

**Reconfiguring the Past:  
Cartographies of Post-imperial London  
in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Buddha of Suburbia***

Jung Su

Department of English

National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan

**Abstract**

This paper aims at exploring the representation of post-imperial London in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* with a view to highlighting how the post-colonial history of Britain is re-written by the above two writers through the alternative cityscapes they depict in their works. I argue that the protagonists of the novels, Saladin and Karim, reflect on their attitudes toward the past via the act of flânerie. The act of strolling will be treated as a spatial politics that helps relativize these two immigrant protagonists' positions in the city of London. The routes of their journeys not only limn the alternative cityscape of the transforming empire but also disclose the socially and politically marginalized immigrant communities which are either demonized or stereotyped in the racialization of space. The reconfiguration of the past in the two novels, looked at in this way, is not just a remapping of the city; rather, it reveals the need to re-examine how Asian British writers deal with the past, on the one hand, and aspire to carve out a niche for themselves in the contemporary British society, on the other.

**Keywords**

Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, flâneur, post-imperial London, cityscape

One of the fascinating features of contemporary British fiction lies in the fact that much of it focuses on the nation's continuous, drastic change metonymically represented by the change of the urban milieu in its capital (London), which can be dated back to the latter years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries and to the decades after the destruction of the Blitz during the second World War. In his critical study of the relationship between British postwar fiction and urban representations, *London Narratives: Postwar Fiction and the City*, Lawrence Phillips informatively points out two noticeable phenomena in the transformation of London as a modern city. The first one is the notable growth of the city's population from the turn of the nineteenth century until the early twentieth century; the second is the sudden population decline caused by the destruction of the Blitz (1-2). Following this sudden decrease, observes Phillips, is the slow population growth and the demographic shift from 1945 up to 1951, a result partly due to the postwar influx of the recruited labour power from Britain's former colonies, and another concomitant actuality: that more and more British writers coming from the immigrant background step into the spotlight in contemporary British literature (8, 10-11). Among these newly emergent writers, quite a few of them address the issue of Britain's change in the recent decades and its contingent evolution toward a more multicultural future. The urban representations of London in these writer's works, from the earlier generations of writers in the 1950s and 1960s (Sam Salvon, Colin MacInnes, V. S. Naipaul, for example) through to those of 1980s, 1990s, and the post-millennium (for instance, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith), have created brand-new perspectives from which they perceive and see London as a place replete with "postcolonial imagination" (Ball, *Imagining London* 13). The protagonists in these literary representations may be regarded as what Lawrence Phillips would call "the new Londoners" (106). Very often the nation's (imperial) past becomes a point of reference to which the fiction's present will always refer back. It is exactly from these retrospective moments and their intersections with the "postcolonial space" that these literary works are able to cultivate a great number of possibilities to depict the new face of Britain (Nalbantoğlu and Wong 7). In several of such contemporary novels, the past becomes a recurrent topic which either features the central subject of the works or serves as the backdrop against which the writer plays out his/her main ideas. Such intertwinement between the present-day change and a longing for retrospection or the reconfiguration of the past, as well as a tendency to relate the sense of change to the revision of history has been clearly explicated by quite a few scholars of the field. This constant act of re-configuring the past, of re-conceiving the past through

re-perceiving one's relation with the urban space, this space-time correlative, is analyzed by Kevin Lynch in his ingenious work, *The Image of the City*, in which he sensibly remarks that "the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time" (1).

Rod Mengham, on the other hand, has more specifically pointed out a self-awareness of the nation's intrinsic change and how such intrinsic change can be spatially-temporally critical:

During the last thirty years, the period linked to a sense of endless change, to the rapid turnover of novelties, to the commodification of artistic experiment; attitudes to the past have been influenced by marketing, by consumer demand for the *retro*, by an investment in history reproducible as style. . . . The history of Britain and of the peoples inhabiting it, the temporal and spatial relationships that determine the margins of Britishness, have all been questioned and amended by the more ambitious fictional projects of a time in which the scale of history itself has been revised. (Lane, Mengham, and Tew 1)

Apart from this sense of self-retrospection, there are also scholars who notice the newly emergent literary trends. Philip Tew, for instance, calls our attention in his seminal introduction in *Contemporary British Fiction* to a new generation of writers who become visible mainly in the 80s and marks out the period as a new phase in the history of British novels:

After 1979 Britain seemed tentatively aware that a new phase of history might well have begun, which if acknowledged, separated it from the earlier post-war period. A new generation of writers, responding to their literary antecedents, developed a newly focused literary consciousness. This was not simply a matter of reflecting historical events or trends. In politics, the reality and myth of Margaret Thatcher and an attendant concept of history were dominant. The theme of myth and history long considered by literature acquired a currency in the public sphere. Novelists responded to both the contemporaneous political domain and their literary predecessors. The place of history in our everyday lives, its literary recovery and the question of its status recur in a variety of contemporary British

fictional texts. (Lane, Mengham, and Tew 11)

In this collection of contemporary British fiction edited by Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew published in 2003, Tew clearly indicates that they see the period, which starts from 1979, the year when Margaret Thatcher, the leader of the Conservative Party, became Britain's prime minister, as "a new phase of the historical novel" and the writers selected in this collection as "part of wider literary commitment to reworking the past as fiction" (11).

If amending the conception of the past is a current tendency in contemporary literary works, then it might be interesting for us to investigate why or how such a recurrent interest in or reference to the past or history always appears to be the main concern of the contemporary British fiction. If we look at the surge of writers who have variegated ethnic backgrounds, we can probably not neglect the fact that a lot of prominent contemporary British writers are immigrant writers or writers of immigrant ancestry. The cultural legacies these writers inherit from "other" traditions and their ruptured historical sense not only inject newness into the themes of contemporary fiction but also reveal different types of postcolonial affect which we seldom see in previous British writers. Their impulse to relocate themselves or their historical sense in the British tradition and their sense of dislocation in the social or physical space arguably become a significant register in their writing.

In this essay, I will mainly focus on two such novelists to investigate how the conception of the past is reconfigured in their works. But apart from the discussion of the temporal dimension, I would also like to bring in the factor of space and examine how space takes part in the two protagonists' reconfiguration of the past in the following two novels. I will begin my discussion from the perspective of two important moments, which respectively mark out the discontinuity and continuity of a first-generation immigrant's life in the new host country and a second-generation immigrant's longing to be able to locate himself in a city in which he was born but to which he does not really belong:

Out of thin air: a big bang, followed by falling stars. A universal beginning, a miniature echo of the birth of time . . . the jumbo jet *Bostan* [Italic original], Flight AI-420, blew apart without any warning, high above the great, rotting, beautiful, snow-white, illuminated city, Mahagonny, Babylon, Alphaville. . . . Proper London, capital of Vilayet, winked blinked nodded in the night. While at Himalayan height a brief and premature sun burst into the powdery

January air, a blip vanished from radar screens, and the thin air was full of bodies, descending from the Everest of the catastrophe to the milky paleness of the sea.

Who am I? (Rushdie, *Satanic* 4)

The city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility: it didn't necessarily help you grasp those possibilities. I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd. I couldn't yet see how the city worked, but I began to find out.

West Kensington itself was made up of rows of five-storey peeling stucco houses broken up into bed-sits. . . . The District Line dived into the earth half-way along the Barons Court Road, to which it ran parallel, the trains heading for Charing Cross and then out into the East End. . . . Unlike the suburbs, where no one of note—except H. G. Wells—had lived, here you couldn't get away from VIPs. Gandhi himself once had a room in West Kensington, and the notorious landlord Rachman kept a flat for the young Mandy Rice Davies in the next street. . . .

So this was London at last, and nothing gave me more pleasure than strolling around my new possession all day. London seemed like a house with five thousand rooms, all different; the kick was to work out how they connected, and eventually to walk through all of them. (Kureishi, *Buddha* 126)

The above two passages, taken from Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* respectively, signify some symbolic moments in the two novels. In *The Satanic Verses*, it is a critical moment when Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha are initiated into *an/Other* London due to a magical-realistic transformation, which propels Saladin into seeing the Thatcherite London from the immigrant's alienated, defamiliarized perspective and thus drastically alters his connection with and attitude towards his Indian past and British present. Rather than viewing London in retrospect, Karim Amir in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, unlike the Bombay-born Saladin, moves from the suburbs towards Central London and observes the city with ambition and anticipation. This denotes a turning point in Karim's life because his father Haroon and his mother

Margaret have decided to separate and his father, together with his mistress Eva Kray and Karim, has moved from the South London suburbs to Central London. Having recently settled in West Kensington, Karim curiously observes some indexical spots in London, roaming around the streets and tracing historical trajectories left by celebrities with a longing for joining in that tradition via active participation in the city's social life.

London in both novels therefore possesses some new qualities. Through the two writers' modes of expression, it embodies a newness that hadn't been apparent in earlier literary works, reflecting something newly emergent in the lived experience of the contemporary London's social, cultural, and urban milieu. We may borrow Charles Baudelaire's description of "modernity"—he confesses to "know[ing] of no better word to express the idea [he has] in mind" (12)—for an approximation of this feeling of newness:

By "modernity" I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. . . . This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. (Baudelaire 12)

In other words, as Baudelaire reiterates in "The Painter of Modern Life," an acute awareness of change and newness, in this case the insertion of the immigrants' colonial past into Britain's history and its constant dialogue with the nation's postcolonial present, may help create a "new structure of feeling,"<sup>1</sup> a feeling gradually shaped by the lived experience in everyday lives and the fashions, morals, emotions of contemporary Britain. And corresponding closely to Baudelaire's innovative definition of the turn-of-the-century aesthetics and lifestyle, though unsettling his emphasis on beauty, is the fact that this contemporary London newness is characterized above all by an affective change at the level of cultural geography. It expresses a contemporariness of the present London.

In *The Satanic Verses* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Rushdie and Kureishi write about Indian diaspora in London and the impact of the decolonization upon the British Empire. Both novelists write from the perspective of the colonized Other even though they focus on different generations of immigrants and adopt different cultural politics. Post-imperial London, as John Clement Ball has argued in his analysis of London in South Asian Fiction,<sup>2</sup> features prominently in the literature of

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<sup>1</sup> Here I am borrowing Raymond Williams' term.

<sup>2</sup> Ball offers a useful list of South Asian writers who write about Indian diaspora and

the Indian diaspora and to a great extent “satisfies” and manipulates the post-colonial subject’s imaginary because it is “a real place to live or visit,” “a symbolic site of struggle and conquest,” and “an object of desire and the idealizing imagination” (“A City Visible But Unseen” 67). The juxtaposition of *The Satanic Verses* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* is in this light an attempt to observe how immigrants of different generations look at their pasts, how they straddle clumsily between two Hallian axes,<sup>3</sup> how they cope with the haunting specters of the past and the ambivalent desire for assimilation, how they battle with racist discourse such as demonization and exclusion, how they strive for the right of representation, and how they negotiate with their ruptured pasts, on the one hand, and reconfigure them in the urban space of London, on the other.

The conception of space here importantly intersects with the question of the past because as Doreen Massey puts it, “space is not static, nor time spaceless” (155). “[S]patiality and temporality are different from each other but neither can be conceptualized as the absence of the other” (155). Only when we “try to think in terms of all the dimensions of space-time” can the full implications of the space-time correlations be made explicit (155). The production and the reproduction of the past are always correlated with the configuration of space. Also, just as Massey has concluded in her groundbreaking elucidation of “an alternative view of space”: “the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics” and “the inseparability of time and space” is always the key point of understanding space-time relationship (159).

To better clarify this space-time correlative, one may want to bring in Henri Lefebvre’s revolutionary, Foucauldian, Marxist analysis of space as it appears in *The Production of Space*, in which he reiterates that space is not transparent but permeated with ideologies, that it is produced through different means in different social, historical networks. Namely, Lefebvre asserts that “(*Social*) space is a (*social*) product” (Italics original, 26). And it is from this concept of “social” space that space is connected to history because “[i]f space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with history” (Lefebvre 46). Social formation always involves the question of history because history serves,

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immigrants’ struggle in London: Buchi Emecheta, Caryl Phillips, Sam Selvon, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and Salman Rushdie (67).

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall’s well-known conception of multiple identities framed by the vector of similarity and continuity and that of difference and rupture has been widely appropriated and discussed in diaspora discourse; therefore, it is mentioned here only as a referential note (“Cultural Identity” 226).

functionally, as the reference point of our retrospection, and instrumentally, as the means of the dominant class's hegemony over the mass; hence Lefebvre's invention of "social space" clearly points out the relation between space and history and how space is produced via the operations of the vestige of histories and its discursive practice. This production of space is, as Lefebvre observes, internalized in and imposed upon the body in everyday life.

The imperial past in the two novels, read in this light, is the key to the spatial displacement, dislocation, relocation, and reconfiguration of the Commonwealth immigrants in London. They live in a Lefebvrian "conceived space" which is regulated by the ruling class of the host country whereas on the other hand, they themselves create their own "perceived space" in daily lives via memory, imagination, and other types of affect. These two types of spaces contradict each other, yet they are also subsumed by each other, as there is always a dialectical relation between the two. When the immigrants migrate from the subcontinent to the imperial center with luggage of different histories, their relation with the past and the present take on a spatial-historical dimension because they participate in the city both spatially and temporally. They have double vision—a vision that possesses a dialectic doubleness,<sup>4</sup> one that is composed of both insideness and distance, of the irreversible past frozen in memory and the unsettling present in which they live like outsiders. The two protagonists in these two novels see the city with certain detachment, their ocular activities thus create strategic designs for constructing a narrative cartography of post-imperial London. Their vision does not just imply the poignant critique of the all-encompassing, Thatcherite discursive construction of the symbolic power structure in the urban space, which champions Englishness to forge a national identity; more importantly, it alludes to the deep reflections on the on-going mutation of the postwar London as well as the nexus role the immigrant plays in bridging new histories, along with cultural difference, into the white tradition.

To investigate the question of the past, we need to trace the history of decolonization and the condition of postwar London. In his comprehensive account of the social transformation of London, Roy Porter points out, "[T]he late 1940s and

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<sup>4</sup> Here I have in mind Georg Simmel's discussion of "The Stranger," in which he analyzes the dialectic characteristics of the stranger's nearness and remoteness and his (her) specific position of objectivity. Simmel certainly does not mention the immigrants in his analysis, but his using the Jews as the paradigm and his seeing the stranger's positive relation to the newly settled land and his adding newness to the place as positive force do seem to anticipate or inspire the recent analyses of the immigrants' role in the host countries. See Simmel, "The Stranger" 143-49.

early 1950s were old London's Indian summer, when the docks still thrived and the trams sailed majestically through pea-soupers" (344). The large market of the Commonwealth enabled London to export such industrial products as cars and double-deckers to the Empire's colonies, which helped to bring about an economic recovery during the 1960s. However, with postwar sterling crises, with imperial decline accelerating after Indian independence in 1947, and with the wars that followed in Malaysia, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden, London was no longer able to sustain its position as the world's premier port and entrepôt and, to a large extent, lost its global preeminence (Porter 345-48). Unemployment, poverty, housing problems, and a growing bush war between blacks and the police haunted the gloomy 1970s. On the other hand, up to 1981, the population of Afro-Caribbean and Asian immigrants grew steadily up to 634,000 (Porter 354). Immigrating to the "new Empire" ever since the 1950s under the large-scale advertising campaign of the Harold Macmillan government (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 133), the South Asian immigrants clustered in suburbia, as is depicted in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The importing of low-waged immigrant labor greatly incited racial hatred of the white working class towards the immigrants, especially when the kind of resentment was fomented by white neo-Nazi groups and tolerated by police insensitivity (Porter 355). From 1974 to 1979, the Labour Party failed to win the support of British citizens, and Margaret Thatcher of the Conservative Party won the election in 1979. Championing *laissez-faire* private-enterprise policies and political centralism, Mrs. Thatcher implemented several urban redevelopment projects to revitalize the nationwide economic recession. However, Thatcherism did not really cure the aged and ailing nation of its chronic economic anemia (Porter 364), which was seriously criticized in *The Satanic Verses*. The gentrification of the Docklands of the London's East End alluded by Rushdie in Saladin's descent into the novel's Brickhall community, for example, is a dramatized episode aiming to satirize Tory ideology.<sup>5</sup> In 1979, Michael Heseltine established a London Docklands Development Corporation and authorized it to carry on the plan with unprecedented powers (Porter 379). Deeply implanted in this ideology, as Peter Kalliney observes, was an intention to "[smash] the welfare state consensus, encouraging entrepreneurs rather than increasing public subsidies or 'handouts' to

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<sup>5</sup> For the reference of the London Docklands development project, see Porter 379-82 and Kalliney 53-61. Peter Kalliney has already made an in-depth comparison between the fictional Bengali community in *The Satanic Verses* and the docklands of the Isle of Dogs in the heart of London's East End. So Rushdie's possible allusion to and critique of the Docklands gentrification project and Thatcher's administration will be mentioned only in passing in this essay.

the needy, and creating new physical, intellectual, and political environments” (60). Throughout 1970s and 1980s, London was shadowed by unemployment, economic recession, and the decline of imperial powers. The Conservative attempt to reverse Britain’s decline in economic and social policy, together with its “statecraft”—“by which is meant winning elections and retaining control of high politics” (Evans 2), merely exacerbated problems in the areas of society that were least able to withstand the negative effects of Thatcher’s radical reforms.<sup>6</sup> To understand this would certainly help us to clarify the textual entanglement with colonialization and the temporal-spatial parameter in *The Satanic Verses*, which is set in 1980s, and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which depicts London of the late 1970s.

Let us first go back to the two symbolic moments cited in the very beginning. The first critical moment happens at the outset of *The Satanic Verses*, when the Bombay-born Saladin Chamcha, whose consciousness is originally conveyed by means of a middle-class naturalized British voice-over, falls from the sky in a plane crash and descends on the English beach; thereupon he undergoes a metaphoric rebirth through metamorphosis. This shift of vantage-point forces him to recognize the corners of the city which Saskia Sassen would call the “urban war zone”<sup>7</sup>—Muhammad Sufyan’s Shaandaar Café in Brickhall High Street, a Bengali

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<sup>6</sup> Thatcher’s radical right line was severely criticized in 1980 by such leftist scholar as Stuart Hall, who regarded Thatcherism as a maneuver of electoral triumph:

To promise immediately to put more money in people’s pockets turned out to be a simple electoral fraud. The temporary alliance it attempted to forge between its own ideological commitment to monetarism and the opposition in some sections of the working class to another round of social contracting and the drive to return to ‘free collective bargaining’ is already much dissipated by the effects of the new economic policy, closures and rising unemployment. . . . This experience of what ‘Thatcherism’ really means in power will undoubtedly undermine some part of its electoral support and drive into opposition some of those constituencies which it won on the most opportunist basis. Clearly, the Government will face here a major crisis in the ‘politics of electoral support’. As to limits: there is little evidence that the new economic policies will have any real effect in turning the economic tide. It is not touching the structural economic problems at home and it is powerless to ward off the savage effects of a global capitalist recession which promises to be deeper and more protracted than at first expected. There is no straight road ahead for the radical Right. (“Thatcherism: A New Stage?” 26-27)

<sup>7</sup> Sociologist Saskia Sassen divides areas of a global city into two different zones—the urban glamour zone and the urban war zone—in the introduction of her frequently-quoted *Globalization and Its Discontents* and in a dialogue with other commentators on *Lifeonline*. See Sassen, *Globalization* and “An Urban War Zone.”

immigrant community of the East End.<sup>8</sup> Having plummeted from a comfortably-off life to the grotesque muck and mire of the inferno, Saladin is compelled to see the seamy side of London and becomes involved with the inhabitants' resistance to the Docklands redevelopment project. The violence he witnessed on the street and the police insensitivity to some extent shakes his firm belief in the "hospitality of the city" even though he is still unwilling to admit it. The kind of ambivalent love for London combined with a hatred for racism can be traced back to his childhood dream of going to London and his later distressing experience at Rugby.<sup>9</sup> Like many Commonwealth colonial subjects, Saladin "knows" the city before even experiencing it because it already existed in the educational system he grew up with, where Britain's image as an ideal homeland was replicated time and again. This infiltration of colonial mentality—to project one's utopia *elsewhere* and thereby create a self-alienation from the place one really lives—is precisely the sort of imposition by colonial ISA on the child's docile body through curricula which Chris Jenks judiciously anatomizes in "Childhood and Urban Space":

[Curricula] involve selections, choices, rules and conventions all of which relate to questions of power, issues of personal identity and philosophies of human nature and potential specifically focused upon the child. . . . The knowledge that comprises the curriculum is an instance of humankind's selection from and control of its world, and its replication and repetition in paradigmatic style is an instance of the control of others through the constitution of the child's body and consciousness into the form of an educational identity. (*Aspects* 39-40)

Therefore, Saladin's "dream of Oz" in fact ends the moment he arrives in London.<sup>10</sup> In spite of all knowledge he has about the city, he has so much difficulty in grafting his past to the present because that past nevertheless comes from a different tradition and appears out of place in the mainstream white society. The traumatic memory at Rugby drives Saladin to make himself more "authentic" than

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<sup>8</sup> Kalliney observes that this Brickhall community "shares a striking material and emotional likeness to the Bengali community in the Docklands" (64). See Kalliney, note 6.

<sup>9</sup> For a further analysis of the Rugby episode, see Su 29-33.

<sup>10</sup> *The Wizard of Oz* is the source of inspiration for many episodes in *The Satanic Verses*. As Rushdie declares in "Out of Kensus": "when the possibility of my going to school in England was mentioned, it felt as exciting as any voyage over rainbows. England felt as wonderful a prospect as Oz" (*Step* 4).

any “authentic” Englishman. Even when his Indian friend Zeeny Vakil accuses him of repudiating his Indian roots, he defends himself by indicating that the tie between him and his Indian “home” has no longer existed:

I have forgotten the rules of seven-tiles and kabaddi, I can't recite my prayers, I don't know what should happen at a nikah ceremony, and in this city where I grew up I get lost if I'm on my own. This isn't home. It makes me giddy because it feels like home and is not. It makes my heart tremble and my head spin. (Rushdie, *Satanic* 58)

It is not until his fall from *Bostan*, a kind of heaven,<sup>11</sup> that Saladin loses the privilege to “look down like a god” and thereby lives “down below” and comes into contact with the specificities of everyday life in the immigrant community (de Certeau 92). Here I am referring to Michel de Certeau's theorization of everyday life by comparing Saladin to a new type of walker on the street. However, Saladin's racial and immigrant identity, metaphorically visualized by his demonic transformation, adds a bitter tone to this appropriation because he is not just one of the “ordinary practitioners of the city who live ‘down below’” or “walkers” who “follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write” and “make use of spaces that cannot be seen” (de Certeau 93); rather, he himself becomes a walker socially invisible in the dominant society.

In the Immigration Office, Saladin, much to his surprise, finds that many other immigrants also take on bestial shapes: manticore, water-buffalo, snake, and so forth (*Satanic* 168). “They describe us,” one immigrant whispers solemnly to Saladin, “That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct” (*Satanic* 168). But Saladin would not admit that fact. Only when he witnesses the incidents of police brutality, the anti-Thatcherite riots on the street, and the climactic melting down of the effigy of Margaret Thatcher is he restored to his human form (*Satanic* 294). After this metaphoric epiphany, Saladin comes to realize how efficient Thatcherite racism could be. Yet, deep in his mind, he cannot get rid of his adoration for the material preeminence of London, which is ambivalently combined with an awareness of the empire's mutant present:

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<sup>11</sup> According to Paul Brian's annotation of *The Satanic Verses*, the name of the plane “Bostan” indicates one of the traditional heavens of Islam (“Notes,” Chapter One). Therefore, Saladin is falling from the heaven and, after the symbolic metamorphosis, turns from a male (non-white) middle class to a devilish colored immigrant.

Empire was no more, but still he knew ‘all that was good and living within him’ to have been ‘made, shaped and quickened’ by his encounter with this islet of sensibility, surrounded by the cool sense of the sea. —Of material things, he had given his love to this city, London, preferring it to the city of his birth or to any other; had been creeping up on it, stealthily, with mounting excitement . . . dreaming of being the one to possess it. . . . London, its conglomerate nature mirroring his own, its reticence also his; its gargoyles, the ghostly footfalls in its streets of Roman feet, the honks of its departing migrant geese. Its hospitality—yes!—in spite of immigration laws, and his own recent experience, he still insisted on the truth of that: an imperfect welcome, true, one capable of bigotry, but a real thing, nonetheless, as was attested by the existence in a South London borough of a pub in which no language but Ukrainian could be heard, and by the annual reunion, in Wembley, a stone’s throw from the great stadium surrounded by imperial echoes—Empire Way, the Empire Pool—of more than a hundred delegates, all tracing their ancestry back to a single, small Goan village. (Rushdie, *Satanic* 398)

The lure of modernity, along with colonial education, seems to implant a complicated sense of belongingness into Saladin’s heart that allows him to build a subtle imaginary relationship between him and the modern Britain he lives and which deters him from reconciling with his past and his father. Near the end of the novel, Saladin flies back to Bombay for a reunion with his father on his deathbed. Standing at the window of his childhood and looking out at the Arabian Sea, he announces the end of his haunting childhood, metaphorically saying: “If the old refused to die, the new could not be born” (Rushdie, *Satanic* 546-47). Through that announcement, Saladin bids farewell to the specters of the past.

Unlike *The Satanic Verses*, which projects the London of the 1980s onto a magical-realistic wonderland, *The Buddha of Suburbia* realistically portrays the South suburbs of London in the late 1970s through the observation of a flâneurist Asian-British hybrid youth, Karim Amir. In this *Bildungsroman*, London acts as a magnet for Karim, who was born of two different traditions:<sup>12</sup> India and England. Bart Moore-Gilbert observes in his comment on Kureishi’s works that the novel is

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<sup>12</sup> For an autobiographical parallel with the plot of the novel, see “The Rainbow Sign,” in which Kureishi touchingly describes his early school years in the suburbs, his visits to Pakistan, and his anticipation of the extent to which white British would adjust themselves to “a fresh way of seeing Britain” and “a new way of being British” (*My Beautiful* 101-02).

preoccupied with the consequences of former decolonization for the “native” British population and the question of national identity (4). This comment reveals the fact that the novel tackles the problem of the future—“What does it mean to be British?”—whereas it is inevitably intertwined with the question of the past. Unlike Saladin, however, Karim is a second-generation Asian British and a teenager for whom the past is too insubstantial to be a burden. The characters who have problems confronting their pasts are people like Karim’s father Haroon and Haroon’s best friend Anwar. Educated in England in the 1950s and settling in the South London suburbs (Bromley) over fifteen years, Haroon is never really able to orientate himself in the city. Karim “sweated with embarrassment when he [Haroon] halted strangers in the street to ask directions to places that were a hundred yards away in an area where he’d lived for almost two decades” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 7). Living in the South London Suburbs, Haroon trades Oriental philosophy to the whites for obtaining the sense of dignity and resorts more and more to the Islamic doctrine. Both he and Anwar appear to be “returning internally to India” as they “aged and seemed settled here” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 64). But it is puzzling to Karim that neither of them express any desire to see the places of their origins again even though in England they recoil from any attempt to partake in social activities. Despite their ambivalent attitudes towards their pasts, both Haroon and Anwar set their heart on the transference of traditional values to younger generations. Haroon “was so terrified that [Karim] might turn out to be gay,” but “could never bring himself to mention the matter” because “in his Muslim mind it was bad enough being a woman; being a man and denying your male sex was perverse and self-destructive” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 174). Having a stricter control over his daughter than Haroon has over his son, Anwar insists on arranging a marriage for Jamila, finding his ideal Indian man, Changez, in Bombay, only to find that Changez fails to meet his expectations: he can neither help him in the store, nor produce for him more offspring.

The kind of ambivalence about the past does not prevent Karim from carrying out his ambition of participating in mainstream society. For Karim, the shadow of the past exists in his parents’ accounts of their past lives—in Haroon’s depiction of his childhood Bombay, which seems distant and unimaginable, and Margaret’s haunting memories of nightly air-raids in the Second World War when her parents were “worn out from fire-watching,” and “houses in the familiar streets [were] suddenly plunged into dust” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 73). What he has in mind is “to leave the London suburbs, to make another kind of life, somewhere else, with better people” (Kureishi, *My Beautiful* 75).

In other words, Karim attempts to step out of the confines of his parents and relatives' ghetto mentality and to carve out a niche for himself in the urban space. If the past has ever become any burden for him, it is always related to cultural differences that he inherits from his community and the suburban life style he endeavors to get rid of. It is noteworthy that the metropolitan qualities—namely the features of modernity, “the intensification of nervous stimulation” and “the metropolitan blasé attitude” in a Simmelian sense (Simmel, “Metropolis” 175, 178)—and the supremacy of a metropolitan life style over the suburban one are the main attractions that Central London has for him.

Among Karim's friends, Eva, Charlie, and Eleanor are typical of the people who can either function as his role models—Charlie, for example—or guide him into the high life of London. Karim's homosexual love for Charlie, for example, is motivated by something deeper than the need for sex:

I admire him more than anyone but I didn't wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face, style [and probably skin color]. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me. (Kureishi, *Buddha* 15)

Likewise, Eva and Eleanor play the same roles because they are intellectually or socially higher than he. This craving for social mobility was so strong that he could even, to borrow Jamila's terms, “pander to prejudices” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 157). For example, in the name of authenticity,<sup>13</sup> he plays the role of Mowgli with a contrived Indian accent.

Karim's longing to participate in metropolitan life is particularly manifested in his observation and comparison of different areas in London—the cityscape, people's manners, and their dress code, which indicates the distinction of race, class, and ethnicity, namely, the “softer” aspect of the city<sup>14</sup>—while he is strolling or cycling around the city. He noticed, for instance, that “Chislehurst had greenhouses, grand oaks and sprinklers on the lawn; men came in to do the garden” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 29). When he took train with Ted to go through the suburbs into London, he passed over “the slums of Herne Hill and Brixton, places so compelling and unlike anything [he] was used to seeing that [he] jumped up, jammed down the window

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<sup>13</sup> For the idea of expropriating the politics of authenticity in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, see Lee 104-19.

<sup>14</sup> Here I have in mind Jonathan Raban's idea of a “soft city.” See Raban. For the idea of seeing London as a soft city—a “soft” London, see Jung Su, “Feeling London Globally,” forthcoming.

and gazed out at the rows of disintegrating Victorian houses” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 43). Ted explained to him, “That’s where the niggers live. Them blacks” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 43). Elsewhere Karim describes Jamila’s home with a bitter implication of how Asian British immigrants live under the threat of white neo-fascist violence:

The area in which Jamila lived was closer to London than our suburbs, and far poorer. It was full of neo-fascist groups, thugs who had their own pubs and clubs and shops. On Saturdays they’d be out in the High Street selling their newspapers and pamphlets. They also operated outside the schools and colleges and football grounds, like Millwall and Crystal Palace. At night they roamed the streets, beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter-boxes. Frequently the mean, white, hating faces had public meetings and the Union Jacks were paraded through the streets, protected by the police. . . . The lives of Anwar and Jeeta and Jamila were pervaded by fear of violence. I’m sure it was something they thought about every day. (Kureishi, *Buddha* 56)

After he moves to Central London, Karim keenly examines the reconstruction of the cityscape:

I walked around Central London and saw that the town was being ripped apart; the rotten was being replaced by the new, and the new was ugly. The gift of creating beauty had been lost somewhere. The ugliness was in the people, too. Londoners seemed to hate each other. (Kureishi, *Buddha* 258)

Karim’s strolling, taken together with Saladin’s sauntering on the streets of Brickhall, if read in the light of Jenks’ elaborations of the metaphor of the flâneur, could be viewed as wandering urban cultural critics who, in depicting a narrative cartography of post-imperial London, provide “an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context” (“Watching” 148, 155). They possess, to borrow Jenks’ words again, “a creative attitude of urban inquisition and a ‘relative’ absence of variable constraints” (“Watching” 156) due to their peripheral stance and their social invisibility. In their alternative cartography of London, the social spatialization of race, class, and culture and the bitter criticism of Thatcherite racism are vividly unfolded in the act of flânerie. Apart from this creative and

critical attitude, they also own an “objectivity” of the Simmelian stranger—a unique quality derived from their “alien origins” (Simmel, “Stranger” 145, 148)—which enables them to observe the city from alternative perspectives, inject new elements into it, and revitalize its organicity. Through this reconfiguration of urban space in narrative cartography, Saladin and Karim, the new urban immigrant flâneurs, are able to reconfigure their ruptured pasts—the pasts are ruptured in the sense that their cultural histories have multiple origins and demand incessant negotiation—in the spatial structure of the city.

In Anwar’s funeral, Karim finally comes to terms with his Indian part and thereby completes his *Bildung*:

But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now—the Indians—that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. (Kureishi, *Buddha* 212)

At the very end of the novel, Karim celebrates with his family his having got a part in a new soap opera, in which he would no longer need to sell his oriental exoticism; rather, he gets a vantage-point to participate in a cultural critique of contemporary British society: the TV soap opera deals with such contemporary issues as abortion and racist attacks. Surrounded by many people, Karim thought in retrospect and with anticipation:

I could think about the past and what I’d been through as I’d struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply.

And so I sat in the center of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn’t always be that way. (Kureishi, *Buddha* 283-84)

Roaming in the city, therefore, provides for Saladin and Karim possibilities of delineating the alternative cityscape of post-imperial London. More significantly, it

is through this flâneuristic strolling that they come to terms with the hidden parts of their selves. Having suffered the racial discrimination of the police and witnessed street violence in Brickhall, Saladin is able to accept his Indian past and realizes that the Indianness in him can never be eradicated even if he achieves class ascendancy. For Karim, in marching towards London and exploring its social life, he gradually accepts his Indian cultural inheritance. Near the end of his *Bildung*, Karim chooses to embrace London and its cultural products—mainly the pop culture of the 1970s, which, with its resistance to “straight” criterion, facilitates a synthesis of diverse cultural elements and globalization. More importantly, this appropriation of global cultural products significantly paves the way for a more inventive, resourceful intervention into the issue of race, ethnicity, age, and gender, thereby complicating the rigid binary logic of anti-racist discourse. The past, or more precisely, Karim’s parents’ past, becomes the enigma explored, detected, and reflected upon by the son. Finally, he comes to negotiate with these pasts, knowing that even though such memories of the past are destined to leave an ineradicable, disconcerting imprint on him, he is still able to withstand their impact and the subsequent challenges with a firmer determination, a determination to recognize different parts of him and to carve out a career of his own.

In both of these novels, the protagonists reflect on their attitudes toward the past in the course of their flânerie. The routes of their journeys limn the cityscape of a declining empire and disclose socially and politically repressed immigrant communities that had been demonized and rendered invisible through the racialization of space (one thinks of Shaandaar Café, a small café run by a Bangladeshi family, the Sufyans, in a ghetto of the East End, for example) and under the racist discursive representation of the urban space (Chamcha’s metamorphosis into a devilish man-goat is a most conspicuous metaphor which indicates the immigration officers’ demonization of the immigrant).<sup>15</sup> Allowing their protagonists to transform the linearity of the past into a re-territorialization of the city via the act of flânerie, Rushdie and Kureishi reconfigure Chamcha’s and Karim’s ruptured pasts in their living reality and affirm their cultural values and difference. Such recognition and affirmation, while being used to remedy the sense of loss, is reused as complementary sources of regeneration and recuperation. Near the two novels’ ending, both protagonists come to realize that, as Stuart Hall has put

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<sup>15</sup> I am referring James Donald’s conception of “the city as text” (“Metropolis: The City as Text” 427) and Anthony D. King’s viewing the city as “a representation of specific ideologies, of social, political, economic, and cultural relations and practices, of hierarchies and structures, which not only represent but also, inherently constitute these same relations and structures” (4).

it, “[they] are in the flux of the past and the present” and that “that new conception of ethnicity is now struggling in different ways across the globe against the present danger and the threat of old ethnicity” (20). But beyond this confrontation of the ambivalent attitude towards the past and the emergence of new ethnicity, it is noticeable that Saladin and Karim’s ambivalence is deeply entangled with a “modernity” complex, which has long been buried under their struggle against white supremacy—they worship western modernity, or rather, the idea of progressivity, of materialism wrapped in the clothing of modernity, on the one hand and oppose its arbitrary intervention into their own cultural traditions (Islam, for example) on the other, which results in the rupture of their own cultures and histories. The ideas of wrestling with and contestation of modernity are therefore subtly implanted in the kernel of colonial subject’s mentality, which is exactly the question hidden behind novels like *The Satanic Verses* and *The Black Album*. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* such a modernity complex is embodied in Karim’s adoration of the metropolitan upper class bohemianism of Eleanor. This contestation, though not explicitly revealed, serves as a powerful drive that motivates the protagonists of the two novels to draw enthusiastically the alternative visions of London on their own. The reconfiguration of the past, in this light, is not just a re-mapping of the city; it also discloses the need to re-examine how Asian British writers deal with the past by including the issue of class transformation and the overlooked, buried aspiration for and battle with the lure of western modernity.

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### About the Author

Jung Su (蘇榕) is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University, in Taipei, Taiwan. Her research interest includes urban literature, post-colonialism, contemporary British fiction, and Chinese American literature. Her articles have appeared in *Concentric*, *EurAmerica*, *the Proceedings of National Science Council, Taiwan*, *Chung-wai Literary Monthly*, and *Review of English and American Literature*. She was editor of *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2007-2009. For more information, please visit the following website: <http://web.ntnu.edu.tw/~jungsu/>.  
Email: [jungsu@ntnu.edu.tw](mailto:jungsu@ntnu.edu.tw)

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