

Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses

Monthly discussion groups

Parts 3 and 4

1. As we have come to expect, characters continue to proliferate in Parts 3 and 4. As you are reading, can you define the relationship between each of the following characters and Gibreel and/or Chamcha:

Alleluia Cone (Allie)
Pamela Lovelace
Rosa Diamond + Don Enrique
Martín de la Cruz + Aurora del Sol
Officers Stein, Bruno, and Novak
Hyacinth Phillips
Jumpy Joshi
Muhammad Sufyan
John Maslama
The Imam
Ayesha (the empress and the peasant)
Mirza Saeed
Mishal
Osman

2. Part 3 is entitled “Elloven Deeowen,” the nonsense phrase Chamcha, as a child in Bombay, used to chant while playing “grand-mother’s footsteps.” The narrator decodes the phrase as “the six letters of his dream city . . . London” (p. 37).
 - Before his fall from the hijacked plane and his resulting transformation, Chamcha seems to have realized his fantasy. He lives in London, he has succeeded in his profession, and he married a lovely wife. But what cracks have already begun to open in his adopted identity? Why did he marry Pamela Lovelace? Why did she marry him? What dissatisfactions plague his work life?
 - After his fall from the hijacked plane, how does the England that Chamcha experiences differ from his childhood fantasy of Elloven Deeowen?
 - How is Chamcha redefined by those who see his transformed self? What new identity has he acquired?
 - The story of Rosa Diamond, who rescues Chamcha and Gibreel after they land on the beach, may seem extraneous to the central plot. How might her delusions about the landing of William the Conqueror and her memories of Argentina expand the novel’s representation of England in the post-colonial era?
3. How does Gibreel’s fall from the hijacked plane transform him?
 - What accounts for the difference between Chamcha’s and Gibreel’s transformations?
 - What is Gibreel seeking in his escape from India to London? How do the Londons that Chamcha and Gibreel imagine differ?

- Does Gibreel's quest for Allie resemble Allie's quest for Everest? Is either quest ultimately spiritual?
4. How are we to understand Rushdie's use of magical realism in the narration of Chamcha's and Gibreel's lives after their fall?
 - Why does Chamcha sprout horns, take on the body of a satyr, and defecate in the police van?
 - Why do the police, the immigration officers, and John Maslama, who sits beside Gibreel on the train, see an aura around Gibreel's head?
 - What are we to make of the angelic vision Allie sees at the summit of Everest?
 - Pamela Lovelace's uncle's manor house was once owned by Matthew Hopkins, the famous seventeenth-century "Witchfinder-General" (p. 188). How does this small detail expand Rushdie's exploration of the infernal and the transcendent in the histories of the Indian Subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula?
 5. Parts 3 and 4 expand the novel's treatment of love, desire, sexual expression, and transcendent experience.
 - In which relationship(s) does individual sexual pleasure seem to be the goal?
 - In which relationship(s) does sexual intimacy seem to flow from love for the other as separate from the self?
 - Do any relationships seem to open a window to the transcendent?
 - Why is sexual betrayal so devastating to Rekka Merchant and Saladin Chamcha?
 6. Gibreel lost his faith after his prayers during his extended illness went unanswered. In his subsequent dreams, how does he imagine religion? Do these dreams present a nuanced critique of Islam, or are they corrosive satire?
 - Which was more likely to have engendered the ire of the Ayatollah Khomeini against Rushdie: his irreverent treatment of the story of the founding of Islam in Part 2 or Gibreel's dream of "the Imam" in Part 4?
 - Why is Gibreel dreaming about Mahoud, a Medieval visionary in the Arabian Peninsula; a contemporary Imam in exile in a Western metropolis; and a girl in modern India who wants to lead a pilgrimage to Mecca? What role(s) does Gibreel play in these dreams?
 7. In Gibreel's dream about "the Imam," the enemy is Ayesha, the empress of Desh. In the dream about Mirza Saeed and his wife Mishal, Ayesha is a peasant girl who becomes a prophetess and leads a pilgrimage.
 - How do "the Imam" and the peasant Ayesha differ as religious leaders of a devoted following? Does either resemble Mahoud?
 - What does each want to achieve? How does each enact love?
 - Why does Al-Lat, one of the three Meccan goddesses mentioned in "the Satanic verses," burst out of the empress Ayesha's shell at the end of Gibreel's dream about "the Imam"?
 - What issues about gender and religion do all three of Gibreel's dreams raise?
 8. What thematic relationships can you find that connect the narration of the lives of Gibreel and Chamcha to the interpolated stories of Mahoud, "the Imam," and the peasant Ayesha?

