, in this text's context, is to ask what it means to be an Indian living in England. As evidenced with Chamcha and Gibreel, the melodramatic form captures the movement of the immigrant: Beginning at Home (India) → Away (England, the state of the exile) → Return Home (India). It is this investment in making sense of the postcolonial immigrant's movement that Aravamudan articulates, referring to Rushdie's text as "a crosscultural rumination on emigration [and] exile," and that Spivak notes, "Rushdie's novel is not only a novel of migrancy, but also a novel of return" (10, 236). What both writers emphasize is that this is a text about movement. In

melodrama's tripartite form, the homeland is "the once and future land" (the first and third stages of the melodrama), suggesting that existence in an other land is to be caught in the middle of the melodrama – in a period of chaos, lack of definition and understanding, unsettlement, and to exist in a sort of continual movement (Rushdie 214). England, therefore, becomes the space of the middle of the melodrama, where the emigré experiences a confusion and uprising of the self and a lack of a clear identity. This is where Indian immigrants turn into goats and manicores, Nigerians grow tails, immigrant women are turned into water-buffalo, and holiday-ers from Senegal turn into snakes (174).<sup>32</sup> For Chamcha, this confusion centers on understanding himself as English or Indian, which Spivak identifies as "an aggressive central theme: the postcolonial divided between two identities: migrant and national" (219). This migrant–national question is precisely what the melodrama is prepared to handle; these are the opposing selves of Chamcha: English Chamcha versus Indian Chamchawala. England as the site of the middle of the melodrama forces this issue to the forefront, through its ability to call all into question. England draws Chamcha's battling selves to the fore, "the more he runs away from his Indian-ness, the more he is confronted with it from all sides . . . ." (Aravamudan 14). As Spivak notes, "empire messes with identity," a notion that is pursued to its utmost here (226).<sup>33</sup>

This is why "all attempts to put down roots [in England] look like treason;" England cannot be a home, but only a "transit lounge," a space that is moved through but not remained in (Rushdie 215).<sup>34</sup> Notice that these characteristics of unsettlement and lack of definition reflect Aravamudan's analysis of the role of the devil in *The Satanic Verses*:

It is plain that Rushdie's epigraph concentrates on the errancy of the devil, his vagabond nature, his constant flight from the stability of an origin, a unified terrestrial locale. . . . it is the very indeterminacy of the devil's actions that make him truly diabolical. . . . his lack of address which summarizes his delinquency, his nomadic refusal to recognize the law of settlement, is an eternal escape from the transcendental signified—God.  
(16)

This inability to be easily made sense of, located, and defined becomes a sort of ethical issue – to be a shifty signifier is to be evil. If a major issue of the text is what happens to the postcolonial immigrant in England, there seems to be a suggestion that he/she occupies the space of the devil – he who is constantly on the move and hard to identify. To be an immigrant is to be a devil (and for Chamcha, this is the case on many levels). Short of locking England out, as the Imam attempts (and even these efforts cannot make it a hospitable home), a postcolonial immigrant residing in England exists in a state in which he/she cannot be sure of anything, particularly regarding the definition of the self.

With this site of the middle of the melodrama established, the text explores the postcolonial immigrant's ability to return home, to complete the melodramatic form. The question of Chamcha's return is the question that persists throughout the text, so that the question of the narrative is, "*Once I'm an owl, what is the spell or antidote for turning me back into myself?*" or, 'Is a, "reverse migration," possible?' (Rushdie 251, 358). The content of the narrative, with Chamcha's happy return, reunion with Zeeny, and escape from England, seems to claim that such a return is possible. Melodrama's insistence on the capability of change also supports Chamcha's ability to morph back into an 'Indian,' at the conclusion of the text.

The melodramatic form, however, suggests a different reading of the conclusion – that the postcolonial immigrant can never fully return home and that this happy ending is

merely a repression of Chamcha's English selves and history into his latent underneath reality, possessing the potential to rise again to the surface. Gibreel comments concerning the English, "Did they not think their history would return to haunt them?" (363). This same question could be turned onto Chamcha, at the narrative's conclusion – 'Does he not think his history will return to haunt him?' The story of Otto Cone's suicide provides testament to this inability of the past to be securely kept away:

[W]hy does a survivor of the camps live forty years and then complete the job the monsters didn't get done? Does great evil eventually triumph, no matter how strenuously it is resisted? Does it leave a sliver of ice in the blood, working its way through until it hits the heart? (308)

The answer to these questions is that the history of the concentration camp never went away, but always remained part of him, like "a sliver of ice in the blood," until it finally rose to the surface forty years later. The same potential exists for Chamcha's English history to at any point resurface.<sup>35</sup> It is not that Chamcha has eradicated his English-ness; it is more that he has neatly tucked it below the surface. As the text recognizes, "But nothing was forever; no cure, it appeared, was complete" (554). Just as Chamcha's Indian-ness rises up in him during the middle of the text's melodrama, so can his English-ness potentially rise up in his future; after all, the bony kipper is still inside him.

The text concludes with these opposing answers, posing the question – Can the postcolonial immigrant go home? Spivak notes this tension, "Perhaps [the national-migrant dualism] is even an aporia for [Rushdie], an impossible decision between two opposed decidables with two mutually canceling sets of consequences, a decision which gets made, nonetheless . . ." (222). Melodrama captures this tension, as form and content oppose each other at the text's conclusion. Unlike Spivak's aporia, however, reading *The*

*Satanic Verses* as melodrama does provide an answer – Yes, Chamcha can go home, as long as he can maintain his repression of England. This resolution may be wholly unconvincing – leaving the issues only nominally contained – leaving the reader convinced that Chamcha cannot maintain this repression. This, however, reading the text as melodrama suggests, is what movement does to the postcolonial immigrant.<sup>36</sup>

## **The Mimic Men**

Before discussing *The Mimic Men*'s utilization of melodrama's form, I will take a moment to examine the text's use of the genre's other characteristics, showing that *The Mimic Men* deserves to be read as a full-fledged melodrama. As with *The Satanic Verses*, the text utilizes a play of masks and surfaces that points to a layered understanding of reality. Being melodrama, these layers do not always remain in tact, as what exists beneath the surface rises up during the middle section.<sup>37</sup> *The Mimic Men* also exhibits the loss of distinctions and constant muddling associated with this rising up of layers.<sup>38</sup> The existence and interplay of various versions of things, people, and events also accompanies this layered notion of reality, as various versions co-exist on different layers of reality or wrest with each other when the layers conflate.<sup>39</sup> Finally, *The Mimic Men* exhibits melodrama's utilization of alternative forms of communication, including the use of objects and landscapes to be read as ways of expressing meaning.<sup>40</sup> These characteristics permeate the text, so that reading and understanding *The Mimic Men* as melodrama is wholly appropriate.

What is really interesting about reading *The Mimic Men* as melodrama, however, is the text's utilization of melodrama's form and the movement that characterizes this form. Ralph's condition is characterized by much movement – multiple departures, arrivals, and returns. As a result, a multiplicity of forms – or lines of movement – develops, which overlap and interact with each other.<sup>41</sup> *The Mimic Men* complicates melodrama's form by layering several cycles on top of each other, thus creating an insistence on the movement and instability of melodrama's middle section, which Ralph cannot escape.<sup>42</sup> In addition to Ralph's movement from site to site, there is also a movement that takes place within each site. In each location, Ralph moves from an initial sense of order and calm to a disorder that builds in intensity, until he eventually moves on to the next location. As the disorder and chaos build, Ralph begins to exhibit movements that increase in intensity. Ralph explains, concerning his first stay in London, "It was during the time of breakdown and mental distress when . . . I travelled about England and the Continent with no purpose, not even pleasure" (Naipaul 49). Within each site there is a growing movement, beginning as almost non-existent in the preliminary order of the site and mounting to an uncontrollable and frenzied movement as order is lost, until Ralph is finally jettisoned off to the following stage of the form.

The text's use of the melodramatic form and its accompanying movement in this way enables the contradictory nature of the sites' influences on Ralph to be understood and accounted for (how, for example, London can be both a place of respite from Isabella and the greater disorder), something that has escaped previous criticism. More significantly for the postcolonial field, this allows *The Mimic Men* to understand Ralph's position as potentially permanently destabilized, making movement his primary condition



– the state in which he exists is one of a constant moving to or through somewhere, always already heading somewhere else – so that the suggestion seems to be that, despite all efforts to the contrary, Ralph lives the life, not of a postcolonial immigrant, but of a postcolonial nomad.<sup>43</sup>

Ralph's first form is made up of his child- and young adulthood in Isabella, followed by his stay in London as a student, and concluding with his return to Isabella with Sandra. This ending is frustrated, however, as Ralph is exiled from Isabella, forced to return to London, the space of the middle of the melodrama.<sup>44</sup> This form is just another version of Chamcha's, in which London exists as the desired space of the immigrant. In this form, London exists at the center, both by its placement in the middle of the form and by representing the site of longing for the immigrant.

Ralph's childhood on Isabella presumably begins with a certain amount of order and security, as it is only after he grows older that he begins to notice the characteristics of the island that will eventually bring him to describe its society as "transitional or makeshift" (11). As Ralph experiences the island through his childhood, he discovers its disorder, impermanence, and transient nature. For example, he notices the absorption of the Caribs, forcing him to recognize the insecure nature of the island and, hence, how quickly change can occur (146). A discovery that highlights the island's lack of roots and instability is the "contrived" nature of the island's "tropical appearance," which Ralph had "considered most natural and characteristic" (175). As Anthony Boxill describes, in *V.S. Naipaul's Fiction: In Quest of the Enemy*, the result of this discovery is Ralph's realization that "he has been looking at his birthplace with the eyes of a foreigner," so that he is not at home even when on the island in which he grows up (52). This sense of

rootlessness to Ralph's life on the island is furthered by his "dual residence" between his father's home and his maternal family home, which Ralph describes as "this switching back and forth between one world and another," further establishing his transient and impermanent life on Isabella (Naipaul 127, 185).<sup>45</sup> All of this contributes to Ralph's longing for order, ". . . I longed for nothing so much as to walk in the clear air . . . , where everything was comprehensible . . .," and eventual decision "to make a fresh, clean start," and "escape" from the island (109, 141,142). Following this initial declaration, Ralph continually reiterates his decision to leave, longing for the order and permanence of London.

Though the frenzied movement prior to shift in location is the least pronounced in this section, it is evident. As Ralph continues to remain on Isabella through his adolescence, he constantly reinforces his desire to leave, until he finally describes it as something "urgent," suggesting that the intensity of his disorder is constantly growing (173). His eventual departure for London is preceded by the drama and intensity of his incestuous affair with Sally and near-showdown with Dalip<sup>46</sup> (190). Shortly after these incidents, Ralph finally leaves Isabella for London, hoping "to find the beginning of order" (22). This marks the shift from the beginning of Ralph's melodramatic form to the middle as a student in London.

In London – the space of the middle of the form – Ralph locates an initial sense of ordering and calmness. He speaks of the city as "so solid . . .," as it presents a solidity and simple-ness, a place easily understood, presenting a kind of order not available in Isabella (23). Ralph's boarding house and relationship with Lieni furthers this initial sense of order, providing Ralph with guidance through the city. This order is quickly

lost, however, as Ralph notes, “So quickly had London gone sour on me” (22). As Ralph loses the temporary order, he loses himself in the messiness and frenzied movement of the middle section, in which all is in question. His loss of order is marked by the break-up of the boarding house, “With Lieni and Mr Shylock’s boarding-house one type of order had gone for good. And when order goes it goes” (36). Following this, Ralph experiences the fracturing and chaos of the middle of the melodrama imposed on him by London, in which the very terms by which he once knew himself are called into question. Ralph comments that he can no longer “feel [himself] as a whole person,” that he has “become distorted,” and that “Those of us who came to [London] lost some of our solidity” (33, 32). London draws Ralph through the growing confusion and muddling of the middle section, constantly pulling him apart, and bringing about a rootlessness and impermanence to his self. It is because of this that Ralph describes London as “the greater disorder, the greater shipwreck,” and predicts, “The crash was coming,” which would bring about the culmination of the messiness of this London experience (214, 33).

As this chaos grows, Ralph’s movement becomes increasingly intense, frenzied, and chaotic. This movement, likewise, begins with the break-up of the boarding house, sending Ralph into a life of transience, “From room to room I moved, from district to district . . .” (36). He describes himself as “restless” and as having “this feeling of being adrift . . .,” of having been destabilized, of having the (once) solid ground pulled out from beneath his feet (36, 32). Ralph attempts to deal with these feelings through further movement. As Robert Hamner recognizes, in his study on Naipaul, “. . . Ralph tries to locate himself and give concreteness to his actions by touring London . . . and by pursuing affairs with various seemingly anonymous women” (139). This movement is

initially observable in his visits to the art galleries, which he utilizes because of “their excuse for movement backwards, forwards, and sideways, any number of times . . .” (Naipaul 26 – 7). Ralph’s movement grows in intensity with the excursion trains, which allow him to move across England to pick up women. This movement becomes so intense – at one point making successful journeys on “four successive Wednesdays . . .” (27) – that he experiences “an agony of disturbance” and feelings of “violation and self-violation,” with this violation marking a breaking down of personal boundaries and distinctions of the self so that Ralph becomes further muddled (28, 30). Ralph’s marriage does little to order the situation, as immediately following the ceremony he experiences a panic and loss of control and flees to a public house to drink (59). At hearing the news of his murdered father Ralph resorts to movement and sex, “I walked about the streets. Later I went with a prostitute” (215). Following this final chaotic movement about London, Ralph simply declares, “I was ready to leave” (215). At this point, his frenzied movements and breakdown of the self have reached their pinnacle, propelling him from London to Isabella – the concluding stage of the form.<sup>47</sup>

Upon arrival to Isabella, Ralph experiences a calmness and a resettling of the chaos and frenzy of London, describing the island as “a scene of peace . . .” (62). There is even a sense of order to the social group he joins, “There were no complicating loyalties or depths; for everyone the past had been cut away” (66). Back in Isabella, Ralph re-gains a solidity and order to his self. He is even able to successfully repress some initially negative reactions to his return, “This return so soon to a landscape which I thought I had put out of my life for good was a failure and a humiliation. Yet this, together with all my unease, I buried away” (60). Much like Chamcha’s final return to

India, the peace obtained at the conclusion of the form seems to be about the ability to successfully repress, re-order, and, hence, reestablish the definition of the self.<sup>48</sup>

The completion of this form is refused, however, by Ralph's exile. Ralph explains that there is only one course of action available to him, following his political demise, "Flight to the greater disorder. the final emptiness: London . . ." (11). Once again, London refuses Ralph any amount of stability or rootedness, "I could not pretend even to myself to be part of a community or to be putting down roots" (13). Ralph is thrown back into the homeless and disordered situation of his previous stay in London. This is what makes exile such a terrible punishment – it boots Ralph out of the completion of his form and back into the space of the middle of the melodrama.<sup>49</sup>

Ralph's second form, then, is that of his movement from London to Isabella, as discussed above, and then back to London.<sup>50</sup> This is the form that deals with the messiness and chaos of Isabella that Ralph spends the majority of the narrative describing and that he refers to as the period in his life that took place in parentheses. The beginning of this form is marked by the initial ordering of London, which grows to the frenzied disorder and movement that eventually propels Ralph to Isabella, as already described. Isabella, then, becomes the middle section of this form. What makes this movement a new form, as opposed to simply an extension of the previous form, is the de-centering of London that takes place. In the previous cycle, London is central to Ralph; it is the site that he longs for, that can save him from his problems of Isabella. With this new form, however, there is a shift, as Ralph begins to long for Isabella in the very way that he once longed for London, so that Isabella is now at the center of his movement and London is pushed to the periphery. Ralph explains this de-centering of London and consequent

centering of Isabella, “. . . I found myself longing for . . . my life on the island of Isabella . . .” (32).<sup>51</sup> Because of this shift in understanding the spaces of London and Isabella, this movement can be understood as a new cycle.

Upon arrival to Isabella, there is an initial ordering and peace, as described as the conclusion of the previous form. This, however, is a short-lived calm, quickly passing over to the chaos of the middle section. Even Ralph and Sandra’s social group, initially noted as offering a sense of order, is almost simultaneously described as “a haphazard, disordered and mixed society . . . [a] fluid group . . .” (Naipaul 66). Peter Nazareth, in “‘The Mimic Men’ as a Study of Corruption,” comments on the instability of this social group, “And the ‘jet set’ Singh joins after his return from England is just so much more jetsam—false, unreal, living an artificial life . . .,” so that Ralph’s attempts at a pure and ordered life are almost immediately thwarted by his association with a “mixed,” “disordered,” and aimlessly floating (“jetsam”) social group (143). The cause for Isabella’s lack of order is the same as the cause for Ralph’s initial departure from Isabella, as the island is a place that causes Ralph to “[panic] at not being able to tear down the unreality about him to get at the hard, the concrete, where everything becomes simple and ordinary and easy to seize” – a panic caused by his inability to grasp a solidity or order while on the island (Naipaul 86). This is the island’s lack of purity, its transplanted nature, Ralph’s sense of being a foreigner there, et cetera, all of which he initially suppressed upon arrival to Isabella but that re-surface to influence his position on the island.

As Ralph’s marriage disintegrates, he desperately attempts to regain his order. He once again resorts to an aimless sort of movement, in attempts to regain control, “At

nights [Sandra and I] would go out driving, just for the sake of motion. We drove to the airport and sat drinking in the lounge with intransit passengers, listening to the names of foreign cities" (83). Not only do they move, but they go to a site of movement and talk to people who are on the move. In a further attempt to instill order, Ralph builds the Roman house, "I was struck by the simplicity of the Roman house, its outward austerity, its inner, private magnificence . . ." (84). The house offers simplicity and, through its distinctions between public ("outward") and private ("inner"), an imposed distinction and ordering.<sup>52</sup> These attempts, however, fail, as Ralph never does regain order, calm, or simplicity on Isabella. The destruction of Ralph's house during his housewarming party clearly marks this inability to achieve order. The disorder and instability of Ralph's political movement, apparent almost from its inception, carry this intensity and chaos to even greater extremes. Ralph describes the situation of the political group as characterized by feelings of "frenzy," "unease," "anarchy," "hysteria," "precariousness," "panic," and "drifting" – all further supporting the chaos and instability of the middle section (239, 246, 252, 263).<sup>53</sup> This is the upheaval, destruction of order and calm, and all-up-in-the-air quality of Ralph's life on the island that constantly refuses any attempts at settlement.

Ralph's disorder and movement grow as he reaches the culmination of his time on Isabella. His visit to London for negotiations presents an even greater movement than he previously exhibited. While in London, he moves around the city and has an affair with Stella, actions that he describes as possessing a sort of "Frenzy" (267, 275). This frenzy further increases during his stopover, which allows him to move through a new city, so transient and un-rooted, "as in a dream," that he describes, "my disturbance was [now]

complete” (279). By this point, Ralph’s self becomes disordered, chaotic, un-rooted, unstable, et cetera, to a whole new extreme. He eventually returns to Isabella, though he recognizes “there was no need for me to return . . .,” as the middle stage has reached such frenzy that he can no longer remain on Isabella but must continue his movement toward the completion of his form (278).<sup>54</sup> By this point, the feelings of unease that Ralph initially suppressed upon his arrival to Isabella have fully resurfaced, as he once again feels himself a foreigner on the island (248).<sup>55</sup> Ralph’s frenzy and movement eventually climax, jettisoning him away from Isabella to the conclusion of the form in London.

Although Ralph’s return to London provides the conclusion of this cycle, he does not obtain immediate resolution, experiencing a brief period of intense movement and homelessness while searching for a place to live beyond London’s city limits. During this period, Ralph moves from train station to train station with no home at all except the movement of the trains, leading a “gypsy life” (299). Ralph’s return to London is, hence, demanded, as it is the only place in which he is able to eventually find a home and bring about the conclusion of the cycle. Once settled in the hotel, Ralph obtains simplicity and calmness. The way of life provided by the hotel plays a significant role in this ability to obtain order, as Ralph comments on “the constriction and order of hotel life . . . . Order, sequence, regularity . . .” (293).<sup>56</sup> Through this order of the hotel, Ralph develops a routine and sense of order in his life, commenting that he and the other tenants “have simplified our lives” (294, 296). In addition to the order of the hotel, Ralph obtains order through his writing. He explains, “By [writing] the event became historical and manageable; it was given its place; it will no longer disturb me. And this became my aim . . . to impose order on my own history, to abolish that disturbance . . .” (292). This



process makes his messy past in Isabella manageable, “sealing off such experience and activity,” so as not to disturb the resolution of the form’s conclusion (12).<sup>57</sup> As a result, Ralph explains, “. . . the conviction was strong that I was again in a well-organized country” (297). Once again, the resolution of the melodrama’s conclusion is about resettling the chaotic nature of the middle of the form and re-instilling an order to one’s life by putting the messy things brought up in the middle section back in their places.

Ralph’s movement, however, can be characterized by one final, yet incomplete, form, beginning in Isabella and moving to London, leaving its final stage undecided.<sup>58</sup> Just as the previous form de-centers London by placing Isabella at the center, this form re-centers London and re-replaces Isabella on the margins. While in Isabella, Ralph shifts his desire and once again focuses on London as the site of salvation from his current chaos. He explains, regarding his scheduled delegations in London, “I would go to London. . . . In the fortnight I would be away I would be undermined. . . . I would have nothing to return to. I began to know relief, to tell the truth; I longed to leave” (264). London once again offers “relief” from upheaval, just as it had done earlier.

The first part of this movement takes place on Isabella, which, as described above, offers an initial order that quickly gives way to intense disorder and chaos, ultimately sending Ralph to London, which becomes this form’s middle section. As already discussed, London offers the relief from Isabella that Ralph desires.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, however, there is also a sense of the impermanence to London’s order and calm. The order Ralph discovers at the hotel seems very much like an order imposed on London, as opposed to something that is inherent to or naturally a part of the site.<sup>60</sup> This suggests an artificiality to this mood of London.<sup>61</sup> Further undermining the supposed resolution

offered by London, Ralph explains his position in London (just pages before discussing the order and calmness of his life in the hotel in London), “Do not yet think that I speak calmly from the position of the secure, the physically safe, the man who has found refuge thousands of miles away in this suburban hotel . . .,” making it difficult to accept the happy ending offered by London (288). Rather, this suggests that the order and calm of London is just a pause before further chaos and movement, as with the brief periods of respite found previously in London and Isabella.

In addition, the narrative leaves the reader suspecting future action by Ralph. He explains that he no longer views himself as being “at the end of my active life” and goes on to explain, “Yet I feel that . . . I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action,” suggesting a future open for further movement and activity (300). Hamner also takes note of this, explaining, “In design . . . the ending of *The Mimic Men* is highly inconclusive. No one, least of all the narrator himself, knows where his life will lead henceforth” (61).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, so much of the order of London has been supplied by Ralph’s writing, which he has now completed, suggesting that as his writing goes so may the order of his life. Therefore, in this form London does not offer a resolution or ending for Ralph, but maintains that he has not escaped disorder, chaos, and movement. In these terms, the narrative’s end leaves Ralph hanging in the middle section of his form, perpetually drawn forward to future movement, so that the text frustrates the reading of its conclusion as a settling of Ralph’s condition.<sup>63</sup>

Understanding the text through these multiple melodramatic forms makes sense of the conflicting ways in which the sites affect Ralph. Much of the previous analysis of

this text attempts to locate Isabella as a site of pure chaos and disorder, with London as either the place in which Ralph can be saved from this or as just another site of chaos. This criticism fails to recognize that Isabella, as much as it is a site of chaos and disorder, is also the site Ralph flees to from the greater disorder of London and that London, while offering respite from Isabella, does not allow itself to be read as a space of pure order, as it remains the greater disorder. The text does not offer such simple spaces; rather, it creates spaces riddled with contradiction, so that London can simultaneously be the site of respite from Isabella and the site of the greater disorder. Notice, for example, Ralph's descriptions of himself on Isabella, as he at one moment describes himself as unable to obtain "intensity of emotion," only just pages later to describe the "drama and insecurity" of his political group and the ease with which the "emotion" of Isabella could resurface (38, 43, 45). Reading the text as melodrama insists that these oppositions within the spaces be recognized, as it allows sites to exist simultaneously as the chaos of the middle of a form and the resolution of the completion of a form.<sup>64</sup> The resulting confusion created by these spaces furthers Ralph's chaos, disorder, and uprooted-ness.

Ralph's multiple forms further interact with each other, destabilizing one another in the very spaces one expects, following the traditional melodramatic form, to find stability and rest. At the very moment that a site is established as the conclusion or home of one form (say, for example, the return to Isabella in the first form), it is simultaneously established as the middle of another form, hence frustrating the grounded-ness and resolution that the home is supposed to provide. The poles of the melodrama where one expects to find order, stability, et cetera – those spaces that are supposed to exist beyond the questioning and chaos of the middle of the melodrama – are made unstable and

thrown into question, so that settlement is constantly refused. As a result, Ralph is unable to establish himself in either Isabella or London, as, “[He] is suspended without vital roots in either environment” (Hamner 137). Ralph is constantly pushed into a “placelessness” and an insistence on movement, never able to settle anywhere, making movement his basic condition (Naipaul 184). His element is nowhere (but also everywhere), because his element is in the lines of movement.<sup>65</sup>

This insistence on movement as Ralph’s natural state is further supported by the text’s portrayal of, in Stephanie Jones’ terms, roots opening up onto routes, through his attempts to establish roots of his own. In her discussion of Naipaul’s *A Way in the World*, Jones notes the text’s “idea of beginning in migration; of a seeming absolute wholeness beginning in fragmentation; of roots always tracing back to routes . . .,” an analysis that seems equally applicable to Ralph’s position in *The Mimic Men* (91). Due to the destabilizing effects of his multiple forms, Ralph’s attempts to establish roots for himself by moving to and attempting to settle in Isabella and London result only in a continued insistence on movement, so that these attempts to root himself only create more routes of movement.<sup>66</sup> As a result, Ralph seems to be rooted, not in stasis, but in routes – in movement.<sup>67</sup>

Naipaul moves the understanding of the postcolonial immigrant closer to a state of sheer mobility, anticipating the movement of *The Namesake*. Whereas *The Satanic Verses*’ conclusion requires some teasing out of its instability, *The Mimic Men* presents this in a more open way, making the immigrant’s condition of movement apparent. Lahiri takes this condition of movement one step further with a text that begins and ends in

movement and constantly refuses settlement throughout, moving closer to an understanding of the postcolonial immigrant as postcolonial nomad.

### **The Namesake**

*The Namesake* is preoccupied with the movement through and in the melodramatic form, as motion characterizes the condition of the text's immigrant families. The story of the narrative begins in movement (though told in retrospect), as Ashoke's connection to movement and jettison into the middle section of the melodrama begins with the train crash. When the train derails, Ashoke is saved only as a result of his movement, "... Ashoke [raised] his hand . . . . 'Wait!' he heard a voice cry out. 'The fellow by that book. I saw him move'" (18). Ashoke's movement verifies and hence saves his life.<sup>68</sup> During the following year, as Ashoke is confined to a sedentary condition in bed, he suffers from the restless feeling of "his motionless body" (19, 20). While in this state, Ghosh's call to travel given to Ashoke prior to the train crash plays in his mind, pushing him to graduate from college and move to America as soon as he regains mobility, to live the life of an immigrant. Not only does this incident propel him into a condition of movement and the middle of the melodrama, but it remains with him, constantly reaffirming his commitment to motion.<sup>69</sup> When Ashima talks about returning home, the memories of Ghosh and the train return to Ashoke, refusing return and settlement, "He remembers suddenly about Ghosh . . . who had returned from England for his wife's sake. 'It is my greatest regret, coming back,' Ghosh had confessed to Ashoke, mere hours before he was killed," so that he maintains a dedication to a life of

movement (33).<sup>70</sup> Movement characterizes Ashoke's post-train crash life, never allowing him to resettle or replant himself.<sup>71</sup> Ashoke is then responsible for drawing Ashima into the melodrama's middle section, bringing her to America. Prior to her engagement, she lives contentedly, strongly rooted to her family and home, as a student (7). It is only through Ashoke that Ashima is un-rooted, taken from her home to live in Boston, where she is then brought into the life of unsettlement and chaos of the immigrant and, consequently, exposed to a condition of movement.

This condition of movement characterizes Ashima and Ashoke's lives as immigrants in the middle section of the melodrama. For instance, they move through several homes, eventually going to the suburbs, a movement that is so significant, that "For Ashima [it] feels more drastic, more distressing than the move from Calcutta to Cambridge had been" (49). While this moving around the Boston area might seem minor, it reflects a continual unsettlement and inability to remain stationary.<sup>72</sup> Further supporting this life of movement, the Ganguli family spends much of their free time driving in their car. They, for example, drive around "without destination in mind," just wandering; they experience New York City by driving through it; and they visit New Hampshire by driving up for a day, stopping only to take pictures from the side of the road (53, 126 – 7, 150).<sup>73</sup> In a way, movement becomes almost a natural state<sup>74</sup> – the way in which Ashima and Ashoke are most comfortable – reflecting their lack of roots and stability.<sup>75</sup>

With their place in the middle of the form and their dedication to movement established, the narrative spends the majority of its time investigating the conditions of the Gangulis in America – what life is like in this middle section. As a result of their

move to America, rather than being firmly planted in a home with family, culture, and history, they exist in a less stable, more free-floating, condition without any of these things to tie them down or provide stability. Their condition in America – much like the immigrants of the previous texts – is one without roots; it is an upheaval. Ashima and Ashoke exist at a remove from their families, orphaned, as even those who have not yet died are just as absent as those who have, “Even those family members who continue to live seem dead somehow, always invisible, impossible to touch. Voices on the phone . . . send chills down their spines. How could it be, still alive, still talking?” (63 – 4). In this way, to be an immigrant is to “live the lives of the extremely aged, those for whom everyone they once knew and loved is lost, those who survive and are consoled by memory alone,” cut away from their roots (63). Even when they do communicate with family, it is in the confused and hazy state of being half asleep and half awake and over a poor phone connection (and almost always only as a result of a death in the family – just a further separation from their roots), so that a gap remains between them (43 – 6, 63). This space between them and their families is a space in which family names and tradition are lost in an abyss, forever in transit, such as “the letter [with Gogol’s name], forever hovering somewhere between India and America . . .,” so that attempts to establish connections are futile and separation is further reinforced (56). Even their regular visits to Calcutta are experienced “like a dream,” so that, yet again, what remains of their roots can only be experienced in the muddled and shifting condition of the person caught between sleeping and waking (64).

Hence, life in America is unsettled and disturbed, lived almost like that of a traveler. As Ashima comes to understand:

For being a foreigner . . . is a sort of lifelong pregnancy – a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. (49 – 50)<sup>76</sup>

This is the condition of existing in the middle of the melodrama – a continual unsettlement, constantly going somewhere else, as it is a state of existence that is not the end in itself, but a middle ground, a space of waiting for what is supposed next to come. For the Gangulis, America is “haphazard” and a place in which “life seems so tentative and spare” (25, 6).<sup>77</sup> Accompanying this loss of order is melodrama’s muddling of distinctions, particularly between the private and the public.<sup>78</sup> This inability to obtain stability or a sense of permanence is why Ashima and Ashoke are unable to feel secure in their Massachusetts house, requiring an alarm system and possessing a “perpetual fear of disaster” – they know that, in their condition, nothing is secure (146, 148).

In attempts to deal with this haphazard condition of the middle, Ashima and Ashoke (and their Bengali friends) work hard to control the chaos, attempting to impose some kind of order and roots on the constantly shifting space of America. They do this, in large part, by attempting to impose distinctions, combating the constant muddling of their lives. This is made particularly evident with the situation of Gogol’s name, as they fight hard to continue the tradition of different public and private names despite their situation in America, which constantly attempts to conflate these separate spheres. They begin to recognize their losing battle when the name ‘Gogol’ appears at the top of his official immunization record, thinking to themselves, “. . . pet names aren’t meant to be made public in this way” (36). This distinction is eventually wholly lost when Gogol goes to school, where the principal makes ‘Gogol’ part of his school record, as she



“Lightly, in pencil . . . writes [Gogol] down on the registration form,” making ‘Gogol’ his official public name (59). With Sonia, Ashima and Ashoke learn their lesson, “The only way to avoid such confusion, they have concluded, is to do away with the pet name altogether . . . . For their daughter, good name and pet name are one and the same: Sonali . . .” (61 – 2). They even provide a nickname for her, Sonia, in a further attempt to avoid the confusion and loss of distinctions they experienced with Gogol.<sup>79</sup>

Ashima further fights her haphazard condition by attempting to create makeshift roots. Her three different address books, in which there are “phone numbers corresponding to no one, and the 800 numbers of all the airlines they’ve flown back and forth to Calcutta, and reservation numbers, and her ballpoint doodles as she was kept on hold,” reflect a chaotic life (159). Ashima holds on to these details, however, in an attempt to establish some sort of roots, “She prides herself on each entry in each volume, for together they form a record of all the Bengalis she and Ashoke have known over the years, all the people she has had the fortune to share rice with in a foreign land” (159 – 60). In this way, she creates a sort of mock lineage in an attempt to establish a sense of belonging and connectedness in a space that constantly refuses such rootedness. In a similar manner, Ashima and Ashoke attempt to create roots for themselves through ‘character’ family members – making Bengali friends in America stand-ins for actual family members.<sup>80</sup> These ‘characters’ fill the places of the friends and family they would have had in Calcutta, creating a mock culture. This system of ‘characters’ can never become anything more than this, however – actors playing roles in an attempt to cover over the instability and rootlessness of life in America.<sup>81</sup> These various attempts to establish permanent roots in America, therefore, are consistently denied.

In a move that makes *The Namesake* particularly interesting, Ashima and Ashoke not only take on this condition of the middle of the melodrama themselves, but they also pass it on to their children, reproducing the characteristics of being an immigrant.<sup>82</sup> This process is most evident with Gogol (and later also Sonia), who is taught this condition from his parents as they raise him in their instability. From as early as one year old, Gogol begins the migrations between Calcutta and Massachusetts, which offer regular disruption and upheaval of his formative life. The narrative describes the affects of this constant movement, “Gogol always finds the labels [indicating their travels to Calcutta] unsettling, the sight of them making him feel that his family doesn’t really live on Pemberton Road” – as if he does not really have a permanent home (79 – 80). Their parents later take Gogol and Sonia to Calcutta for eight months, disrupting them and furthering their unsettled-ness.<sup>83</sup> Even upon arriving home, “They still feel somehow in transit, still disconnected from their lives . . .,” for a period, so that this condition of movement is not easily shaken off (87). This movement is reflected on a smaller scale as well. For Gogol and Sonia, a weekend is spent traveling between states to visit Bengali friends and vacations are composed of sightseeing from the car. Even when Gogol goes to college, his parents force him to come home every other weekend, frustrating his attempts to establish even a certain amount of permanence at school (106). As a result, Gogol constantly lives the life of the traveler always moving back and forth, so that he cannot feel settled anywhere, as he is always in the process of heading somewhere else.

This movement is not the only way their parents reproduce unrootedness and instability in Gogol and Sonia. Much of Gogol’s and Sonia’s lives, for example, are

spent in the presence of the ‘characters’ and mock culture. Their parents’ reminders on Christmas day, “. . . Bengali friends were the closest thing they had to family . . .,” seems unconvincing, so that much of what surrounds their childhood has a feeling of speciousness to it (200 – 1). They experience the confusion of being woken in the night by deaths and their parents’ intense emotions, “. . . their parents screaming on the other side of thin bedroom walls. They stumble into their parents’ room, uncomprehending, embarrassed . . .,” which is certainly an unsettling feeling (63). Gogol experiences the opening up of his private self through the utilization of his pet name in the public realm, so that the use of his private name at times “[distresses] him physically, like the scratchy tag of a shirt he has been forced permanently to wear” (76).<sup>84</sup> The childhood of immigrants’ children, it seems, is plagued by an inability to settle, a feeling of unbelonging, and a sense that things are never quite right. In other words, the children inherit the condition of the middle of the melodrama from their parents, but in (what should be) their home.

As a result, the children take on many of the characteristics of their parents – of immigrants, people who are not at home. After college, Gogol feels the need to flee his parents, “. . . after four years in New Haven he didn’t want to move back to Massachusetts . . . . He didn’t want to go home on the weekends, to go with them to pujos and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world” (126). Rather than go home, he must continue to move, remaining distanced from his family and his history. Sonia, similarly, moves across the country to California. Ashima notices this, “She passes over two pages filled only with the addresses of her daughter, and then her son. She has given birth to vagabonds” (167).<sup>85</sup> It is only after Ashoke’s death that Gogol

begins to return home, but this movement – bringing him from New York to Massachusetts every weekend – only furthers his unsettlement, as he is never in the same place for even a week’s time, so that he continues to lack permanence.<sup>86</sup> Shortly after Ashoke’s death, when Ashima wants Gogol to establish some roots and find a wife, “. . . by now his mother wants him settled,” he is unable to do so, as he lacks the ability to stabilize himself (191).<sup>87</sup>

Gogol’s relationships highlight these adopted immigrant characteristics and his failed attempts to create roots and establish himself.<sup>88</sup> His relationship with Maxine provides an interesting juxtaposition to the life of his family, as the Ratliffs possess a life of stability and comfort in ways the Gangulis never could. Gogol is aware of this, noticing “that apart from their affluence, Gerald and Lydia are secure in a way his parents will never be” (141).<sup>89</sup> Gerald exhibits a sense of belonging to the earth, a sort of union with it, as “[he] spends most of his time in his vegetable garden, his nails permanently blackened from his careful cultivation of lettuce and herbs” (154). This is a noticeable contrast to the uprooted lives of the Gangulis, who only appreciate the earth as something to be moved across. Whereas, “The [Ratliff] family seems to possess every piece of the landscape, not only the house itself but every tree and blade of grass,” the Gangulis live more like nomads, never really belonging in any one place and always heading somewhere else, only ever in a location temporarily, and certainly never owning any land (154 – 5). As a result, whereas the Gangulis work hard to construct a certain amount of connection and belonging-ness in America – attempts that are never wholly successful –, for the Ratliffs such a way of life is had without effort or consciousness.

Because of these differences, much of what is important to Gogol and his family – maintaining distinctions, the need to constantly move, et cetera – are non-issues for the Ratliffs, suggesting that these things are only important for immigrants. For example, Maxine can shamelessly and happily move back in with her parents, never feeling Gogol’s or Moushumi’s need to run away, as she possesses “the gift of accepting her life,” of knowing that she belongs (132, 138). Furthermore, the Ratliff’s life has such stability that the muddling of distinctions or confusion, which the Gangulis fight so hard to ward off, is inconsequential.<sup>90</sup> Again, whereas for the Gangulis creating a life of stability by working hard to maintain distinctions and order demands a constant effort, without ever being fully obtainable, for the Ratliffs this way of life is simply possessed.

In an attempt to appropriate some of this stability, Gogol roots himself to Maxine’s life, moving in with Maxine and her parents and becoming practically unreachable by his own family.<sup>91</sup> Resulting from this attachment to Maxine and her family, however, Gogol notices, “And yet . . . it is dependence, not adulthood, he feels” (142). Rather than establishing his own roots, he attaches himself to the Ratliffs’, so that rather than forming independence he creates dependence on another family’s stability.

These wholly inassimilable ways of life are what eventually causes their break up. With Ashoke’s death, Gogol begins to assert a need to maintain public-private distinctions, as he requires a certain amount of privacy in these actions.<sup>92</sup> Maxine “[tolerates]” Gogol’s “need . . . to visit [his mother and Sonia], on weekends, without her” – the ‘tolerance’ suggesting, however, that she does not necessarily understand (188). When she learns that Gogol and his family are going to Calcutta without her she is

no longer able to tolerate his need for privacy – for this continued insistence on distinctions –, as this is just not something that makes sense in her world.

Gogol's relationship with Moushumi draws out the complete inability of immigrants' children to establish roots. Initially, Gogol and Moushumi get along well together, forming a connection on their mutual rootlessness and instability.<sup>93</sup> Their relationship breaks up, however, because of Moushumi's draw towards movement, frustrating their attempts to settle down. Their marriage appears to be offering the possibility of settling down. They, for example, host Thanksgiving for their families – a sure indicator that they are becoming more entrenched in their established lives as a married couple (270).<sup>94</sup> Moushumi responds to this settling, however, by experiencing a pull towards reasserting a life of movement and detachment. Even before Dimitri's appearance, Moushumi's itch to escape the established life with Gogol makes itself apparent. During their one-year anniversary dinner, Moushumi feels constantly unsettled and uncomfortable, a feeling she has experienced before, “. . . a part of her has a nagging urge, feels like standing up, leaving. She had done something similar a few weeks ago, sitting in the chair of an expensive hair salon, walking out after the apron had been tied behind her neck . . .” (251). Similarly, she looks forward to a life in which she will be forced to fly between New York and some remote place every week, “There is something appealing to her about this prospect, to make a clean start in a place where no one knows her, as she had done in Paris” (254). She is drawn to a life of instability and a site where she has no past, as this is the kind of life she has been taught.<sup>95</sup> Dimitri's appearance, then, offers Moushumi a way out of this more rooted life.<sup>96</sup> With their eventual break-up, Gogol's attempts at putting down roots via a relationship are once again denied, thus

returning him to his life of unsettlement – the condition of the middle of the melodrama that seems just as inescapable for the children of immigrants as the immigrants themselves.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to this interest in reproduction, *The Namesake* provides a unique example of melodrama through its alteration of the typical ending. Whereas the other texts examined in this paper (and the traditional melodrama, in general) have attempted to bring about a closedness, a resolution, to the condition of the middle section of the melodrama, this text does not. For Chamcha there is the return to India and for Ralph there is exile in London, though both narratives suggest the strong possibility for future movement. Ashima, however, who recognizes that ‘home,’ Calcutta, is also foreign and that Massachusetts, despite always remaining foreign, is also ‘home,’ refuses this choice, opting instead for a life of movement between Calcutta and America, possessing a home of her own in neither and, while in America, moving between Gogol, Sonia, and friends. Ashima, in other words, denies the melodrama’s ending, providing the text with a sort of ‘non-ending ending’ – leaving the open-ended-ness and irresolution of the middle section, feelings that are enhanced because they frustrate melodrama’s intense desire to make a closed system, to offer a sense of finality. She, rather than fighting the condition of rootlessness and instability, embraces it, accepting the life of the person constantly on the move, “True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere,” living like a nomad (276). This, the suggestion seems to be, is the best way of life available to the immigrant – not fighting to establish deep roots and an established nature, constantly at war with the self or the place

trying to impose some ideal way of life, but rather accepting the nomad's life, the open-ended-ness of it, the irresolution of it, and the movement of it.<sup>98</sup>

This leaves postcolonial thought looking to the future, particularly in terms of the postcolonial immigrant. Does Ashima's embrace of a life of movement – of the nomad – mark a change in the way the immigrant's position is to be understood? Her ending – which is not really an ending, but a future of movement – offers a way out of the either-or dualism, faced by Chamcha and Ralph, of return 'home' or exile. Rather than constantly fighting rootlessness, by attempting to entrench oneself in a position, it provides a way to live with it. Perhaps, the suggestion is that the metaphor of 'roots' no longer provides the appropriate way to think the immigrant's place – no, not place, but space. This could be a freeing move for the postcolonial immigrant; a way out of a system established by the colonizers – a way out of 'establishments,' in general. In a sense, this is taking *The Satanic Verses*' questioning of postcolonialism's ability to stop thinking of itself in terms of the colonizers to the extreme – to stop thinking of oneself in terms of a situation that he/she has been put into by the colonizers and to move in a wholly new direction. What would life be like in this situation, if one willingly adopted an existence dedicated to always already heading somewhere else? It would be to get away from attempts (particularly 'Western' attempts) at resisting change, at always trying to be 'solid' and 'predictable' (as if these are commendable qualities?). It would be to drastically re-think one's space in the world. It would be, following Aravamudan's description of the devil as a shifty wanderer, to live like the devil<sup>99</sup> – accepting another version of oneself, a



version opened up by the play of the middle of the melodrama, which revealed this way of life as an option, in the first place. Perhaps, the postcolonial immigrant should strive to be the devil.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, this provides yet another geographic space for the genre, examining the movement from Calcutta to America (in particular, the Northeast Coast).

<sup>2</sup> As Thomas Elsaesser notes, in "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," melodrama's, "significance lies in the structure . . . of the action" (69).

<sup>3</sup> This is partly what distinguishes the melodramatic form from that of the traditional novel, which often also moves from stability to chaos and back to stability.

<sup>4</sup> Notice the parallels between the movement of the postcolonial immigrant and the melodramatic form, enabling the genre's ability to play with the field's interests. The immigrant's form can be represented:

Home → Away → Home

with initial stability in the first stage, chaos and upheaval in the middle stage accompanying travel to a Western country, and a return to stability in the final stage with the return home. Melodrama's form offers a synthesis of this movement. Hence, melodrama provides the ideal form for studying the immigrant narrative's interest in movement – examining the affects of movement on the individual and how he/she is (or is not) able to deal with this situation – in a way that no previous genre has been able to.

<sup>5</sup> This revisionism may appear to contradict melodrama's conservatism. However, even if the status quo is returned to at the end, the middle section, at the very least, allows for the recognition of the presence of alternate versions. In addition, the ambiguous ending allows for the suggestion that these versions may reappear; that they have not been permanently suppressed. Furthermore, melodrama can deviate from this typical conservative form and, rather than re-imposing standards at the conclusion, it can allow for the placement of new standards or versions.

<sup>6</sup> In a review of *Brick Lane* (as well as Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*), Pankaj Mishra describes Nazneen's situation as a newly arrived immigrant in London, "Ali set herself a difficult task in choosing as her main protagonist someone whose English consists of three words, 'sorry,' and 'thank you' . . . . Ali compensates . . . with sharp perceptions of [Nazneen's] dreary physical world and of the weird white people who live in it" (42). Here is an obvious example of the inefficiencies of 'official' language to the postcolonial subject, who then resorts to the physical world to make meaning and express what could otherwise not be expressed.

<sup>7</sup> As described by Frank Rahill in his study of the birth and growth of the melodrama in theater, *The World of Melodrama*.

<sup>8</sup> Notice that postcolonial literature displays an investment in the significance of drama. For instance, *The Mimic Men* discusses, throughout the narrative, the prevalence and importance of the dramatic in the life of the postcolonial subject. Similarly, Mishra captures the importance of drama in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*:

Hasina rebelled early against her fate, but her choices have not worked out well. She elopes with a young man who turns out to be unstable and violent. She works at a garment factory in Dhaka, and is raped by an elderly benefactor, before being forced by poverty into prostitution. Her story may sound a bit too action-packed and lurid [melodramatic?], but then life in places like Dhaka still tends to melodramatic brutality . . .

. . . (42)

<sup>9</sup> As a side-note, it might be very interesting to study the proliferation (was there one? if so, how did it manifest itself? etc.) of melodrama in post-9/11 society.

<sup>10</sup> For example: it was born out of the French Revolution (Brooks 14 – 5); it encouraged the growth of socialism during the 1830's and 40's in France and later in England (Rahill 156 – 7); it was utilized during the 1950's in American film (i.e.: the Korean Conflict, the Cold War, nuclear proliferation, the sanctity of the family, gender roles, et cetera) (Landy 21); and it was prevalent in the colonial states of Australia and Ireland (Hays and Nikolopoulou x; Rahill 191).

<sup>11</sup> From the very beginning, when Gibreel sings, "To be born again . . . first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji!" music is intertwined within the text, becoming the very device that saves the two men from their fall (3). This use of music to actually drive the narrative forward exemplifies its importance to the text. The text describes the ability of musical language, "To name the unnamable, to point at frauds," so that it is also utilized to help the narrative examine reality by pushing beyond the surface (100).

<sup>12</sup> According to Aravamudan, satire, "[mounts] tremendous symbolic violence by laying bare the status quo . . .," aiding melodrama's project of questioning this very status quo (17).

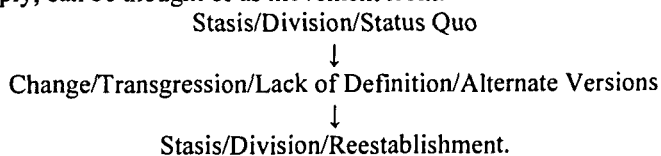
<sup>13</sup> There is a sense that everything in this text is loaded with meaning – nothing means nothing. For example: Chamcha's tree of life (Rushdie 45); Sri Srinivas' FP dolls, representing the layers of reality (231); Mirza Saeed's, "station wagon of skepticism" (495); and the importance attached to the kitsch, as

with Alleluia's "surrogate Himalayas" (461). These seemingly simple objects carry significance beyond what their surface would typically suggest, so that a station wagon is no longer just a station wagon but a purveyor of the skepticism harbored inside of it. Just as Gibreel learns to read "the mysteries of the [lunch] runners' coding system, black swastika red circle yellow slash dot," so, too, must this text be deciphered (18).

<sup>14</sup> The narrator becomes an active character in the plot, "Higher Powers had taken an interest . . . (I am, of course, speaking of myself)," and later actually takes shape to speak with Gibreel (Rushdie 137, 328 – 30). The narrator's interruptions and questions act as mechanisms, drawing the reader to interrogate the actions of the narrative. Spivak notes this kind of reaction to the narrator's role, making her question, "Does this make the author less reliable or more? Does this make the voice less real or more?" so that the role of the active narrator seems to be to aid in throwing everything into question (225).

<sup>15</sup> Summing up its dramatic nature, the text actually refers to the action of its narrative as a "universe of soap operas" (Rushdie 168). These characteristics are essential for driving the plot and exposing the layered nature of the text's reality. For instance, Gibreel flies to London because of his love for Alleluia, enacting his immigrant movement. With this investment in the dramatic understood, Chamcha's comment at the beginning of "The Angel Azrael" section, "It all boiled down to love," which confounds the reader who wants to be able to claim that this text is about so much more, can be better understood (411). It is all about love; the text is all about drama as a means of gaining access to the layered reality and understanding its processes, movements, and changes.

<sup>16</sup> This form, most simply, can be thought of as movement from:



This movement, for example, characterizes Chamcha's life:

Childhood in India → Adolescence and adulthood in England → Return to India.

Similarly, Gibreel follows his own melodrama:

Child- and adulthood in India → Move to England → Return to India and death.

In addition to these meta-melodramas that encompass the entire text, there are smaller melodramas (mini-melodramas), which occur throughout the narrative. There is, for example, Mahound's movement:

Jahilia → Migrates to Yathrib → Returns home to Jahilia.

Mahound's encounters with the archangel seem to suggest that, to some extent, these messages come from Mahound, who comments that it feels as if the messages come from within him, suggesting a mini-melodrama of God's messages:

Originating in Mahound → Traveling through Gibreel → Returning to Mahound as the word of God (108).

Mirza Saeed undergoes a mini-melodrama of private emotions:

He wakes up thinking that he is very in love with his wife, believing, "a separation was unthinkable," →

Upon seeing Ayesha his feelings change, as he "was stricken . . . by what seemed too rich and deep a

sensation to be called by the crude name, lust," so that his love for his wife and his emotions become

uncertain and are called into question → These feelings settle down, as he reaffirms his love for his wife,

"The overwhelming fondness he had felt at dawn [for his wife] returned" (225, 7).

Abstract ideas, such as the process of evil, are described as going through this movement:

"There is the moment before evil [→]; then the moment of [→]; then the time after" (453).

There are even simpler, three-word movements: ". . . ass. Arse. Ass" (187); Muhammad Sufyan's eyes go, "shut open shut" (251); and, "London, Londres, London" (438).

<sup>17</sup> In other words, if what presents itself on the surface of reality is all that exists, there would be nothing to be thrown up in the air and questioned.

<sup>18</sup> This presence of a layered reality is again referred to when Gibreel becomes aware of "two realities, this world and another that was also right there, visible but unseen" (361). The underneath is "right there" – "unseen" because it exists beneath the surface that is obtainable by the eye, but "visible" in its influence.

Note that "A City Visible but Unseen" is also the title of the section.

<sup>19</sup> For example: Mirza Saeed "[allows] Ayesha's supernaturalism to infect him" (515); Alleluia Cone is "infected by Everest" (314); and geographical sites take on the ability to infect people, "the poison of this devil-island [England] had infected [Hind's] baby girls . . ." (258).

<sup>20</sup> Other recurring subjects that suggest the importance of what goes on beneath the surface include: Babies and pregnancies, in which something quite literally grows beneath the surface; and heart imagery, which functions both by pointing to the importance of the organ beneath a person's surface and by representing a person's interior emotions. The persistence of this type of imagery throughout the text displays an investment in the multi-layered reality of melodrama.

<sup>21</sup> The text suggests that this is something that is endemic to many migrants, not just Chamcha, explaining, "most migrants learn, and can become disguises" (49).

<sup>22</sup> This is not to suggest that English-ness does not become a part of him in a more substantial way (remember the bony kipper), only that these are examples of a more constructed and artificial surface.

<sup>23</sup> In the first section of the melodrama, Gibreel appears to have evil at his surface, "Gibreel's exhalations, those ochre clouds of sulphur 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," so that he now becomes the opposite of this, challenging his previous status quo (Rushdie 13).

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, dreams present another way for history to reemerge. Before Gibreel becomes a famous actor, he reads about the events that form his dreams of the Mahound, Ayesha, Return to Jahilia, and The Parting of the Arabian Sea sections of the text, so that these events from his past come to coexist with his present self (24). This also allows for these (semi-) historical events of the past to coexist with the present time period, so that, in yet another way, history gathers onto a single plane.

<sup>25</sup> This boundary is further questioned when the two states actually affect each other, "[R]ising before dawn with a bad dream souring [Mirza Saeed's] mouth . . . He had been reading Nietzsche the night before . . . he was angry with himself for being so foolish in his choice of bedside reading matter" (Rushdie 223). The reading material of Mirza Saeed's waking-life dictates the substance of his dream and his dreaming-life affects his awakened self, by "souring his mouth," blurring the two – no longer so distinct – states.

<sup>26</sup> This loss of distinction is evidenced in many other ways, as well. For example: the difference between the concrete and abstract is blurred, "Allie had a way of switching from the concrete to the abstract, a trope so casually achieved as to leave the listener half-wondering if she knew the difference between the two; or, very often, unsure as to whether, finally, such a difference could be said to exist" (314); Aravamudan notes the loss of distinction in relation to religion, "Diabolical and divine are mutually constitutive but frequently indistinguishable" (14); and sex is understood as bringing a person's distinctions and boundaries into question, "the blurring of the boundaries of the self, the unbuttoning, until you were open from your adam's-apple to your crotch" (Rushdie 324). This loss of the distinctions of self, as seen here through sex, recurs throughout the text: for Gibreel, "the boundary separating the performer and his roles had long ago ceased to exist" (17); the Jahilian prostitutes, likewise, develop confused senses of their selves and Baal sees their edges blur, when they take on the appearance of Mahound's wives (395); and during the fall from *Bostan*, Gibreel and Chamcha lose their distinctions, blending with one another, forming, "Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha" (5).

<sup>27</sup> In fact, this characteristic of England's landscape is precisely what Gibreel blames as the cause of the country's problems:

No more of these England-induced ambiguities . . . Clarity, clarity, at all costs clarity! . . .  
 . O most slippery, most devilish of cities! – In which such stark, imperative oppositions  
 were drowned beneath an endless drizzle of greys . . . . [T]he trouble with the English  
 was their . . . *weather*. Gibreel Farishta . . . formed the opinion that the moral fuzziness  
 of the English was meteorologically induced. 'When the day is not warmer than the night  
 . . . when the light is not brighter than the dark, when the land is not drier than the sea,  
 then clearly a people will lose the power to make distinctions, and commence to see  
 everything – from political parties to sexual partners to religious beliefs – as much-the-  
 same, nothing-to-choose, give-or-take. . . . Gibreel enumerated the benefits of the  
 proposed metamorphosis of London into a tropical city: increased moral definition . . . .  
 (364 – 5)

The problems of the city lie in its lack of distinctions, as everything blends and nothing can be certain. Like the middle section of the melodrama, it lacks definition.

<sup>28</sup> The issue of Gibreel's sanity, which is questioned throughout the text, can be made sense of through these characteristics of the middle of the melodrama. 'Insanity' appears to be nothing more than the labeling of the mechanisms of the middle section of melodrama, with a mental breakdown as a

manifestation of the multiple layers and lack of distinction. Gibreel, for example, is called crazy when talking to Rekha's ghost and when his dream-life blends with his waking-life (206, 446). This lack of distinction is also evidenced in Gibreel's speech before he kills himself (558). As Gibreel says, "sickness is like something like this" – sickness is like this lack of distinction of the middle of melodrama (558). Understanding Gibreel's psychosis in this way explains his suicide, "I told you a long time back . . . 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" (560). In other words, Gibreel kills himself because he is unable to permanently end the middle section of his melodrama; he is unable to re-institute solid boundaries in his life.

<sup>29</sup> This explains the butterfly imagery throughout the text, which represents change. When Ayesha is surrounded by and digesting butterflies, she possesses a mutable self, as the butterflies become part of her (225). Similarly, the recurrence of cocoon imagery represents the gestation period of the middle of the melodrama; for example, when Chamcha lives in "that cocoon-den in which he was being – or so he believed – restored to his former self" (427).

<sup>30</sup> This constant potential for reconfiguration accounts for the text's inability to recognize anything as definite or certain. This explains the text's constant waffling: "And, or, maybe" (32); "*it was and it was not so*, as the old stories used to say, *it happened and it never did*" (35); and ". . . may or may not . . ." (70).

<sup>31</sup> For example, in reference to his rescinded Satanic Verses, Mahound thinks to himself, "they will survive in just one or two unreliable collections of old traditions and orthodox interpreters will try and unwrite their story" (126). In other words, they will be buried beneath the 'Official Truth' that Islam wants to portray, due to their scarce replication and unreliability. Notice that the way in which Islam's 'Official Truth' is constructed seems remarkably similar to the way in which the 'Truth' of Chamcha's events in the police van is constructed.

<sup>32</sup> Notice that this passage, typically used to support a magical realism reading of the text, can actually be understood in terms of melodrama.

<sup>33</sup> These shifting identities and losses of agency are reflected through Chamcha's various name changes. Most notably, there is the melodramatic movement:

Salahuddin Chamchawala → Saladin Chamcha → Salahuddin Chamchawala

This suggests a change of name for every lounge of self.

<sup>34</sup> This description of England as a waiting lounge recalls the quote above, from *The Lonely Lonaoners*.

<sup>35</sup> Aravamudan similarly understands the narrative's conclusion in terms of repression, "This nagging doubt [of the devil] suggests itself through the book's closing lines, which playfully re-emphasize the repression of the diabolical rather than its seeming expulsion from Chamcha's personality" (15).

<sup>36</sup> This issue suggests a larger question: Can the postcolonial subject 'go home;' which is to say: Can the postcolonial cultures stop feeling the need to understand themselves in the terms of the colonizers? In this sense, Chamcha's journey is about more than his physical ability to relocate from England to India; it is about Chamcha's and, more broadly, all postcolonial subjects' ability to turn their focus from the colonizers to their own cultures. The text's answer, just like the answer to Chamcha's ability to go home, is 'Yes,' at least for the moment. Perhaps, then, the next question is how to remain 'home.' This is to say, how does one remain truly *postcolonial* – with the *post* signifying that this is a state *after* the English, *after* the colonizers' ability to create the colonized, *after* the postcolonial cultures' tendency to look outside of themselves in attempts to understand themselves. Perhaps, this is not even really the appropriate question; rather, this is actually an attempt to go beyond the term 'postcolonial' all together, as the 'colonial' will always signify a certain attachment to the colonizers. The question, then, is what comes after postcolonialism.

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps, the most obvious utilization of masks and surfaces in the text can be found with the islanders who constantly create 'characters' for themselves, as Ralph refers to them as "mimic men of the New World" (Naipaul 175). Ralph's character of the 'dandy' is the most prevalent 'character' of the narrative. This layered understanding of reality takes on a particular significance with Ralph's many secrets, "But observe how weighted down I was with secrets: the secret of my father . . . , the secret of that word wife, the secret of my name. And to this was added a secret which overrode them all. It was the secret of being 'marked'. . . . So many secrets! I longed to be rid of them all," which weigh heavy on him from a place tucked away below the surface, hiding but still impacting him (114). This influence of layers beneath the surface is again witnessed when Ralph describes the beginning of his writing of the memoirs, at which time the memory of his first snow, "[forced] itself to the surface," from a place inside, where it had remained tucked away until brought about through writing (292).



<sup>38</sup> For example, the ability to maintain the distinction between private and public is challenged, throughout the narrative. This is most obvious with the schoolchildren of Isabella, who work to make the realm of school “a private hemisphere,” keeping all else out, though the distinction is eventually entirely eliminated, unable to maintain itself (115). Furthermore, Ralph’s fear of his house on Isabella falling down is the fear of this loss of distinctions – of the inability to maintain the imposed separation between the public and private (175, 184).

<sup>39</sup> The most obvious example of this is the various stories that surround the creation and existence of Gurudeva’s movement: there is Ralph’s version of how the movement begins; there is the version of the “first reports that came to the street;” and there is the ‘official’ history book version of the events, all of which co-exist and wrest for dominance (150 – 5, 168 – 9).

<sup>40</sup> There are, for example, the “pidgin” languages that Ralph utilizes with the women he meets in London and Oxford (53). The text utilizes language to create alternate forms of communication in a more complex manner, as well. For example, there are the (almost) nonsense phrases that take on loaded meanings in Isabellan society, “But of course, as you know, the Niger is a tributary of that Seine,” and, “. . . whitey-pokey” (213). By assigning significance to these nonsense phrases the text creates an alternate language out of the ‘official’ English language. An example of the utilization of landscape to create meaning can be found when Ralph suggests the necessity of understanding the transitory and shifting nature of sand to understand his near fatal situation with Dalip, “Whence had that mood of the previous minutes come? The sea and the sand” (196). As a result, the landscape becomes a means, not only for expression, but also for actually creating situations, so that it must be ‘read’ just as language is read to understand a situation.

<sup>41</sup> These forms are:

Isabella → London → Isabella [→ London]

London → Isabella → London

Isabella → London → \_\_\_\_\_

\* These arrows, which represent the movement from one location to another, are sites of pure movement (for example: a boat, a plane, a stopover in Europe, et cetera).

<sup>42</sup> One might ask what it means that these melodramatic forms, which offer a sort of order to Ralph’s actions, are provided to the reader through Ralph’s re-telling of the events, suggesting the possibility of alteration to the events, so that the forms could have been imposed only in retrospect by a man who very much longs for order. This question certainly brings up a whole host of issues, including the reliability of Ralph’s storytelling, which I cannot appropriately examine here. I do, however, think this may be a worthwhile question to pursue.

<sup>43</sup> Whereas so much of the form and movement of *The Satanic Verses* is bound up with a desire for repression and locating the forces that are going to actively create the surface Ralph’s movements are concerned with obtaining order. Boxill comments on this, noting, “[Ralph’s] life . . . has . . . been dedicated fairly relentlessly to a search for order” (55). This aim is not wholly different from that of repression, as they are both attempts to calm down the all-up-in-the-air characteristic of the middle section.

<sup>44</sup> The form, therefore, looks like this: Isabella → London → Isabella → [London].

<sup>45</sup> In addition, other critics have noted Isabella’s “. . . absence of [a] regional, historical consciousness . . .,” it’s “unnatural bringing together of peoples . . .,” and its “‘fragmented’ and ‘inorganic’” nature as causes for Ralph’s growing sense of disorder and impermanence (Thieme 513; Weiss 102, 99).

<sup>46</sup> Which, interestingly, begins with a car-ride characterized by frantic and out-of-control movement

<sup>47</sup> Notice, also, that Ralph’s disorder and movement is often characterized in terms of growing drama – affairs, marriage, death, prostitutes, et cetera. This will also hold true in the subsequent periods of chaos, as Ralph experiences the drama of his marriage coming to an end, the drama of being rich, and the drama of politics, so that drama is also an essential aspect to Ralph’s movement and changes.

<sup>48</sup> There is a sense that Ralph’s return is the expected behavior of the postcolonial immigrant. His prodigal cycle is actually predicted prior to his departure, perhaps suggesting the necessity of return and, hence, melodrama’s cycle. In his conversations with Mr. Deschampsneufs and, shortly afterwards, Mr. Deschampsneufs’ friend, both men talk of Ralph’s return as an inevitability (204 – 5, 213). Ralph, similarly, hints at his return to Isabella, as he is sailing to London, “Even as I was formulating my resolve to escape, there began that series of events which, while sharpening my desire to get away, yet rooted me more firmly to the locality where accident had placed me,” as if his return – the completion of the form – is assumed before he leaves (142).

<sup>49</sup> It is also this exile that is responsible for bringing about Ralph's other forms, as it continues Ralph's back and forth movement beyond this initial cycle.

<sup>50</sup> This cycle looks like this: London → Isabella → London.

<sup>51</sup> In his analysis of *The Mimic Men*, Timothy Weiss recognizes this re-shifting of Ralph's way of viewing the world:

[Ralph] rejects the metropolis; in his mind the marginal colony now becomes the center, home, and he eventually returns to Isabella with his bride. . . . From one perspective, his reverie romanticizes the West Indies . . . , thus inverting the usual colonial-metropolis dualism in which the metropolis is viewed as the center of the real world. (94, 98)

<sup>52</sup> Bruce King, in his commentary on the text, explains that the houses Ralph models his house on are known for "their hierarchical order," further supporting the understanding of the house as an attempt to instill order (82).

<sup>53</sup> Even in retrospect, this period is marked by confusion, "Everyone's motives remain unclear, and I doubt whether an impartial commission of inquiry will establish more than confusion, leading cloudily to a resolution of some sort," resulting in a sort of pure, "formlessness," an inability to be grasped or understood, of the middle of the melodrama (261, 292).

<sup>54</sup> Ralph comments further on this return, "Then I saw that my return to Isabella was not only unnecessary, it was even more irresponsible than my departure had been" (287). This seems to imply a responsibility of return or maybe even of movement in general; perhaps, suggesting an ethics of melodrama's movement and form?

<sup>55</sup> This creates a sort of mini-melodrama during Ralph's time on Isabella, which goes from: Feelings of not belonging, upon his initial arrival to Isabella → The suppression of these feelings, during much of his time on the island → The eventual complete resurfacing of these feelings.

<sup>56</sup> The hotel, for example, creates a hierarchy, as witnessed through the importance placed on seating at the Christmas party table, which further establishes order and regularity between its tenants.

<sup>57</sup> This is what allows Ralph to describe the middle section as a period in "parenthesis," because it is a stage that is closed off and "put in its place," sanctioned off from his current state (13).

<sup>58</sup> This form looks like: Isabella → London → \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, while in London for the delegation, Ralph is able to "re-create the city as show," to walk through it as if it is new to him, as if he is a "tourist," suggesting a newness to the city, distinguishing it from his previous experiences there (267).

<sup>60</sup> Several analyses of the text have also noted this aspect of the conclusion: "The writing of the memoir . . . appears finally to represent no more than an artificial ordering of experience . . ." and, "Ralph eventually achieves a measure of calmness [through writing], but his final solution is fraught with artificiality" (Thieme 517; Hamner 141).

<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, one should keep in mind that London remains the site of "the greater disorder," – a description of the city made by Ralph from the position of this achieved order in London and one that he never rescinds but only reinforces – and the place that Ralph cannot belong or establish roots (Naipaul 11, 13).

<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Selwyn Cudjoe, in *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading*, notes, "His eventual residence in London is . . . a reflection of his unresolved (and somewhat unhealthy) relationship with the island" – perhaps suggesting another return to Isabella to work out this unresolved and, hence, still lingering relationship (111)?

<sup>63</sup> Movement, which is the fundamental aspect of Ralph's forms (his movement through the forms), is not limited to these cycles, but is endemic to the narrative. The movement is not just about Ralph, but encompasses the entire text, so that movement is not just a Ralph-, Male-, Isabellan-, Islander-, New World-, Indian-, or postcolonial subject-story. Sandra, for example, undergoes a melodramatic cycle of her own, beginning in London, moving to Isabella, and finally leaving Isabella. Similarly, Browne's movement follows a form very similar to Ralph's, going from childhood on Isabella, to London as a student, and later returning to Isabella where he takes on his political career. Beyond these other forms, there are many characters or things that are constantly in motion. There is, for example, the movement of the text's characters: the Sunday drive that Ralph and his family take together (145 – 7); Cecil, who adopts a kind of frenzied movement, "Movement was one of Cecil's ideas of fun" (190); the group of Ralph's fellow students who all plan to move away from Isabella and even Eden, who cannot leave, devotes himself "to studying the movements of ships and passengers . . ." (200); Browne's forced deportations, driving

people away from the island (254); and there is Stella, who, during sex “was all motion . . . [and] frenzied . . .” (276, 277). Similarly, events and political actions are described as possessing a certain kind of movement: events in the colonies are “quick” and “the turnover of leaders rapid” (10); Gurudeva establishes and carries on “an eccentric lower-class movement . . .” (152); and Ralph’s political group forms a “movement . . .” (227). Movement is even reflected through history, objects, and the landscape: Ralph refers to the movement of Columbus, “I thought of Columbus as hour after hour, day after day . . . we moved through that immense ocean” (214); an airplane is “the cinematic symbol” for movement (219); the beach has a movement, “On the beach itself, the banks of these channels, the tide now rising, were continually undermined, fell off in vertical sections . . .” (133); and the trees that wash up on Isabella’s shore represent the movement from “some other island or continent” (193). This all goes to suggest the importance of movement to the text, as nothing seems able to escape movement’s pull.

<sup>64</sup> Most notably, Isabella simultaneously acts as the final stage, middle stage, and concluding stage through the different forms of the melodrama, recognizing the space’s ability to offer respite and chaos for Ralph.

<sup>65</sup> One might argue against the notion that Ralph is a character of movement, suggesting that he is too passive to be considered an agent making the conscious decision of movement, instead merely allowing himself to drift ahead. However, I would suggest that, although he is passive, this is because of his rootlessness and actually results in a commitment to continual movement into the future. He is not conservative, as he can never be seen to try to hold onto a status quo, and he does not resist where his path leads him, as, for example, he fights Deschampsneufs, not because Ralph particularly wants to, but because this is where the situation leads him. Another, albeit, extreme example of this is found in the situation on the beach with Dalip and Cecil. Although Ralph has the opportunity to take or hide the gun, so as to prevent his possible death, he does not, instead allowing his future to progress, not even fighting to hold onto the status quo of his condition of being alive. Ralph acts similarly in later situations, including his marriage and his political career, as he constantly exhibits a “disinclination to resist where life leads him” (Greenberg 222). Though Ralph may not exhibit much agency of his own, he has made a commitment to accept movement into the future. Though this is certainly a paradoxical sort of movement, it does suggest a commitment to the condition of movement.

<sup>66</sup> This is also evidenced in terms of his historical roots. Ralph spends much of his childhood attempting to identify with the ancient Aryans, explaining, “I lived a secret life in a world . . . among nomads on horseback, daily pitching my tent . . .” (Naipaul 118). Furthermore, upon his arrival with Sandra to Isabella, Ralph explains his mother’s dramatic action as “an act of piety towards the past, towards ancient unknown wanderings in another continent,” so that even his family’s actions can be traced back to the nomadic Aryans (68). In *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie*, Michael Gorra explains, “Singh tries to link his own journey to the past . . . , looking . . . to a time when his forebears had not yet become a settled people, when that wandering had seemed not futile but natural, not the mark of a ‘shipwreck’ but simply a part of who one was,” so that Ralph’s attempts to ground himself in his history open up a heritage of movement and destabilization (70).

<sup>67</sup> Understanding *The Mimic Men* as melodrama allows Ralph’s status as nomad to be understood, not as a result of existing in a transplanted New World island as most of the analysis of this text and Naipaul’s work in general suggests, but as reflective of an issue that is much broader and wide ranging – that of being a postcolonial immigrant or, perhaps, even of just existing in a postcolonial society. Weiss, for example, explains, “Singh’s restlessness is a Caribbean or West Indian restlessness, and Singh’s malaise is a Caribbean or West Indian malaise” (99). Reading *The Mimic Men* as melodrama, however, understands the situation in a larger context, making this an issue of the postcolonial immigrant in general. As discussed in the analysis of Ralph’s movement through the forms, the transplanted nature, impurity, and disorder of Isabella are certainly major causes for his instability on Isabella. However, this does not explain his periods of instability in London or his periods of stability on Isabella. Ralph’s situation is very much comparable to Chamcha’s, who – despite originating in the much more stable (at least geographically speaking) India –, following a period of stability, goes through the chaos of the middle of the melodrama, until finally returning to India, where he successfully represses and re-orders the messiness of the middle section. One could easily imagine, however, a situation like Ralph’s exile arising for Chamcha, as there is the suggestion that Chamcha’s resolution could very easily give way to a resurfacing of all those repressed issues and forces of the middle section, leading to further instability and movement out of India. The potential for future disorder and movement is present for both Chamcha and Ralph. Therefore, this

insistence of disorder and movement that leads to the nomadic situation, rather than being the condition of a relatively small area in the Caribbean, is what it means to be a postcolonial immigrant in general.

*The Mimic Men* even suggests the possibility that this situation of instability and movement can be extended further to include the whole of the postcolonial society – both ex-colony and ex-empire. As discussed, movement and instability characterize nearly all the characters and cultures of this text. So many of Ralph's schoolmates from Isabella lead a future of movement, regardless of their heritage. Even those born and raised in England are caught in the text's movement – Sandra and Stella. The suggestion seems to be that this situation of movement and instability – the opening up of roots onto routes – that is charted through melodrama's form is something that touches both colonies and empires. This is a condition that extends beyond the Caribbean and the ex-colonies, implicating cultures and people of the world.

<sup>68</sup> There is a sense that movement constitutes life, hence, the line, "He was born twice in India, and then a third time, in America" (21). Significant movement (in a way not so dissimilar from Gibreel and Chamcha) gives birth to new Ashokes – he is reborn in the movement of the train crash and then he is again reborn in his movement to America. Opposite this, notice that the room Gogol is taken to in the hospital, after his father's death, is marked by a lack of movement, "There is little commotion, no doctors or nurses scurrying down the halls" (171). In a building full of motion and commotion, the place associated with Ashoke's death noticeably lacks this very movement. Similarly, the train crash, a sudden halt in movement, brings death for so many (and near-death for Ashoke).

<sup>69</sup> The memories, for example, "lurk around a corner," "hover by his shoulder," and come to him in his sleep, causing, "muffled screams" (20 – 21, 29).

<sup>70</sup> In addition to these memories, Gogol (his son) remains a constant reminder of, not necessarily the incident, but the need to remain in motion, which is what Ashoke means when he tells Gogol, "You remind me of everything that followed [the train crash]" (124). Gogol reminds him of the movement that saved his life and the condition of movement – of being alive – he has since dedicated himself to.

<sup>71</sup> He does not even settle down in death, as his ashes are scattered in the Ganges.

<sup>72</sup> In addition, this movement through apartments and house, though not unusual in America, is very likely significantly more movement than they would have experienced, had they remained in Bengal.

<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the memory Gogol has of a family trip to Cape Cod is of him and his father walking as far as the land stretching into the water will allow, his father saying afterwards, "Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go," so that vacations are, not time for rest, but an outlet for more movement (187).

<sup>74</sup> Notice, for example, that Ashoke can only have the discussion of the meaning of Gogol's name while in the car, first while driving and, once they reach the house, remaining in the car, attached to a symbol of movement (122 – 4). In addition, Ashima and Ashoke treat traveling and movement respect, as if occupying a sacred space in their lives. Gogol notes, ". . . for his parents, the act of travel is never regarded casually, that even the most ordinary of journeys is seen off and greeted at either end" (144). Movement is made into an event, always surrounded by a certain amount of fan-fair, never taken for an insignificant endeavor, as these are people who know what movement can mean.

<sup>75</sup> Mirroring this role of movement to the characters, the narrative itself reflects a constant motion, often making large leaps through time and offering only quick explanations of the significant events that have occurred in the passed over time.<sup>75</sup> One could even say that time in this narrative moves like a train, making stops at a few points and quickly passing by many other points.

<sup>76</sup> Notice, as in *The Mimic Men*, the description of life in the middle as belonging in parentheses.

<sup>77</sup> When Ashoke lives in Cleveland, he does not even inhabit his living spaces, as Gogol notices, ". . . there is no sign of his father in the car. No maps or scraps of paper, no empty cups or loose change or receipts" (173). Similarly, his apartment shows little signs of being settled in, with nothing hanging on the walls and much of what is there just a transport from their house in Massachusetts (175). Ashoke lives more like a visitor, like someone in transit or a person on the go, as settling in and making himself a home are not so easily done in his condition of instability.

<sup>78</sup> As Ashima notes, being a foreigner, "is something that elicits . . . curiosity from strangers," bringing about an invasion of the private. This loss of distinctions takes place in many realms of their lives: their first American apartment is unable to keep the outside conditions from effecting the inside temperature (30); they are forced to buy secondhand items from garage sales, so that their private possessions are not all

that private (52); and even death is not accorded privacy, as Ashoke dies in the public space of a hospital room, which is soon after filled with a new patient (173).

<sup>79</sup> The Gangulis fight to avoid muddling and confusion in other facets of their life, as well. When they have enough money, they buy a house – a brand new house, which has not been used by anyone else – in which the outside temperature actually stays outside (51 – 2). Still, this is not a total success, as they are forced to furnish the house with secondhand items, bringing other people's stuff into their private space (52). When Gogol goes to school, Ashima fights to maintain the distinction of spaces for life and death, refusing to hang up Gogol's fieldtrip gravestone rubbings, imposing taboos in an attempt to reinforce order. Ashoke maintains a certain amount of order for himself, through repression, by keeping emotions buried away and out of his public life, "[Ashoke] is not the type to admit such things [if he is lonely], to speak openly of desires, his moods, his needs" (122). And, Ashima appreciates the order imposed on her life through pregnancy and child-rearing, noting, "Before Gogol's birth, her days had followed no visible pattern," but that afterwards has a certain amount of imposed order and distinctions, combating her otherwise chaotic condition (34 – 5).

<sup>80</sup> At Gogol's birth, for example, the Nandis and Dr. Gupta, "are only substitutes for the people who really ought to be surrounding them," and, as Gogol grows older, a family friend becomes, "Maya Mashi, as if she were his own mother's sister, his own aunt . . ." (24, 61).

<sup>81</sup> This playing of 'characters' becomes so much a part of their lives that Ashima and Ashoke learn to take on the roles of characters in other aspects of life, as well. They, for example, do not act as themselves when Maxine comes to visit, as Gogol notices, ". . . that they are not used to passing things around the table, or to chewing food with their mouths fully closed," reflecting an inability to be comfortable with who they are – as if they perpetually do not belong (149).

<sup>82</sup> The suggestion then, it would seem, is that even people who are born in a place can be an immigrant in that place.

<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, during their stay in Calcutta, they live the lives of nomads, "Instead of renting an apartment of their own, they spend eight months with their various relatives, shuttling from home to home. . . . Every few weeks there is a different bed to sleep in, another family to live with, a new schedule to learn," refusing even the possibility for a temporary settlement, while away (83).

<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Moushumi's childhood seems to possess the same basic characteristics, with the additional movement from England to America and the hassle of her parents' constant attempts to arrange her marriage (212 – 3).

<sup>85</sup> In a way, Gogol and Sonia exhibit a more constant motion than Ashima does, who has spent her entire life between five homes, suggesting, perhaps, that the reproduced version of migrancy is, in some ways, more intense or affecting than the original version (167).

<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, notice what happens to Gogol when movement surrounding his life stops, through the sudden deaths – unforeseeable interruptions in movement – of his father and Alice, the administrative assistant at NYU. Gogol is unable to incorporate these cessations in movement, sudden halts in the flow of events, into his life, as on both occasions they draw out problems in his existing relationships, eventually leading to their ends.

<sup>87</sup> Moushumi follows a similar pattern. While at Brown, she adopts, "a third language, a third culture,"<sup>87</sup> opting for a culture in which she can feel more detached, "It was easier to turn her back on the two countries that could claim her in favor of one that had no claim whatsoever" (214). She then moves to Paris, in attempts, like Gogol, to flee her family and her past, so that she is constantly on the run. Following the end of her relationship with Graham, "Her first impulse was to move back to Paris," so that movement is what she resorts to, as if a natural state for her; it is in movement that she can feel most comfortable (217). Notice, however, how precarious she feels even in this Parisian life, so that when visiting with Gogol she will not even let him take her picture in a café, because, "she doesn't want to be mistaken for a tourist in this city . . ." (234). Even here, in her adopted home, the place she feels most comfortable, she lacks stability and belonging, as her place in Paris is so transient that just the act of taking her picture throws it into question.

<sup>88</sup> His first relationship, with Ruth, is borne out of movement, as their relationship begins on a train ride. While in motion, Gogol finds himself doing things he usually does not do, ". . . it occurs to him that he has never spoken of his experiences in India to any American friend," reinforcing the state of motion as one of comfort for Gogol, as if his home is, not land or a particular country, but lines of movement (112). As their relationship progresses, Gogol roots himself to Ruth, so that when she studies abroad in England he is,

“lost,” unstable, and, “. . . longs for her as his parents have longed, all these years, for the people they love in India – for the first time in his life, he knows this feeling” (117). His feeling, however, of being momentarily separated from a girlfriend of just over a year should not really be comparable to his parents moving, permanently, halfway across the globe from their family and culture that they grew up in, to a place where they know nobody. These experiences only become comparable because Gogol, who has grown up rootless, has attempted to root himself through his relationship, so that Ruth’s going away becomes an upheaval of his attempted stability. As a result, when she returns, they both realize, “. . . that something had changed,” the something being that Gogol’s makeshift roots have been cut away, hence, causing their break-up (120).

<sup>89</sup> Take, for example, how the Ratliffs entertain, presiding comfortably, “. . . at the center of their dinners,” and, “. . . assured . . . that their life will appeal to,” others, carrying themselves with a solidity and a knowledge that they belong where they are, comfortably rooted in their position (141, 136). Even their flatware has a noticeable weight or solidity to it (137).

<sup>90</sup> For example, in the house, “[The] patches of disorder make no difference . . .” (132). Gogol can touch, “the everyday possessions of a family he barely knows,” Maxine can go to the bathroom without closing the door (displaying an utter disregard for private-public distinctions that even most non-immigrants feel the need to adhere to), and Gogol and Maxine can comfortably sleep together just a floor above Maxine’s parents, noticing that, “even the absolute privacy they would have had [at Gogol’s apartment] is of no appeal,” as that need to maintain distinctions is just not necessary in the Ratliff’s lives of stability (133, 137, 139).

<sup>91</sup> Gogol becomes so dissociated from his parents’ way of life that “[Maxine] does not associate him with his parents’ habits,” and Gogol comes to find that, “. . . the concerns [of his family] make no sense . . . among Maxine and her family” (146, 158).

<sup>92</sup> When Maxine offers to go to Cleveland with him, Gogol refuses, “He doesn’t want to be with someone who barely knew his father, who’s met him only once” (170).

<sup>93</sup> In a strange, way, though, their relationship is founded on the ‘character’ culture of their parents. When they meet for their first date, Moushumi recalls the name she was taught to call Gogol, “Gogol Dada,” in this realm of ‘characters’ (194). Even aspects of their mutual past – the memories that rise up in Gogol, the pictures he finds with the two of them together, their parents’ very friendship – are founded on this little bit of falsity, on a connection that was not really there, so that, to an extent, their connection seems to be one of masks and untruth.

<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, their book collections, “have merged,” so that distinctions between the two of them as individuals (capable of independent movement) are being lost.

<sup>95</sup> In addition, the notion of being finished with school appeals to her, not for the obvious reasons that the end of school appeals to almost anyone, but because she sees completion as a means of escape, of getting, “. . . beyond the world that has defined and structured and limited her for so long,” of reasserting her ability for movement (253).

<sup>96</sup> Dimitri offers Moushumi the ability for movement in several ways. For example, there is her movement to meet him, providing a way for Moushumi to assert her ability for independent motion (263). Dimitri himself lives the life of a traveler, “There is nothing on Dimitri’s walls. He is still living out of a series of mammoth duffel bags,” so that she can associate herself with his unsettlement. Sex with Dimitri also represents a sort of moving, as afterwards he is, “. . . out of breath as if he’d been chasing her,” chasing her because she was running, always on her way somewhere (263). Even Moushumi’s little bit of a past with Dimitri is linked through movement, from the trip to Washington D.C. to the untraceable postcards he sent her from around the world (257 – 60).

<sup>97</sup> Notice that the secret of Moushumi’s affair coming out while in movement, on a train (282). Almost immediately after, she leaves the apartment, “[wanting] nothing of the brief life they’d had together,” wanting nothing that could suggest the possibility of her near-settlement (283). Moushumi, not surprisingly, resorts to movement and goes to Paris, where she can live her life of rootlessness and detached-ness. Not so dissimilarly, Gogol also copes through movement, taking the trip to Venice that was initially planned for both of them.

<sup>98</sup> Gogol’s future appears somewhat more vague. On one hand, during his final visit home, he seems to accept himself in a way that he could not earlier. He recognizes that ‘Nikhil’ never fully broke away from ‘Gogol,’ that it has not been possible to, “reinvent himself fully,” or break away from himself by creating a character (287). Similarly, his reading of the Gogol book given to him by his father, after so many years, to

conclude the narrative seems to be trying really hard to convince the reader that he has made some sort of progress, perhaps, to some extent, accepting himself and his family. Of course, if this is the case, one must also notice that the same time that he finally accepts his roots is when his roots, quite literally, disappear, with his mother's movement, "And then the house will be occupied by strangers, and there will be no trace that they were ever there, no house to enter, no name in the telephone directory. Nothing to signify the years his family has lived here, no evidence of the efforts, the achievement it had been," so that, once again, Gogol's attempts to establish some kind of permanence seems to be refused (281).

This ending points to something that appears to be going on in this text, concerning the difference between how men and women deal with the condition of the middle of the melodrama. This is the first text (of those examined by this paper) that has seriously paid much attention to how women deal with being an immigrant and being constantly in motion. Though a deeper analysis of this gender issue is certainly necessary, the appearance seems to be that women handle the situation better. Ashima's ending offers the obvious example, as she does something that no man has done, accepting a nomadic, as opposed to sedentary, life – adapting to, instead of fighting, her condition. Sonia, who has been paid little attention in this analysis (mostly because the text itself gives her little attention), seems to inexplicably end up in a solid position, with a strong relationship and a good career. This offers some mystery, as, aside from the situation of the name, she was raised in the same circumstances and with the same experiences as Gogol. The only other difference, of course, is that she is a female – so, is the suggestion that there is something inherent in women that allows them to better handle the situation of the middle of the melodrama? Then there is also Moushumi, who, though not necessarily leading the ideal life (already with a broken engagement and a divorce), would seem to be at least better off than the male, Gogol. She, at the very least, is not attempting to fight the (apparently) losing battle of establishing roots, as Gogol has, though she does seem to still be fleeing something, by moving back to Paris. At the very least, the suggestion appears to be that women handle the situation of being in the middle of the melodrama better than men do.

<sup>99</sup> Of course, to be like the devil is to remain in that good-evil binary system. So this is not a wholly appropriate metaphor, but, perhaps, as close as one can come to describing life outside of the binary system, from within that very system.