
“Lovers on the ayre”: Love as a Means and Metaphor of Identity Construction in Suhayl Saadi’s *Psychoraag*

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Abstract: *In psychology, postmodernity is perceived as having detraditionalized our understanding of and attitude to love and intimate relationship, as a result of which postmodern relationships are viewed as being built on and determining a change in emotional and sexual intimacy, the significance of sexual satisfaction, as well as developments in the process of individualisation. In postmodern literature, as Catherine Belsey points out, “love becomes the condition of a happiness that cannot be bought” and “has come to represent presence, transcendence, immortality” (683). In diaspora literature, these changes and developments connected to love, and happening when the individual experiences the presence and transcendence of love, are often further intensified and complicated by issues of race, ethnicity and religion. In all its complexities and individual perceptions, postmodern love is often depicted as closely related to or intertwined with the process of the diasporic subject’s search for identity. Close reading Suhayl Saadi’s *Psychoraag* (2004), an experimental novel with postmodern text(uality), and its portrayal of the role of identity positions and the transformative power of music and love/intimacy in personal development, the paper examines the protagonist-narrator DJ Zaf’s mental and physical journeys with regards to his two intimate relationships from the aspect of the diasporic subject’s identity crisis. I shall argue that the protagonist’s relationships – and by extension, love itself – are essential stages of his ‘journey,’ unalienable parts of his multiple selves, as well as inevitable elements and the ultimate metaphor of identity construction.*

Keywords: *love in postmodern literature, Scottish Asian novel, music, cultural hybridity, identity construction*

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changes and developments connected to love, and happening when the individual experiences the presence and transcendence of love, are often further intensified and complicated by issues of race, ethnicity and religion. In all its complexities and individual perceptions, postmodern love is often depicted as closely related to or intertwined with the process of the diasporic subject's search for identity. Close reading Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag* (2004), an experimental novel with postmodern text(uality), and its portrayal of the role of identity positions and the transformative power of music and love/intimacy in personal development, the paper examines the protagonist-narrator DJ Zaf's mental and physical journeys with regards to his two intimate relationships from the aspect of the diasporic subject's identity crisis. I shall argue that the protagonist's relationships – and by extension, love itself – are essential stages of his 'journey,' unalienable parts of his multiple selves, as well as inevitable elements and the ultimate metaphor of identity construction.

Saadi's *Psychoraag* has received critical acclaim for its redefinition of Scottish identity and merits as the first Scots Asian novel (Cf. Mitchell, 2006), and may also be marked out for being a contemporary Glasgow novel with an ethnic twist: presenting the city as a postcolonial territory reterritorialized and hybridised by the Pakistani diaspora. With its musical narrative style and complex language, the novel further emphasizes its (self-) positioning as a hybrid cultural production. From the aspect of poetics, *Psychoraag* is an experimental novel alternating between first- and second-person narration, written in various languages and dialects, and including a host of intertextual references and drawings. It is not simply a coming-of-age story, a documentary of a community or phenomenon, revolutionary in the cultural milieu it portrays, but a self-reflexive, postmodern text using Rushdiesque narrative strategies and allegorical formations, speaking in a metaphysical voice and suggesting parallels with other art forms. Its text(uality) becomes a major character and agent: questions concerning the identity of the narrator-protagonist become questions concerning the identity of the text.

During the final six hours of the madness of the Junnune Show that the protagonist-narrator DJ Zaf spends in his cubicle at Radio Chaandni, he embarks on a mental journey recalling his parents' 'epic voyage' from Pakistan to Scotland, their early days of settlement and the creation of diaspora space in Glasgow, and he laments on the past events and loves that have defined him (Saadi 129). Despite the constant shifts and leaps from past to present and future, from reality to memory and hallucination, from song lyrics to intertextual

references, the protagonist's stream of consciousness, combined with a first-person "radio DJ-narrator technique," offers a highly complex yet seamless narrative (Mitchell, "Psychoraag"). The intertextual references vary from Hebrew and Muslim mythology, to Scottish historical figures and literary works, as well as to Persian and Urdu literature and culture and, most emphatically, the *raag*, the most celebrated form of Indian music used as the basis for improvisations, conveying various emotions, and enabling the musician "to unite his or her personality with a particular mood and, thereby, instil the same mood in the audience" (Saadi 428). Since the novel positions itself first and foremost in language and music, these references are important not only from the aspect of the hybridity of the text and its protagonist but also in terms of the situatedness and rootedness he experiences. What I mean is that, while references to Scottish and Pakistani literature, history, religion and culture serve as 'cultural markers' of a hybrid diasporic subject, the innumerable instances of Persian, Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, French, Spanish expressions and cultural references, as well as Saadi's use of language, a hybrid dialect made up of Urdu, English and Glaswegian vernacular, a regional variation of Hinglish (blending English with Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi), on one hand, portray Zaf as an educated polyglot at home in the world – a cosmopolite at heart – and, on the other hand, point to a "post-ethnic 'Scottish' identity" (MacDonald 87), which may incorporate and compress a multitude of ethnicities and cultures at once, but is identified by none of them exclusively.

Music may be interpreted as yet another form of language and signifier of identity in the novel, and it occupies a central position therein, as a means of getting in touch with the audience (and the readership), of evoking memories, conveying thoughts and various mental states, and of indicating a carnivalistic, almost chaotic hybridity and cultural diversity. The protagonist's song choices from Eastern and Western music, or as he calls them, "Wanderin soangs, a narrative ae the night" (Saadi 401), provide the spine and frame of the narrative of *Psychoraag*, and are also interconnected by means of flashbacks and flash-forwards: the music triggers memories and memories inspire the music, thus creating Zaf's very own "psychoraag" (Saadi 401). Although Zaf initially claims to be "a sample," a fragmented, faulty representation both in Scotland and in Pakistan, he later realises that his identity "lay not in a flag or in a particular concretisation of a transcendent Supreme Being but in a chord, a bar, a vocal reaching beyond itself" (Saadi 210), that is, while he previously identified himself according to his region (as a Glaswegian), his words here

suggest an identity position beyond spatial concerns since it is music that describes and defines him. When he says “music an soang ... That’s whit Ah’m about” (Saadi 208-9) ¹, he lays claim to an identity (continually) constructed and positioned in and through music – as Kathrine Ashley points out, “[l]ike a raag, which is never performed the same way twice, identity [...] is conceived as a flexible process rather than as a predetermined state of being” (Ashley 140-1). Music thus serves as a self-reflexive poetic and cultural metaphor, hybridizing both the language and the text itself, while “psychoraag” may be interpreted as the metonym of Zaf’s stream of consciousness, as well as a metaphor for the diasporic subject’s identity formation and construction.

Love and intimate relationships are just as much a fundamental part and, at the same time, a metaphor of the protagonist’s cultural identity, self-positioning and identity construction as music since, in Zaf’s words “iviry piece ae music ye listen tae, iviry person who comes intae yer life, iviry breath ae soang fae the dark river ae the raat [night] that runs under the skin, changes ye” (Saadi 37), that is, music and love both have a transformative power with regards to one’s personality and identity. Before finding love and a concomitant sense of belonging in his Glaswegian community of listeners, his “[l]overs on the ayre” (Saadi 334), and creating a transcendental self in music, Zaf attempts to define himself in relation and as opposed to space/place – Pollokshields, the neighbourhood he grew up in –, as well intimate relationships – with fellow Asian Zilla and Irish nurse Babs. As he claims, the women he’d loved would always be there, in his head, gathered around his body, defining him [...] A person wasn’t defined by what he did, though or said when the sun wis shinin, the music wis singin up the major keys. It wis what you did on the nights when there were no shadows [...] It wis what you did to people, when they didn’t match up to your dreams, that counted. How you treated those you loved and who loved you when everythin wis goin down. (Saadi 33-34)

One of the people who did not match up to his dreams but rather turned out to be a ‘nightmare’ in more ways than one is his ex-girlfriend Zilla, whom “the great city of Glasgow had trapped [...] in its vein” (Saadi 91) and who reminds Zaf of roots, i.e. his neighbourhood and cultural identity, denoting rootedness as both attachment and fixity, being firmly entrenched, which he attempts to run away from. When Zaf notes that “[g]rowin up in the Shiels in those days wis purgatorial and, for years, [he] had existed in a state of unrequited life” (Saadi 377), he displays an unbearable sense of confinement and – drawing on the

1 In all such cases, the ellipsis is in the original text.

definition of the purgatory as an intermediate state and a transitory, in-between space – and being defined by Bhabhaian (1996) cultural in-betweenness, generating an identity crisis as a stage in his process of identity-construction.

The purgatorial diaspora space, where as a young adult he felt trapped in the “constant sense of imminent, barely suppressed violence” (Saadi, *Psychoraag* 115), and struggled with a frightful feeling of rootedness in a place and a culture, indicates a certain motionlessness and inescapability, resonating with the feelings he readily associates with (his love for) Zilla:

Zaf had never known where his own reality lay. That was why he'd left Zilla. Because she had dived into the depths of herself, only to find that there wis no end, that her soul wis a form of hell [...] Deid eyes. It wis as though Zilla hud become those streets (Saadi 279, 299).

Zilla's metaphorical transformation into the place she inhabits may mean rootedness *par excellence*, both physically and mentally, which Zaf perceives as particularly frightening since it may as well happen to him too: when Zaf refers to Zilla, as well as Zafar, the gangster of Kinnin Park, as alter egos (Saadi 47, 106), alternate dark selves, his words suggests a fear of turning into them – embodiments of a possible future as a junkie or a criminal – should he stay in the Shields, which he desperately wants to avoid. Furthermore, as all three of them are cultural in-betweeners in/of a hybrid diaspora space, I read Zaf's rootedness, and his loathing thereof, being fixed in a state of in-betweenness and identity crisis, permanent and inescapable. Zilla managed to escape the diaspora community and the immigrant 'ghetto' only to get trapped in drugs (given to her by Zaf in the first place) and prostitution, and although Zaf left her, her presence is constantly felt in his consecutive relationship and she returns in a drug-induced hallucination to reunite with him, as I shall discuss it later.

Zaf's attempt to run away from Zilla may thus be read as an attempt – and failure – to escape unwelcome parts of his identity and the feelings they generate: his own roots and rootedness, and the sense of in-betweenness they entail, perceived as a threat, a spatial-mental confinement, a paralysis-like state – although these later prove to be unavoidable stages in his identity construction. Zaf's wish to uproot himself and find where 'his own reality lay' drives him to Babs, Zilla's (and his) complete opposite, who “knew her place in life ... she had no dilemmas about who she really wis – no fracture of the soul” (Saadi 326), meaning that she has a sense of self devoid of painful insecurities and crisis generated by cultural in-betweenness. Furthermore, Babs'

attitude to her native place is strikingly different and therefore highly attractive: “She’d been brought up in the deep south, in Galloway, where she had been surrounded by the land and the sea. She carried them with her wherever she went. The hills and the ocean breathed in her head” (Saadi 11). Babs appears to be likewise rooted but not confined in a place and culture, and incorporating them into her identity with ease. Her “lust of migratin Celts” (Saadi 20) and ‘carrying her homeland’ with her signifies a different kind of rootedness, which Zaf perceives as a positive feature and a significant factor in her power over him (Saadi 175), since it implies “stability and a source of unproblematical identity” (Massey 151) and points to what Proshansky et al. (1983) call “place identity,” denoting situatedness and rootedness through an emotional bonding with a place. For Zaf, Babs’ rootedness is perceived as and hoped to offer him, too, emotional safety, which may be explained by Erich Fromm’s psychoanalytic theory (1955) of basic human needs, which include rootedness (the need to establish roots and feel at home in the world), a sense of identity (awareness of one as a separate self) and relatedness (a desire for union with another person through, for instance, love, producing authentic fulfilment) – needs which Zaf believes to be able to fulfil with and through Babs. These three existential needs may provide alternative roots for Zaf, to remedy the lack caused by the roots he wishes to reject as, in Fromm’s words,

if man loses his natural roots, where is he and who is he? He would stand alone, without a home; without roots; he could not bear the isolation and helplessness of this position. He would become insane. He can dispense with the natural roots only insofar as he finds new human roots and only after he has found them can he feel at home again in this world (37).

Zaf is convinced that with Babs he could feel, in a Frommian sense, “at home” again: transgress the boundaries of his “mental ghetto” (Saadi 383) and run away from “the eternally judgemental, hung-up families of [the immigrant neighbourhood of] East Pollokshields and Kinnin Park – far away to some vast, empty place where they would be able to lose themselves, where they would be able to become just two tiny figures, specks of dust in a classical European vista” (Saadi 77). Their love seems to offer an opportunity to leave behind the rootedness experienced in and spatially embodied by his diaspora space, to fit into the enabling diversity he associates with Europe, and thus live free from expectations and limitations imposed on him by both his diaspora and society and making the home he knew unhomely and suffocating.

Through their relationship, Zaf expresses his refusal to “live along both sides of a double-edged blade” (Saadi 279-80), that is, westernisation or clinging to his roots, and chooses uprooting, becoming “some kind of interloper not just in Govan but also now to his parents and to the life he had had before” (Saadi 272), a state of unbelonging in place, to community and family. When he claims that he “had grown up and away” (Saadi 272), his uprooting suggests both physical and mentally distancing and detachment – a defiant act or, at least, a wishful thinking thereof. However, although Zaf leaves the Shields, he never really leaves Glasgow and, with time, he experiences complex, at times contradictory feelings and an unresolvable crisis in their relationship as well: “[With Babs] he felt twice as tall, he felt accepted, loved or, at least, not hated. He had felt part of her world though he had always remained unsure, really, of what that world might be ... But still, he had needed more” (Saadi 328). His experience of not fitting (in), of not belonging is also described with a spatial metaphor when he laments “Once, they had been like continents and their edges had matched perfectly. In the mornin, though, it had always been more difficult to span the gap” (Saadi 409) – a realization that “he had been trapped like a fly in the lens of a camera, that he had been actin a role” (Saadi 202), denoting a renewed sense of confinement.

Babs and Zaf’s relationship is further complicated by the fact that he “had carried Zilla’s shadow with him through his life and, even now, all these years later, it haunted his every thought. And he wis sure that Babs could feel the presence of the other woman, tattooed deep in the moistness of his skin. Leathered to his soul” (Saadi 327). It seems that what he rejected in the first place – Zilla and whatever she stood for – is forever ingrained onto his skin and into his soul, it is an inalienable part of him. When Zaf claims he “had the odd feelin that he had known her always ... It wis unusual to see an Asian girl goin out with an Asian guy. It seemed somehow that the two entities were mutually repellent – as though there wis a danger that they might catch something from each other. Blackness mibbee. Or shame” (Saadi 90), the repulsion he points out suggests a fear of contamination by someone who is ‘the same as’ him and likewise perceived as the Other, and indicates that he projects his own self-hatred onto Zilla. Interestingly, at one point Zaf also describes Zilla as his feminine side: “Sometimes [he] had tried to elide himself into the mind and body of a woman [...] But the woman he became wis always Zilla. She wis like a fuckin alter ego” (Saadi 47). As an alter ego, Zilla embodies Zaf’s dark, restricted personae, a part of his identity, his image in a (distorted) mirror he wishes to repel and expel just as much as his rootedness.

What he does not recognize at this point is that Zilla as an alter ego may represent, by definition, the duality (or rather, multiplicity) of his identity, his cultural hybridity, impossible to discard or run away from. By the same token, Zaf is drawn to Babs, because she “had been different. She wis white. Reality is nine-tenth of myth” (Saadi 76), that is, her seemingly stable, singular identity which he identifies with whiteness and which makes her ‘the white territory’ he yearns to conquer.

Zaf’s relationships, and especially his emphasis on the two ex-girlfriends’ complexion, are indicative of and thus need to be examined from the aspect of his identity crisis related to his own skin colour as well. When younger, whenever Zaf stared into a mirror, he was reminded of and angered by the ‘alienness’ of his reflection:

He remembered a time he had hated himself so much, he had deliberately avoided mirrors. And yet, sooner or later, he would always find himself lured by one of the glass sirens ... Gazin into the mirror and not knowin what you were lookin at. [...] Purgatory wasn’t a place in the sky. It was right down inside of your skin [...] He would be arrogant to his own people but would find himself unbearably obsequious with any white person. Charmin to the point of idiocy – as though he had wanted to obliterate himself, to merge his being in their white-ness. He had wanted, so badly, to be accepted and loved that he would’ve been willin to have scraped the blackness from his skin, cell by fuckin cell, until all that would’ve been left would’ve been the bones. And they were white [...] For a long time, he had wished that he wis white [...] he had aimed at some elusive quality of white-ness which probably had never really existed but which was all the more prized because of that. His image had chased him repeatedly through the days and the years until, finally, inevitably, it had always caught up with him and, every time it did, his eyes would be transfixed by the alien face in the mirror and he would die again. Glass deaths. There wis a certain masochistic joy in that” (Saadi 134-35).

This passage is especially noteworthy inasmuch as it highlights the physical, symptomatic aspects of Zaf’s identity crisis. First, his avoidance of mirrors may be interpreted as a ‘reversed’ Lacanian mirror stage. In Judith Butler’s understanding of this Lacanian notion, the child’s sense of the body is generated through the projection of “an idealized totality” (43) of the mirror image, and by transforming “a lived sense of disunity and loss of control into an ideal of integrity and control” (43). In contrast, Zaf’s words above suggest a sense of disunity and a self-hatred (a loss of control over his [self-]perception) generated in part by his mirror images as reflected in/by other people and the

actual mirrors he wishes to avoid, lest they should confirm his feeling of being an alien, the Other in the eyes of others. Secondly, the recurring image purgatory, with reference to his skin this time, is again equated with suffering from in-betweenness, which he yearns to do away with by “obliterating himself” and thus achieving similarity or sameness with white English people since he associates whiteness with security and wholeness (Saadi 283), a stable identity he is desperately searching for. Furthermore, the fact that Zaf longs for the destruction of colour, it being a racial signifier, and dies “glass deaths” each time he faces his own blackness-alienness in the mirror also evokes Roger Caillois’s notion of mimicry, where imitative acts may be performed as a desire for self-erasure, to do away with the distinctions between itself and its environment, which may, however, result in the loss of identity. The “masochistic joy” Zaf finds in these “deaths” suggests that what he desires is not death *per se*, but self-erasure for the sake of a new identity, a chance to do away with the distinctions, which he hopes to achieve by scraping his skin until the whiteness of his bones shows – by mimicry as camouflage, denoting “blending in with something in the background that none the less is not entirely there itself” (Huddart 46).

Years later, Zaf strives to ‘whiten,’ to purify himself by engaging in a relationship with Babs, whose very being and affection for him seem to be the proof that the “elusive quality of white-ness” does exist and may be transferred upon him through uniting in love. When Zaf claims that he needs

her smooth, golden white to fill out his darkness” (Saadi 281), he gives away a perception of his blackness as a lack, an emptiness that may be filled by whiteness. From this aspect, Zaf’s desire for Babs may be interpreted in several ways. First, it points to Belsey’s take on the Lacanian notion of desire, according to which “desire inhabits the unconscious, and its motive is a lack, an absence at the heart of identity.” The demand for love thus signifies a lack, a hole to be filled and the “displacement of the want-to-be (685).

In short: Zaf’s desire for whiteness is a lack, and Bab’s love is the presence (Belsey 683) that promises to fulfil it. Second, Zaf’s desire resonates with Lewis Gordon’s phenomenology of racism, according to which the racial other is seen as “Absence” whereas white men and women may regard themselves as “Presence” (124). Similarly to the long passage quoted above, Zaf’s words here give away a considerable sense of self-hatred as a result of internalizing racist attitudes to skin colour: he perceives whiteness as “an entry” to “Paradise,” that would enable the diasporic subject to become “an honorary person. No longer

a Paki, nigger, wog” (Saadi 245). Zaf’s love for Babs may thus be interpreted as essentially concomitant to *her* whiteness and *his* self-hatred, which, in Franz Fanon’s theory involves both the fear of losing one’s self and the desire for whiteness; in his words, “out of the blackest part of my soul ... surges this desire to be suddenly *white*” (63) [original emphasis]. In David Marriott’s view, this desire can be directly linked to Fanon’s notion of “true love” as a “gift of self” (*Black Skin* 41). Yearning for whiteness thus may manifest in yearning for the love of a white woman, described by Marriott as follows:

By loving me ... the white woman embraces me with the whiteness of her love. That whiteness dazzles me with its promise, the conjuration of the white man buried within. In other words, by possessing her, I possess my wished-for self. [...] Through her I can transcend all that is inborn in me by redeeming the whiteness hidden within. Her love betokens what I was meant to be, not what I am. (152)

What is most noteworthy in this description is the way the (love of) white woman is presented as a mere mediator, a means of turning the desire for whiteness into the possession thereof. As a third interpretation of desire, this perception of love recalls René Girard’s notion of mimicry, his mimetic theory elaborated in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1965), the basis of which is the so-called triangular desire among the subject, the object and the model/mediator. In Girard’s theory, the modern subject is unable to live up to his self-expectations to be original, (i.e., to be wholly himself) and so he imitates the alleged originality of the other to mask his own lack and to “camouflage the essential role which the Other plays in his desires” (“Triangular Desire” 302). As a result, he pretends that, like the other, he also “chooses the objects of his own desire” (295) – and this is precisely how triangular desire comes to life. In her introduction to Girard’s “Triangular Desire,” Dorothy Hale summarizes the process the following way:

[T]he individual deceives himself that he desires an object that will satisfy him and that he can possess – when in truth he desires something that he can never be: the autonomous subject the mediator seems to be. The ‘object’ is thus itself a disguise, a mask to hide the subject’s dependence upon another person. But we should also remember that the mediator himself is in some ways simply an ‘object’ to begin with, the screen upon which the subject projects the initial fantasy of achieved individuality. He is projected first as the autonomous individual and then as the ‘rival’ who possesses or seeks to possess the object that the subject believes himself to desire. (286-8)

What follows is that, whether perceived as desire, love, or envy, the “impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator” (Girard, “Triangular Desire” 299). From this aspect, Zaf’s love for Babs signals self-love he yearns to achieve through taking possession of whiteness, that is, he is trapped in a triangular desire where he is the subject, Babs is the model/mediator, and whiteness is the object.

Saadi portrays the desire for possession (of presence, true love, a ‘true’ self, even) with another spatial metaphor, the body as territory, and as a mutual desire of the two lovers:

Babs ... had cried out, ‘my brown god, give me your seed!’ ... he had felt he wis dissolving, like rough brown sugar, into her and yet, in the same moment, he had felt the separateness between them widen and the two feelins made him sense that he wis about to be torn apart ... Before, he had always tried to see their relationship as colour-blind but, that night, he had realised that it could not be ... She needed his brownness – just as he needed her white. They were both conquerin territories. Three hundred years ... Nuthin wis equal between them. (25-26)

While their union as merging and dissolving may be read as both a desire for self-erasure and the fear of losing his self and the whiteness desired (pointing back to both Caillouis’s and Girard’s notion of mimicry), the separateness that Zaf experiences foregrounds the impossibility of the fulfilment of his desire, while the phrase “conquering territories” points to the colonisation and counter-colonisation of the body of the Other as an object of desire and a rivalry for possession, with Zaf being on the losing end. Although, right from the onset, Zaf had been aware of Bab’s power over him, deriving from her rootedness and whiteness, and did not seem to mind this imbalance of power, since “with Babs, he felt complete” (Saadi 175), the sense of separateness during their sexual intercourse may involve the realization that “[i]t had always been there, runnin beneath their relationship, the implicit threat of her takin her white-ness and goin elsewhere. She’d been the one who’d really always been in control” (Saadi 140-41). Consequently, when Babs gradually grows apart from and finally leaves him, Zaf feels that “he hud loast his great, white soul” (Saadi 317), that is, the whiteness he was ‘meant to’ have, and must start his search for love and his self all over again, re-positioning or re-constructing his identity as “Zaf, the King of the Airwaves” (Saadi 328).

On the final night of the Junnune show, the image of desired

whiteness returns in a somewhat different, more subversive form: “Zaf hated those kinds of boundaries – hated bein defined by his status of bein other – felt trapped by that whole thing. Mibbee that wis why he’d dumped Zilla – because he’d not wanted to be cast in his own skin [...] Zaf wanted to be like a lizard and to be able to slip from one skin to another, whenever it suited him [...] To be like a white man” (Saadi 45). The passage indicates Zaf’s refusal of being defined by his complexion and a wish for the ability of self-positioning, the privilege of the white man, which could give him control over his (self-)perception – an attitude pointing to the concept of passing, “a successful self-representation in line with a socially favoured identity at the expense of an ‘authentic’ one” (Harrison 1). Referring to whiteness and all that it entails as essentially a matter of positioning resonates with Stuart Hall’s concept of cultural identity as a positioning (“A Place” 395) and life as an “ensemble of identity-positions in all its specificities” (“Formation” 502), as well as Steve Pile’s claim that “the self is always located within a situation” and that this situation is always “profoundly geographical” (54). This suggests that one’s geographical location and social situation are concomitant with one’s cultural and personal self-positioning. Such a positioning in space, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, “gives the subject a coherent identity and ability to manipulate things [...] in space” (92), while identity-positions mark various stages in the process of one’s identity construction, or, in Hall’s words, “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (“Introduction” 5). Drawing on these theories, I argue that Zaf ‘applies’ different identity positions in different places/spaces, situations and even in his romantic relationships – a self-positioning that may be interpreted as manipulation, control, or even transgression.

If his skin is a boundary, it is definitely one that Zaf transgresses: with Babs he positions himself as a ‘white Scot’ with a borrowed whiteness and as the “brown god” she needed him to be, while at Radio Chaandni he wears the mask of DJ Zaf and projects a part of his identity which is Asian. On one hand, these identity-positions evoke Bhabha’s concept of hybridity as a “camouflage,” “a contesting, antagonistic agency,” a subversive form of counter-authority, as well as the “third space” of the “in-between” (*Location* 193, 38) which is a metaphor not of sameness, but of cultural difference, “a metonymy of presence” (*Location* 115). On the other hand, they may be read as identity performances which “reconstructed something that wasn’t real from somethin that wis” (Saadi 22), purporting one or another ‘exclusive’ signifier of his self. Added up, these signifiers-positions form a

complex, multiple, hybrid identity, which, in a way, he also performs during his shows through his hybrid language use, and during the final night, through his hybrid playlist of music.

The acceptance and conscious performance of his hybridity goes parallel with and is metaphorised by a changing perception of the loves of his life:

They wur right oot in the deepest, maist silent part [of a loch with Babs] [...] He could feel her darkness, arch ower his corpse – silent like the daith – could feel himself sinkin intae emptiness. A perfect, quiet moment. [...] Her whiteness turnin tae black. Becomin Zaf [...] Becomin Wan [...] No like the Other. No like Zilla. She had always existed in fragments. Broken mirrors. Shattered glass [...] he hud loast [Babs] there oan the loch-wi-nae-music, he hud loast his great, white soul an aw he could see, aw he could feel, wis Zilla. The perfect wan. The Shadae ae Goad. (Saadi, *Psychoraag* 317)

The image of Babs' whiteness turning into blackness and thereby into Zaf suggests a metaphorical dissolution of her power over Zaf and the end of triangular desire. At the same time, Zilla, though fragmented and broken, is elevated to the powerful position of 'the perfect one,' which may mark a crucial stage in Zaf's process of transforming his identity positions into a fluid, multiple identity. Such a transformation, however, he only perceives to be possible through rebirth, which he experiences not in the traditional diasporic form of relocation or re-rooting, but via a complex process of transfusion. In *Psychoraag*, this process is speeded up and completed by Zaf's alleged sexual intercourse (happening in his narcotic state) with Zilla, who makes him feel

as though [he] wis no longer man or wumman but sumhin undefined – sumhin in between or doon below, a hindbrain ae a thing, a purely physical entity that would jist shudder an die an leave nae imprint [...] Her hale boady wis formin a hide ower his, a skin that stopped him fae movin, sweatin, breathin, a darkness that engulfed him an turned his boady, his mind, his essence, intae music, intae a single, howlin note ae despair. (Saadi 301-2)

While through making love with Babs, Zaf hoped to be reborn as white, Zaf's union with Zilla, sinister and illusionary as it may seem, suggests the birth of a third entity that exists beyond gender and skin-colour, and is both heavily physical and purely spiritual. The metaphor of turning into music filling the ether recalls the image of being 'lovers on the air' and suggests that their union is the ultimate transformation, transmutation *par excellence*, creating a transcendental being.

Furthermore, if Zaf's essence or 'true self' turns to music then this is a case of true alchemy, the realisation of the alchemist's ultimate goal – an alchemical "metempsychosis" (Saadi 177).

Throughout the novel, Saadi Zaf makes repeated references to alchemy; for example, Zaf's job as a DJ is to "Turn life intae music [...] Turn lead tae gold" (P201) and he asserts that "Good music [...] filled your world, it completed you. It replicated your soul and turned you to gold" (Saadi 239). These are not simply images of transformation but point to the alchemist's endeavour to create gold out of nothing. On the other hand, the metaphor of Zaf turning into music through love implies that Zaf (and, by extension, Saadi) also uses the concept of alchemy in a Jungian sense of the alchemist being transformed into a different, superior substance during the process of alchemy, the primary aim of which is "the creation of a Divine Self," (Cavalli 49), which Zaf describes as becoming "[i]neffable. God only wise" (Saadi 337). Zaf and Zilla's union may thus be perceived as a *cuniunctio oppositorum*, the final stage of the alchemical procedures, which signals "the union of opposites in which separated materials with opposite qualities were at last united to create a wholly new united substance – the ultimate goal of alchemical procedures" (Hopcke 124). What makes this alchemical transformation even more noteworthy is that a few pages later Zaf claims that "part ae him hud always been Zilla [...] Ivirythin that wis inside ae him wis Zilla," that is, as he becomes music, "[w]an note, carved in stone, firin aff tae the farthest corners ae the universe" (Saadi 305), it is not a fixed singular self that becomes a spiritual substance, a divine Self, but an always already fluid and multiple self. Therefore, I argue that Zaf and Zilla's union recalls the birth of Salman Rushdie's "Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha" (5), a joint entity, a hybridity and multiplicity *par excellence*, and thus signifies the acceptance of this hybridity and multiplicity, manifested in the implied divinity of the two notions.

Furthermore, transmutation is also linked to Zaf's alter egos: in his drugged hallucinations and music-induced madness, Zaf's figure often merges with that of Zilla, his feminine side/self; Zafar, the gangster of Kinnin Park, who is Zaf's diasporic 'dark' self; and a Pakistani boy on a faded photograph, "the brother he'd never had" (Saadi 197), who embodies Zaf's roots in Pakistan. Sometimes these identities merge into one, forming a (trans-) mutant self, for example, Zilla's "lover-pimp," "Zaf-Zafar, the double-headed, mortal deity" (Saadi 400), while other times they are joined by additional figures of identification, showing him a completely different reflection in the mirror: "The face wis interchangeable – wan moment, it wis Zilla, the

next Babs, then his maa, then his papa, then it wis Zaf an he wis Zafar. There wis no separation – ivirythin wis wan note” (Saadi 395). The phrase ‘one note’ Zaf uses with regards to his union with Zilla and all his alter egos suggests a fluid, multiple identity and his acceptance thereof.

In my view, Zaf’s tangled, at times unwelcome, self-images, identity positions and alter egos, the women he loved and the loves that changed him are metonymies of his metempsychosis, and unalienable parts of his multiple selves and his “psychoraag;” as Zaf points out with a musical metaphor: “They had formed you. You were like a *mela*, inseparable from the *raag*” (Saadi 365). In *Psychoraag*, Saadi portrays love in its postmodern complexities, as an essential stage of the protagonist’s journey: Zaf yearns to conquer and become, through triangular desire, Babs and all that she possesses, but ends up being entrapped by her control over him and rootedness in an image (blackness) he wanted to shed in the first place; he tries to run away from Zilla (that is, his roots, cultural identity, hybridity) but eventually becomes (one with) her through transmutation. If drawing on Rushdie, we perceive the air as a “transitory zone,” a space of transmutation, of hybridization as the inevitable process of the diasporic subject’s identity construction, then Zaf, Babs and Zilla are indeed “lovers on the ayre,” and love, transitory and transformative by its very nature, is the ultimate metaphor of identity construction.

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