

Writing Fundamentalism

Writing Fundamentalism

Edited by

Axel Stähler and Klaus Stierstorfer

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

AXEL STÄHLER

(UNIVERSITY OF KENT, CANTERBURY)

AND

KLAUS STIERSTORFER

(WESTFÄLISCHE WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT, MÜNSTER)

Now, as I before hinted, I have no objection to any person's religion, be it what it may, so long as that person does not kill or insult any other person, because that other person don't believe it also.

But when a man's religion becomes really frantic; when it is a positive torment to him; and, in fine, makes this earth of ours an uncomfortable inn to lodge in; then I think it high time to take that individual aside and argue the point with him.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*¹

Fundamentalism has emerged as one of the most pressing concerns of our time. Recent acts of terrorism, and sometimes even the “War on Terror,” are being attributed to fundamentalist “ideologies.” Similarly, though perhaps less dramatically, fundamentalism has become an issue in political, cultural and social debates both globally and locally. Indeed, the spectre of fundamentalism seems to raise its head in all walks of life. And more often than not that head is perceived to be ugly: for in spite of, or maybe even because of, its ubiquity, discussions of this multifaceted phenomenon are fraught with misconceptions and generalizations. Originating in fear (of loss of faith), fundamentalism generates fear and intolerance, thus creating a vicious circle of insecurity and deep angst. Not only does it widen the rift between those considered to be fundamentalists and those who are not, but it extends to and polarizes other groups “tainted” by association.

¹ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 89.

Not surprisingly, therefore, fundamentalism has become the focus of much scholarly attention.² Whereas it is commonly recognized to be centred on texts, however, the complex and at times paradoxical relationship of fundamentalism with literature remains as yet largely unexplored. Some work has been done on “fundamentalist” modes of textual composition and interpretation,³ and a number of studies on negotiations of individual literary texts with various fundamentalisms have now been carried out;⁴

² Of particular note among the plethora of publications on the subject of fundamentalism are still the five volumes of the “Fundamentalism Project” edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Yet these, like most scholarly explorations of the subject, deal only marginally with literature, if at all. For some exceptions, albeit sometimes only partial, see note 3.

³ See, for instance, Robert K. Johnston, “Interpreting Scripture: Literary Criticism and Evangelical Hermeneutics,” *Christianity and Literature* 32.1 (1982) 33–47, Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), P. J. Du Plessis, “Fundamentalism as Methodological Principle,” in *New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament*, eds P. J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 1991) or Sharon Crowley, *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

⁴ See, for instance, Albert Sonnenfeld, “Flannery O’Connor: The Catholic Writer as Baptist,” *Contemporary Literature* 13.4 (1972) 445–457, Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., “A Closer Walk with Thee: Flannery O’Connor and Southern Fundamentalists,” *Southern Literary Journal* 18.2 (1986) 3–13, Robert M. Price, “Fundamentalists in the Fiction of Stephen King,” *Studies in Weird Fiction* 5 (1989) 12–14, Lindsey Collen, “The Rape of Fiction,” *Index on Censorship* 23.4–5 (1994) 210–212, Mara E. Donaldson, “Baptizing the Imagination: The Fantastic as the Subversion of Fundamentalism,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 8.2 (30) (1997) 185–197, Ralph C. Wood, “Flannery O’Connor’s Strange Alliance with Southern Fundamentalists,” in *Flannery O’Connor and the Christian Mystery*, eds John Murphy et al. (Provo, UT: Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature, Brigham Young University, 1997) 75–98, John C. Hawley, ed., *The Postcolonial Crescent: Islam’s Impact on Contemporary Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), Philip H. Melling, *Fundamentalism in America: Millennialism, Identity and Militant Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), Mark Wormald, “The Uses of Impurity: Fiction and Fundamentalism in Salman Rushdie and Jeanette Winterson,” in *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English since 1970* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999) 182–202, Donna Spalding Andréolle, “Utopias of Old, Solutions for the New Millennium: Comparative Study of Christian Fundamentalism in M. K. Wren’s *A Gift Upon the Shore* and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*,” *Utopian Studies* 12.2 (2001) 114–123, Lorenza Rocco, “Letteratura come profezia: ‘Karin è tra noi,’ ovvero lo

but more focused and systematic efforts to explore the intricacies of the interaction of literature and fundamentalism are still in short supply.⁵

The essays in this volume have been assembled to promote and deepen the ongoing critical discussion. Based on new research by an international team of scholars working in the fields of literary and cultural studies, these contributions are based on a number of theoretical frameworks and debates and open up a historical perspective which challenges received notions of fundamentalism: by exploring literary representations of fundamentalisms and the function of literature in fundamentalism, they enquire into the underlying generic differences and incompatibilities as well as (perhaps more unexpected) the similarities and affinities between fundamentalism and literature.

The volume is based on the challenging assumption that, in relation to fundamentalism, literature and literary practices circumscribe a field of contestation between polyvalence and ambiguity on the one hand and monovalence and inflexibility on the other; or, to put it simply, literature and literary interpretation may function both as instruments of control and as means of resistance in fundamentalist contexts. And it is not only literature in its narrow definitions, but a wide range of cultural practices, that seems pertinent here – from musealization, architecture, “hypertext” and computer games to the perception and designation of geographical space and beyond. Most strikingly, the interplay of fundamentalism and literature emerges as the almost inevitable corollary of coping with the poten-

scottante problema del fondamentalismo islamico,” *Silarus: Rassegna Bimestrale di Cultura* 42.219 (2002) 17–21, John Culbert, “On the Trace of the Other: Memory, Melancholia, and Repression in Rachid Boudjedra’s *Timmoun*,” *Esprit Créateur* 43.1 (2003) 69–80, Karen A. Krasny, “Love and Evil as a Complicated Kindness: Moral Ambiguity and the Novel,” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 2.2 (2005), 86–89 and Matthew D. Stroud, “Infallible Texts and Righteous Interpretations: *Don Quijote* and Religious Fundamentalism,” in *Cervantes y su mundo III*, eds Robert A. Lauer and Kurt Reichenberger (Kassel: Reichenberger, 2005) 543–558.

⁵ As yet, no monograph has been published on the subject. Earlier collections of articles which are, to some extent, augmented and updated by the present volume are Catherine Pessoa-Miquel and Klaus Stierstorfer, eds, *Fundamentalism and Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Klaus Stierstorfer and Annette Kern-Stähler, eds, *Literary Encounters of Fundamentalism: A Case Book* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008).

tially threatening experience of cultural change as it affects established belief systems.

Concepts of fundamentalism as a response to exclusively modernist tendencies since the beginning of the twentieth century will therefore be questioned in this volume. Opening up a historical perspective reaching back to the early sixteenth century, several contributors begin to explore the rise of fundamentalisms at various points in history characterized by the experience of cultural change from the clash of innovative, or modernist/modernizing, tendencies (polyvalent) with what appears to be a reactionary movement (monovalent). Arguably, the latter must, however, in itself be perceived as innovative and, paradoxically, as a form of modernization or even, as recently suggested in another context by the political theorist Roger Griffin, of modernism itself.⁶ Developing Griffin's approach with some modification, fundamentalism may hence be conceptualized as a "mazeway resynthesis," a term first suggested by the anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace (1956) to describe the evolution of religious inspiration and revitalization movements.

According to Wallace, the "mazeway" is the individual's mental image of themselves within their natural, social and cultural environs, the sum total of their self-perception.⁷ When the perception of reality and the "mazeway" are no longer congruent, the individual or, as the case may be, a particular collective is faced with the choice of either maintaining the current mazeway at the cost of suffering the mounting stress this entails or of altering the mazeway. The latter choice leads to a process of mazeway resynthesis, which appears to be an inherently narrative activity; the former frequently entails the insistence on, or re-inscription of, the imperilled mazeway. But this, given the continuous, if variable, pressure to react to cultural change, is in effect also a progressive resynthesis and thus ultimately a "modernization." Fundamentalist writing and literary negotiations of fundamentalisms as a counter phenomenon are thus positioned in the context of what appear to be genotypical patterns of human mytho-

⁶ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 346.

⁷ See Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956) 266.

poeia and transcend a frequently too narrow temporal frame for studies in fundamentalism.⁸

While taking this conceptual base as a point of departure, the articles collected here then spread out on a plurality of theoretical frameworks. Alert to the productive friction between these discourses, which it aims to elicit, this volume confronts earlier research in the disciplines of theology, history of religion, sociology, political history, anthropology and – if less copious – literary studies with postcolonial and cultural studies. With its general focus on writing in English, including American and British literatures as well as the “new” literatures in English worldwide, the collection takes into account cultural and historical affinities and differences which have contributed to the ongoing negotiations of fundamentalism and literature in the English language and transcends borders of both nations and academic disciplines.

In exploring new perspectives on fundamentalism and literature, the collection of articles offers tools for better understanding this interrelation which should be of interest to scholars across all disciplines concerned with fundamentalism as a social and cultural phenomenon of ever growing global importance and impact.

*

The intimate connections of fundamentalism and literature had already been highlighted in the wake of the so-called Rushdie affair. The story is well-known: Following the publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, which had been perceived to be blasphemous against Islam, the writer had been sentenced to death by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in a *fatwa* issued on 14 February 1989. Bloody riots in several countries, the firebombing of bookshops, the public burning of the novel, attempts on the lives of its author as well as some of those involved in its publication (and

⁸ Wallace’s theory has been used by political theorist Roger Griffin to argue for a “maximalist ideal type of modernism” and – with some modification – is useful also in the context of fundamentalism and fundamentalist literature, see Roger Griffin, “Modernity, Modernism, and Fascism. A ‘Mazeway Resynthesis,’” *Modernism/Modernity* 15.1 (2008) 14. For a further exploration of Griffin’s suggestion, see also the contribution by Axel Stähler in this volume (chapter ten).

the actual murder of its Japanese translator) no less than the writer's enforced hiding were gauges of the cultural and political impact of a literary text and indicators of the clash of conflicting world views. The affair has been forcefully brought to mind once again by the recent violent protests against conferral of a knighthood on the author in 2007. The first section of this collection, "The Rushdie Case: An Anatomy of the 'Author' and His Place in Contemporary Literary Negotiations of Fundamentalisms," is therefore dedicated to a revaluation of the *fatwa* and its repercussions. It focuses in particular on the further development of Salman Rushdie's negotiations with fundamentalism and their impact on other writers.

In dialogue with theoretical debates on authorship, Frédéric Regard discusses in the first chapter, "Humanism Restylized: Salman Rushdie, the *Fatwa*, and the Resurrection of the Author," the re-emergence of the "author" after the so-called "death of the author" (Barthes) as insisted upon by the attention the person of the author was given through the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie and the ways in which the author himself, not least through his restylization as a "jostling crowd of 'I's,'"⁹ triggered this response. This investigation into the forceful intervention of "practice" in the realms of "theory" is followed by an exploration of the ways in which Rushdie confronts various kinds of fundamentalism. Catherine Pessoa-Miquel discusses in "'Gobbledygook Is Back in Style: Salman Rushdie's Confrontation of Fundamentalism," how the writer's confrontation of various fundamentalisms correlates to representations of the relationship between "Westerners" and "Islamists" in his work and how this compares to other recent fiction by British writers dealing with Islamic fundamentalism.

In the second section, "New Perspectives on Fundamentalism: Literature, Extended Scripture and Ethics," various new perspectives on fundamentalism are brought together which take their point of departure from the wider context of the Rushdie affair and its repercussions. Aiming at theorizing the interrelation of fundamentalism with literature, they give particular attention to relevant literary and interpretive practices with respect to literary texts, territories, "extended scriptures," and ethics. Lite-

⁹ Salman Rushdie, "Tell Me, What Is There to Celebrate?," *The Observer*, 10 August 1997, 14.

lature is examined, in relation to fundamentalism and in recognition of the qualities peculiar to it, as a vehicle of control, of resistance and of mediation. Ihab Hassan, in “A Terrible Simplicity Is Born: Fifteen Rocks in the Gardens of Violence,” discusses the power of literature to counter absolutist tendencies with a view to the generic affinities between fundamentalism and literature. With respect to the fundamentalist quest for fixity, Gareth Griffiths explores, in “Open Spaces, Contested Places: Writing and the Fundamentalist Inscription of Territory,” the function of literature as a means of deconstructing limited readings of texts and territories with reference to literary texts and their potential to develop practices of interpretation which help us engage imaginatively with cultural difference. In “Smiling Angles, Bibles, and Buicks: Fundamentalist Autobiography and the Evangelist,” Kevin L. Cope explores autobiographical writings of the first-generation television evangelists Oral Roberts, Rex Humbard, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, and Ernest Angley. Given the emblematic and hermeneutic character of the evangelists’ lives, and focusing on different medial and generic representations, and transformations, of their biographies, Cope examines the diverse influences playing upon the paradoxical version of the “all-American superman” they represent. Finally, in this section, discussing examples of literary texts as either foreclosing reconciliation or as bridging the divide between the Western liberal imagination and fundamentalisms, Klaus Stierstorfer explores in “Fundamentalism as Other: Readings in Literature, Ethics and Philosophy” Emmanuel Levinas’s concepts of the Other and his foundational ethics as offering ways of reconciling the apparently incompatible discourses of liberal humanism and fundamentalism.

Referring to selected literary texts and literary practices, the third section, “Fundamentalisms before ‘Fundamentalism’ and After?,” questions received notions of fundamentalism as being a reaction to modernist tendencies since the early twentieth century. In four “case studies” a new historical perspective is opened on fundamentalisms *before* “Fundamentalism” (the term originating in early twentieth-century America), ranging from the early sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries and, finally, returning to the present and instances of fundamentalism *after* “Fundamentalism.” Drawing on a range of early sixteenth-century texts, the commonsensical emphasis put in early modern times on the literal sense as against

medieval allegorical interpretation is investigated by James Simpson in "Sixteenth-Century Fundamentalism and the Specter of Ambiguity." Challenging received notions of the character of the literal sense, Simpson argues that the literal sense is always dependent on pre-textual understandings. He suggests that evangelical insistence on the easy legibility of the literal sense paradoxically originates in ambiguity which is then repressed and discusses some of the strategies, relevant also to an understanding of fundamentalist reading cultures of the twentieth century, with which early evangelical writers attempted to address the ineluctable presence of textual ambiguity. With a critical reading of Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) as an analysis of the nature of fundamentalism, the perspective of the late sixteenth century is introduced by Anja Müller-Wood in "'Revenge and Innovation:' Thomas Nashe's Enduring Vision of Fundamentalism" and questioned as to its relevance with respect to notions of fundamentalism and modernity in our own day. Sonja Fielitz explores in "'The Bible Says So:' Female Prophets in Revolutionary England (1648–1660)" the prophetic utterances and writings of female prophets in mid-seventeenth-century England as vehicles of identity formation and empowerment and examines fundamentalist tendencies in revolutionary England with respect to gender roles. Finally, fictional literature based on, and disseminating, a fundamentalist world view is investigated by Axel Stähler in "Fundamentalist Fiction: Mazeway Resynthesis and the Writers of the Apocalypse." Read as a genotypical response to crises experiences and as a particular form of cultural criticism, it is argued that fundamentalist fiction as a literary phenomenon is nonetheless peculiar to a distinct strain in the Protestant tradition and the product of a mental disposition which has been in evidence since the Puritan settlement of New England in the early seventeenth century. Against the background of this historical perspective a generic definition of "modern" fundamentalist fiction is developed with reference to texts from the early twentieth century to the present.

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Writing Fundamentalism is not designed to give an encyclopedic overview of its subject. Obviously, the societal and cultural processes on which the

volume reflects are fluid and remain subject to change. At the same time, however, its main contention, that there may be a genotypical pattern of human mythopoeia on which the complex and paradoxical interplay of fundamentalism and literature is based and according to which both are attempts at achieving a “mazeway resynthesis” in the face of cultural change would suggest that the scope of their interrelation is, if perhaps bounded by a pattern and characterized by a certain repetitiveness, in fact unlimited.

There is no formal “conclusion” in this volume because, as yet, the subject has barely been broached and it is to be hoped that the articles gathered here will stimulate further scholarly interest and instigate a wide-ranging exchange that may, in time, perhaps turn into a dialogue which will reconcile apparently irreconcilable perspectives and which will contribute towards the exploration of ways of finding a common basis for such seemingly contradictory discourses as fundamentalism and Western ideas of liberal humanism.

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PART I

THE RUSHDIE CASE: AN ANATOMY OF THE “AUTHOR” AND HIS PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY NEGOTIATIONS OF FUNDAMENTALISMS

CHAPTER ONE

HUMANISM RESTYLIZED:
SALMAN RUSHDIE, THE *FATWA*,
AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE AUTHOR

FRÉDÉRIC REGARD
(ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE DE FONTENAY/ST. CLOUD)

When in February 1989, after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988),¹ Ayatollah Khomeini issued his famous *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, the message could have been received in the Western world of academe as an ironic reminder: No, indeed, the author was not dead; for if a novelist could be sentenced to death for writing a novel, the author was most certainly still living. Predictably enough, some commentators were quick to argue that the fundamentalists' call for murder was evidence of their intellectual backwardness: since Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," everybody knew, or should know, that serious writing could only rest on a negation of its own origin, that it had no other choice but to conceive of itself as a "revolutionary," "countertheological" protestation against godlike authority.² Khomeini's condemnation of a great novelist was therefore branded as a sad, sinister example of interpretational archaism; Rushdie's text should have been read as standing by itself, owing its legitimacy neither to divine nor to biographical authority. The Author was dead already, and wanting to kill him again was simply ridiculously absurd.

I still think this was an arrogant way of relegating fundamentalism to the dark ages of book-reading. That some people in the world in which we also lived, our neighbours, our brethren, were not prepared to accept the

¹ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1988); all further references to this edition.

² Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, 1992) 1130–1133.

crucial principle of our modernity according to which a work of fiction should be radically cut off from its origin, dissociated both from the living man – the “author” – who had written it, and from an original Truth, that a work of fiction could be deemed to contain such devastating untruths that the elimination of its author appeared an urgent necessity, was formidable enough in itself, it seemed to me, to cast serious doubt over our own certainties, which I felt were suddenly made to appear as a typically Western – should I say French? – fiction, or fantasy: perhaps, after all, we had all lived on an illusion; perhaps in order to produce a singular identity of our own, an imagined community of selves, we had sought to reinvent ourselves on the model of the only radically innovative gesture available in our mythology, the gesture of severing the head of divine authority exactly as our forebears had cut off Louis XVI’s head to mark the birth of a new, free identity; for this is the myth that Barthes’s definition of writing implicitly plays upon. The paradox, of course, was that the fundamentalists, by sentencing a novelist to death in the name of God, thus seeking to reassert genuine divine authority, were also restoring a principle of godlike authority in the production of literature, denying Rushdie the right to exercise his playful, “postmodernist” irresponsibility, crowning him with the aura of an archenemy, turning him both into a false prophet, and into a belated “liberal humanist,” whose intentional existence had to be authorized before it could be contested.

It is this curious paradox that I want to explore, bearing in mind that a prophet is a speaker (φήτης), speaking “in advance,” *pro* (προ) – which means both in anticipation of the word that is coming, and in the name of that word, in its place, the utterance being thus a negation of the utterer as a singular, highly individualized self. A prophet’s existence is authorized only insofar as it bears the word of the original Intention and gestures towards the recovery of a fixed Truth, an enunciative pattern which Lyotard calls a “parallel arrangement,” as opposed to the structure of the “serial arrangement,” where on the contrary the original meaning and intention is lost, or perverted, in the endless process of repetition and reinterpretation – the structure of modernist and postmodernist literariness.³ Keeping this distinction in mind, how do we reconcile the humanism implied by the as-

³ Jean-François Lyotard, *Instructions païennes* (Paris: Galilée, 1977) 60–62.

sumption of intentional authority – an analysis of *The Satanic Verses* proposed by the French philosopher Claude Lefort, who praised Rushdie’s “original, individual vision” as that of “a human being” voicing “humanity’s most precious good,” doubt⁴ – and the counter-prophetism implied by the law of modernist and postmodernist reinterpretation? What do we make of the accusation levelled at Rushdie, of being a threat to true prophetism? Do we simply waive the accusation aside? Or do we accept to contemplate the possibility of an element of truth in it? Should we reconsider our theories of literariness to include false prophetism? Would a resurrection of the author be necessary both to a reassessment of Rushdie’s work, and to a better understanding of fundamentalism? In what way could fundamentalism – which refuses to abolish the frontier between secular life and spiritual revelation, between politics and religion – help put forward a definition of literature bridging the gap between humanism and (post)modernism? Those are some of the broader questions I want to address in this chapter, greatly inspired by two fairly recent books dealing with the pragmatics of literary discourse.⁵

I first focus on the author’s and narrator’s ontological instability. I argue that Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* challenges orthodox binary oppositions, but I also argue that the narrative’s contestation of purity goes beyond the closed world of fictional reconstruction and abolishes the distinction between authorial intention and narrative claims, by taking up some of the author’s non-fictional statements, whose metaphorical quality expose in turn the thinness of the line separating authorial intrusion from narratorial literariness. Here, instead of keeping to the traditional opposition between “author” and “narrator,” I prefer Maingueneau’s use of three, sometimes separate, sometimes overlapping, agencies constituting “Authority:” the “person” (*la personne*, the living human being), the “writer” (*l’écrivain*, the agency choosing literary strategies), and the “inscriptor” (*l’inscripteur*, the agency at work in the production of the work of art).⁶ I then focus on the characters’ lack of ontological stability, which enables me both to pin-

⁴ Claude Lefort, “Humanisme et anti-humanisme: hommage à Salman Rushdie,” *Écrire. A l’épreuve du politique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992) 49, 54.

⁵ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics* (London: Macmillan 1999); Dominique Maingueneau, *Le discours littéraire: Paratopie et scène d’énonciation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

⁶ Maingueneau, *Le discours littéraire*, 107–108.

point Rushdie's technical devices and to relate such devices to a general conception of identity as "posture" – an analysis I owe largely to Lecercle's theory. I finally come back to the question of the death of the author and argue that Rushdie's posture was not misunderstood or misinterpreted by the fundamentalists. On the contrary, my contention is that Rushdie's "ethos," by which I mean the author-image projected through rhetoric, i.e. also a style of being, a style of living,⁷ is indeed that of a false prophet, whose utterances are to be read as prophecies of a democratic restylization of the world and of the self – an abomination to fundamentalists of all kinds.

In the first part of the *Satanic Verses*, as the war between India and Pakistan breaks out, Saladin Chamcha's mother refuses to cancel a party, arguing that Hindus and Muslims "can love as well as hate" (46). A few pages further, Saladin's lover, Zeenat Vakil, states that India was not fashioned by exclusion, but by "borrowing" (52). As the novel develops, hate is more and more explicitly analysed as "the fear of impurity" (426). Such utterances do not belong to the world of fiction exclusively; they are also explicit reminders of Rushdie's philosophy of life, as it is exposed in texts meant to be read both as summaries of the *person's* political creeds, and as a *writer's* artistic manifestos. In such essays, Rushdie repeatedly opposes what he calls two "concepts:" the concept of purity, analysed as the core fantasy of fundamentalism, and the concept of impurity, or multiplicity, presented as the driving force behind the "India idea."⁸ It is this "India idea," experienced by the *person* as citizen, and propounded by the *writer* as artist, that the work of the *inscriptor* – i.e. Rushdie's novels – seeks to flesh out. In the *Satanic Verses*, the concept of impurity operates with such intensity that all fixed sets of opposites are destabilized; the concept of multiplicity seems even to be pushed to its extreme conclusions when the refusal of the principle of mutual exclusion inherent in the concept of purity is made to bear on the opposed values of good and evil, the sacred and the profane. "My other, my love," cries out the archangel Gibreel when he sees his enemy, Saladin-Shaitan (353). Saladin and Gibreel

⁷ See Maingueneau, *Le discours littéraire*, 214, 221.

⁸ Salman Rushdie, "The Assassination of Indira Ghandi," in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991) 44; see also Salman Rushdie, "India at Five-O," *Time*, 11 August 1997, 16.

are portrayed as two interchangeable, twin-like characters. To orthodoxy, this may seem to be heresy, indeed, but this collapse of traditionally opposed values is in fact not so much the symptom of a heretic rereading of the Coranic *doxa* as of a profound contestation of “pure” identity in general.

In a 1983 interview with Una Chaudhuri, Rushdie stated that his work had “a post-Freudian form,”⁹ by which he seemed to mean that the work of inscription could no longer rely on the classic, pre-Freudian assumption of subjects fully coinciding with themselves. His writing had integrated the teachings of psychoanalysis. What the prefix “post” also suggested, however, was that Freud’s topologies of the self should be reconsidered. This is what Rushdie himself did in the very same interview, when he used two metaphors to describe the way postmodern identities were produced. The first metaphor, to be found also in *Midnight’s Children* (1981), is that of “leaking:” selves, he argues, never stand immune to each other, but “leak into each other,” contaminate each other, on the model not of poisonous infection, but of Oriental cuisine, where various, sometimes contradictory, flavours are made to blend.¹⁰ The second metaphor is that of “shifting:” selves constantly displace themselves, adapting to new situations, adjusting to new interlocutors, shifting to ever-renewed, temporary identities. By contesting the validity of a closed, vertical, “striated” structure of identity, the writer’s metaphors thus suggest an open, horizontal, “smooth” arrangement of the self, caught not in a history of fixed layers fighting to suppress each other, but in a geography of endless “becomings.”¹¹ In one of his essays, Rushdie, speaking both as a *person*, or citizen, and as a *writer*, explains that fundamentalists miss the point when they seek to impose a monolithic view of culture and national identity: culture and iden-

⁹ Salman Rushdie, “Imaginative Maps: Extracts from a Conversation with Salman Rushdie,” Interview with Una Chaudhuri, *Turnstile* 2.1 (1990), <http://www.subir.com/rushdie/uc_maps.html> (accessed 28 January 2009).

¹⁰ Rushdie’s 1983 interview with John Haffenden, in John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985) 249.

¹¹ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “The Smooth and the Striated,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 474–500.

tity feed on what Rushdie calls, by another metaphor, “pollination.”¹² Hence Rushdie’s celebration of the “migrant:” to take up the Deleuzean parlance again, migrants are a “deterritorialized” agency, caught in a process of becoming other, inventing themselves while forming “a new imaginative relationship with the world.”¹³ The use of metaphors is a constant reminder of the thinness of the line separating the *person* from the *writer*, and the *writer* from the *inscripitor*: the metaphors of “leaking,” “shifting” and “pollination” – taken up now and again in fiction as well as in non-fiction – always already *inscribe* the writer’s utterances within a tight network of reiterable utterances, which both precede and exceed the text under scrutiny, setting prior examples of “new imaginative relationship[s]”¹⁴ while also calling for further exemplification, or reiteration.

And indeed, it is this very same principle of “a new imaginative relationship with the world”¹⁵ that *The Satanic Verses* fleshes out in the “splitting” of its characters (351): from the outset, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, later to be respectively identified with the archangel Gibreel and his archenemy Saladin Shaitan, are introduced as actors playing various simultaneous roles, to the point of blurring their distinctive identities, both physical and psychological. Gibreel is introduced as a movie star “zooming in” from one part to another, in as many as eleven films at the same time; while Saladin is portrayed as an anonymous actor working for TV commercials, lending his voice to alien creatures or to inanimate objects (60). That the two characters share in fact the same fate is strongly suggested, from the very beginning of the novel, by their chance meeting somewhere between India and Britain, sky and sea, realism and fantasy, when the plane which carries the two of them suddenly explodes. The character of Ayesha is subjected to the same law of ontological indeterminacy: the signifier, which is bound to recall to any Muslim reader the name of the Prophet’s wife, is made to refer to a Muslim saint in the second part (125), to a bloodthirsty empress in the fourth part (206), and finally to the poet Baal’s favourite courtesan in the sixth part (380–387). Again, this is

¹² Rushdie, “Commonwealth Literature Does not Exist,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 67–68.

¹³ Rushdie, “The Location of *Brazil*,” in *Imaginary Homelands*, 124–125.

¹⁴ Rushdie, “The Location of *Brazil*,” 125.

¹⁵ Rushdie, “The Location of *Brazil*,” 125.

not so much heresy, the intention to contest orthodoxy, as impurity, the operation of a concept in the work of inscription. No character, whatever its ontological status, is preserved from the work's universal law of "splitting:" in the second part, the archangel Gibreel questions the validity of Mahound's – the Prophet's – distinction between the holy and the unholy, the divine and the satanic: "[I]t was me both times," the archangel explains (123–124), thus challenging the orthodox tradition attributing to the devil those of Mahomet's utterances deemed to be incompatible with the monolithic statue of prophetic purity, i.e. "the satanic verses." The work of inscription consists in this precisely: multiplying all perspectives and all sources of utterance, thus nullifying any pretension to authenticity and legitimacy, and eventually radically challenging the "purist" view that there should be one, and one only, origin of enunciation.

Such an operation of inscription inevitably implies the invention of a non-prophetic style, which the writer once defined as "stereoscopic vision."¹⁶ What the phrase also suggests is that Rushdie's style privileges the visible world of the moving image over the fixed invisible world of the Logos common to all metaphysical traditions. It is therefore certainly no coincidence if, in a 1989 interview with Catherine Bush, the writer extolled the virtues of television, praised it as "a miraculous being [...] bringing a kind of revelation," implicitly equating the TV set with a new archangel Gibreel.¹⁷ In *Constructing Postmodernism*, Brian McHale used this interview to propose a very interesting theory of postmodernist art based on the technique of "zapping," or "switching channels:" according to McHale, by allowing to represent the same event from various perspectives and through different styles or modes of narration, virtual images function as "ontological pluralizers," thus playing the role of the angels of old by introducing another level of meaning into our world, while at the same time threatening the coherence of allegorical representation by multiplying the possibilities of interpretation.¹⁸ The work of inscription in *The Satanic Verses* does precisely this: it "textualizes," so to speak, the plurali-

¹⁶ Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," in *Imaginary Homelands*, 19–20.

¹⁷ "Salman Rushdie, An Interview by Catherine Bush," *Conjunctions* 14 (Fall 1989) 7–20.

¹⁸ Brian McHale, "Zapping, the Art of Switching Channels," in *Constructing Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 130.

zation of virtual perspectives and possible interpretations, his characters acting as “ontological pluralizers,” both introducing other levels of meaning and threatening the purity of allegorical interpretation. Caught in a series of ever-changing, contradictory versions of his own existence, Saladin himself comes to life through such virtual images – speaking bottles of ketchup, cans of baked beans, packs of crisps (60). Gibreel, too, although he is supposed to be the pivotal intercessor between God and His Prophet, is an unstable agency, sometimes the actor, sometimes the spectator, sometimes the director, sometimes the camera itself (108). Rushdie’s work as an inscriptor is not here simply *inspired* by cinematic techniques; it *textualizes* them by parodying them, reiterating and recontextualizing iconic utterances, as part of a universal grammar of representation to be played with. The novel’s privileged tool, therefore, is the technical device that makes such code-playing possible, i.e. the remote control. This is what Saladin explains at the end of the novel:

O, the dissociations of which the human mind is capable, marvelled Saladin gloomily. O, the conflicting selves jostling and joggling within these bags of skin. No wonder we are unable to remain focused on anything for very long; no wonder we invent remote-control channel-hopping devices. If we turned these instruments upon ourselves we’d discover more channels than a cable or a satellite mogul ever dreamed of [...]. (519)

By its use of free indirect speech, this passage also invites the reader to draw a parallel between the *character*’s utterance here and what the *writer* himself explained to Catherine Bush: “the novel in a way does channel hopping”¹⁹ – a formulation which defines the *inscriptor* both as the holder of the remote control device, i.e. as the authority making multiplicity happen, and as the outcome of a “switching” force inherent in the process of novel-writing, i.e. as an authority produced by the dissociations of the human mind. Rushdie’s definition has the double merit of reinstating a principle of intentional authority while at the same time implying that such authority does not precede discourse, that it is itself the result of a dialogical construction. In this respect, Rushdie’s writing cannot be said to stem from intentionality, or position-taking; in pragmatic terms, the novelist’s authority consists in adopting “a posture,” which is also “an im-posture,”

¹⁹ Rushdie, “Interview,” 19.

insofar as authority interpellates its environment as much as it is interpellated by it.²⁰

We may now come back to the question of “the death of the author,” and to the strange necessity of considering Rushdie to deserve a *fatwa*, a distinction which we should not underestimate. In fact, Khomeini’s intuition was remarkable, clearly sensing that Rushdie’s authority, by conceiving of itself as the product of both historical determination and personal commitment, proposed in fact a new model of prophetic interpretation. It was not only that in the war waged against those contesting the validity of the concept of Truth in interpretation and of the principle of fixity in meaning, the *fatwa* grasped that Rushdie’s posture was fundamental heresy. It was also, and perhaps first and foremost, that Khomeini was the first to understand that Rushdie’s writing could no longer be defined as a “neutral space,” animated by a free play of signifiers, as Barthes would have had it. The place and function of the holder of the remote control had to be acknowledged, as well as the incessant porosity between *person*, *writer* and *inscriptor* in such matters. The “purist” distinction between “author” and “narrator” could therefore no longer hold. Khomeini was right, rigorously logical, and the socio-political context within which Rushdie’s authority situated itself is of capital importance here.

Sunil Khilnani (1997) explained that, as the first postcolonial nation to emerge from the postwar period, India could not ground its identity on the pre-existing European concept of unity – geographic, ethnic, linguistic – but had no other option but to invent itself, imagine itself, in the form of a composite entity, i.e. in the form of a democracy – a possibility that Pakistan constitutively refused to face by founding its existence on the principle of religious unity.²¹ It is precisely this “idea of India” that the three agencies of *person*, *writer* and *inscriptor* known as “Rushdie” see as their common denominator, the driving force constituting their “authority:”

I want to extol the virtues of the most important thing that came into being on that midnight 50 years ago, the innovation that has survived all that history could throw at it: the so-called idea of India. [...] It deserves to be celebrated – because it is an idea that has enemies, within India as well as

²⁰ Lecercle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, 116–117.

²¹ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997).

outside her frontiers, and to celebrate it is also to defend it against its foes.²²

The agency which says “I” here, that primarily of a *person*, or of a citizen involved in local politics, but one which we also assume to be that of the *writer* and that of the *inscriptor* – Rushdie’s novels are indeed “celebrations” of this India idea – although it sketches the personality of the implied “author” behind any of Rushdie’s novels, is certainly not inspired by the model of divine authority. “Authority,” here as elsewhere in Rushdie’s work, is a “child of midnight” – the product of a *person* born of the 1947 partition²³ – whose artistic ambitions as *writer*, and novelistic achievements as *inscriptor*, seek to voice, imagine, shape, the discursive lore latent in the unforeseen reality of postcolonial India. In that respect, “Authority” does remain paradoxically prophetic: the work of inscription renders palpable, visible, audible, and therefore possible, what precedes it and what is also dependent on it for its articulation – the dialogical, democratic, potentialities of the partition. I want to argue that it is precisely here that style becomes heresy to Islamic fundamentalism: the moment the work of inscription starts conceiving of itself not as the expression of a fixed origin of meaning, but as a restylisation of the world, perceived as a discursive cornucopia waiting for its word-bearer, or prophet – in other words: *style as a prophecy of democratic rearrangement*.

What the *fatwa* clearly perceived, therefore, was that literature, like religion, could indeed produce itself as a “constitutive discourse,” i.e. as a discourse of the origin capable of justifying and legitimizing its own existence through its own enunciative capacities, as a discourse producing performatively the space of its own origin.²⁴ But what the *fatwa* also perceived when it resurrected the author the better to sentence it to death, was that “authority” was here constituted, not by *three*, but in fact by *four* indissociable agencies, which, put together, constituted a formidable threat. Obviously enough, Rushdie’s *person* was the *fatwa*’s living human target. But what triggered off the manhunt was the articulation of the citizen on the *writer*, who had made his points – political, ethical, aesthetic – very clear in the various media of his field (the interview, the theoretical essay,

²² Rushdie, “India at Five-O,” 16.

²³ See Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, 232–323.

²⁴ See Maingueneau, *Le discours littéraire*, 47.