

Angels and devils: a transformative process essay sample



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Shortly after Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha fall over the English Channel, they both seem to go through a major transformation which is one of the themes in Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*. Farishta and Chamcha not only go through an opposite physical transformation but a mental process throughout the novel with themselves, each other, and society around them. Saladin goes through a physical mutation into a "devil-like" figure with horns and cloven hooves, while Gibreel acquires a halo seen only sometimes, giving him an "angel-like" appearance.

These bodily changes took place based on how the two men have previously been judged in life, with Gibreel being a famous actor playing godly roles, and Saladin denying his true identity by trying to become an Englishman. It becomes apparent towards the end of the novel that the transformations are deceiving. Although the mutations started off as physical for the two characters, they ended up having a huge mental impact on each one of them.

Gibreel's conversion starts shortly after he decides that he does not believe in God. His transformation is somewhat confusing due to the fact that he is losing his faith and at the same time being portrayed as an angelic figure. Also, we have seen in the novel that Gibreel is far from an innocent being as he begins the story with sulfur breath that no actress would prefer to kiss, suggesting that he has devilish characteristics. Farishta's halo is first seen in Rosa Diamond's house when his betrayal of Chamcha begins.

Even though Gibreel is still expressing devil-like qualities on the inside, the reason for him transforming into an angel in appearance is the fact that the

outside world sees him as a religious and godly figure because of his acting career. One can also look at the fact that Gibreel Farishta has always been “true” to himself as a reason why he is being transformed into an angel instead of Saladin’s unfortunate devilish mutation. Saladin Chamcha goes through the most drastic transformation when he takes on the physical appearance of a devil-like animal.

Saladin, being the more proper and English of the two, feels that it is unfair for his transformation to be into a goat while Gibreel is converting into an angelic being. However, though it is unfair through Saladin’s eyes, it is appropriate for Saladin to develop horns and cloven hooves in order for him to understand that he was denying his true identity. It is a problem for Saladin that he is trying so hard to become as English as he can to fit in with what he sees as the more sophisticated kind of human and yet he is still being viewed as a person of Indian decent.

In the eyes of his people such as Zeenat Vakil, he was seen as fake and a traitor while still being viewed as a foreign “devil” in the eyes of the English police officers who were harassing him. Zeenat Vakil was always on Saladin’s case about trying too hard to be an Englishman even before his transformation. While Saladin would look in the mirror and see “a man to whom certain things are of importance: rigor, self-discipline, reason, the pursuit of what is noble without recourse to that old crutch, God,” Zeenat saw right through him (139-140).

She was never afraid to tell Saladin how she felt, for example when she said to him, “you know what you are, I’ll tell you. A deserter is what, more

English than, your Angrez accent wrapped around you like a flag, and don't think it's perfect, it slips, baba, like a false moustache" (53). She is explaining to Saladin how fake he is becoming almost like a warning that he chose not to listen to. This might not have been such a problem for Saladin if he was actually fitting in with who he was trying to envelop.

He should have realized at the moment that the English police officers were harassing him that the English still perceived him as a foreign animal. If he took into account the way he was being treated by Englishmen and everything that Zeenat had said to him, he could have realized that his transformation was supposed to mean something important. However, Saladin still could not understand why his devilish horns were growing day by day. While he was living with Jumpy Joshi's uncle and his family, he had a fit of anger in which his horns actually started to diminish.

This fact suggests that while Saladin was showing real emotion and being his "true" self, he became less devilish in appearance. Saladin had to go through this transformation in order to open his own eyes to his real identity. It was a necessary "rough justice" to learn the negative side effects of self-denial. There was a conflict between Saladin's essential self and what was happening externally and the outcome of Saladin's transformation had a big impact on his mental being as well as his life in general. Saladin's physical transformation had an impact on his mental wellbeing.

In his eyes, Gibreel, who did not care for London in the first place, was taking it over. Saladin had become lonely; he had no wife, no work and as a result had lost London while Gibreel had all of these things with no effort. When he

realizes that his life consisted of four things: a dream, a woman, a city, and his culture, he starts to recognize the limitations of being English. His dream of childhood produced childlessness, his woman represented estrangement in his life, the city that he loved so much hurled him down and his culture only bedeviled and humiliated him.

When analyzing all of these aspects of his life, he begins to realize how pathetic he has become. Shortly after Saladin changed back into his human form, his true mental transformation began. The death of Saladin's father had to take place in order for Saladin to return back to his hometown and for his journey to come full circle. In the first chapter it becomes clear that Saladin has always blamed the conflict with his father for why he wanted to escape to London, "Of what did the son accuse the father? Of everything: espionage on child-self, rainbow-pot-stealing, exile.

Of turning him into what he might not have become. Of making-a-man of" (69). Ever since he chose to receive an education in London, Saladin's relationship with his father deteriorated. The city of London and the hope of becoming an Englishman to escape his true background could not have been more appealing to Chamcha before his transformation. However, after Saladin's transformation his father's illness brought him back to his roots in Bombay. His father's death allows Chamcha to bury his past and realize who he really is inside.

He had stopped fighting himself and embraced his true self by focusing his love towards his father and even changing his name back to Salahuddin Chamchawala. He even regained his true, not fake like the "love" for

Pamela, love for Zeenat Vakil who welcomed him back to his hometown. Salahuddin's physical transformation made way for his self-discovery process. After finding his true identity within, Salahuddin could finally be happy with whom he truly was. Gibreel Farishta's mental transformation was not as successful as Chamchawala's.

The changes taking place within Farishta started by him questioning his faith. After he decided for himself that God did not exist and losing his faith, he was confusingly depicted as an Angel. Of course, Farishta did not mind being looked at as a godly symbol as he was used to being a successful actor of religious figures anyways. Gibreel started having multiple elaborate dreams suggesting that he was God's messenger, the Angel Gibreel. It is questionable whether Rushdie was signifying that Gibreel was making these dreams up in his head or if these dreams were just strictly happening to him.

Whether Gibreel was going mentally crazy or not, his angelic nature was affecting him in a negative manner. Because Gibreel was being portrayed as an angel in his dreams, he starts to succumb to the notion of his divinity. This becomes an unfortunate circumstance because based on Gibreel's character, it is known that he is in fact not of godly temperament.

Directly after Farishta and Chamcha's landing in London, this passage describes a Gibreel's problem, "'come on, baby,' cried invisible Gibreel, in whose behavior the reader may, not unreasonably, perceive the delirious, dislocating effects of his recent fall. Rise ' n' shine! Let's take this place by storm! ' Turning his back on the sea, blotting out the bad memory in order to make room for the next things, passionate as always for newness.. " (135).

Gibreel's "passion for newness" is a problem because he is becoming over confident with himself and he believes that he is invincible and capable of being successful in London. He seems to be correct at first however soon realizes that just because he appears to be an Angel in his dreams and on the outside, does not mean that he has changed whatsoever on the inside.

All of his life, Gibreel has had everything handed to him and has never had to take responsibility. He has not come to terms with uncertainty which is why he is being plagued towards the end of the novel by the angel of vengeance. Farishta lets his jealousy get out of control and he tells Chamchawala, "I am the angel the god damned angel of god and these days it's the avenging angel Gibreel the avenger always vengeance why I can't be sure something like this for the crime of being human" (558).

The content of his dreams and the deception of his external transformation finally eat away at Gibreel who fails to redeem himself and instead chooses to end his own life. This conclusion of the story suggests that Salahuddin has been brought a second chance at life while Gibreel was doomed from the start. Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha were polar opposites from the beginning of the novel which is why it is no surprise that they both went through contradictory physical and mental transformations.

The physical mutations of the two characters were misleading, however it was necessary for the deceptiveness to take place in order for each character to actually realize their true identities. Salahuddin who went through the worst physical transformation was able to redeem himself by the end of the story while Gibreel had been overcome by the mental trickery of

his transformation. This proves that the major theme of this novel, transformation, comes from the inside, not out.