Salman Rushdie and Postcolonial Authorship:

The Ethics of Intellectual Practice

By

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To my daughters,
Sofia and Ruby

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Introduction

… do not, under any circumstances, belittle a work of fiction by trying to turn it into a carbon copy of real life; what we search for in fiction is not so much reality but the epiphany of truth.
—Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race …. Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead.
—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

The epigraphs to this introduction give expression to two conceptions of literature that are crucial for an engagement with the *oeuvre* of Salman Rushdie, one of the most prominent (and certainly the most "notorious") contemporary writers. On the one hand, the literary work is seen as carrying its own "epiphany of truth," which bears little or no relation to the world outside it: seen in this light, a work of fiction acquires value according to its own intrinsic qualities, which are independent of how it positions itself *vis-à-vis* reality. On the other hand, literature is invested with the ideological mission to shape and refashion cultural and epistemological paradigms, to abandon its solipsism for a profound engagement with the social and historical realities from which it springs in order to effect a change in society and in individuals. Rushdie embraces both of these broad conceptions of literature, staging and developing them in his novels in various ways. He uses historical, political and cultural references to create fictional worlds that, he insists, are only tangentially related to the real entities or events that inspired them and should be conceived of as existing in this separate and autonomous aesthetic realm. Yet, this is informed by the politically and culturally subversive postcolonial literary ethos of bringing to the fore the marginalised and silenced (hi)stories and reappraising the biased values and dichotomies established by dominant power structures (colonialism, nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, communalism, religious extremism).

Rushdie's literary career is marked by temporal, geographical, ideological and thematic nomadism: spanning more than four decades (although *Grimus*, his first published novel, appeared in 1975, the novel that established him on the literary scene and that initiated his trajectory as a postcolonial writer was *Midnight's Children* (1981); his latest novel, *Quichotte*, appeared in 2019), with the author's location, reflected in the settings of his novels, migrating from the Indian subcontinent through England to the USA, his *oeuvre* charts a literary and intellectual evolution that at times risks being engulfed by the furore occasioned by his most explosive novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which gave rise to "the Rushdie affair." Setting aside the political and ideological provocativeness that has dominated the reception and interpretation of his works, this research takes as its focus their author's insistent preoccupation with writing: the genesis and the effects of writing, the responsibility that authorship imposes on the author, and, crucially, the afterlife of the written text and its subsequent existence as, to use Plato's analogy, an orphan wandering about without the protective presence of its father. Giving expression to their multiple and conflicting selves, Rushdie's authorial figures locate their true being and legacy in the texts they produce, which carry their author's meaningful essence. All these aspects of writing that Rushdie explores in his works reveal his central preoccupation with what I will term "the ethics of authorship," which situates him not only in literary history, but, more importantly, in a broader intellectual history of philosophical engagement with writing that comprises, among others, Plato, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Benda, Nizan and Said.

The main focus of interest of this book are the figures of writers and writing subjects who contemplate and reflect on the nature and purpose of their craft, their authorial identity and their positioning in society and intellectual history in, through, and by means of, (their) writing; the aesthetics of the texts they produce and their subsequent agency in the world through the various ways they are interpreted and appropriated. Thus, the object of this study is not to follow every thread of instances of narration and storytelling with which Rushdie's *oeuvre* abounds, but to emphasise authorship as a special category of storytelling, a specific craft and vocation giving expression to a conscious and purposeful project. While storytelling is a common practice in which every individual engages

on a regular basis, the authorial signature invites a greater responsibility and a more serious engagement on the part of both author and reader. As Seán Burke points out, "the signature puts in place channels of accountability, responsibility and inquiry", that situate the authored text in a "deep structure of ethical relationships."[1] Onymity, therefore, as opposed to pseudonymity and anonymity, enables and conditions the disintegration of the solipsism of art, whereby a work of art is accountable only to itself and the artist only to the dictates of his artistic imagination; rather, it reminds authors and readers alike that the authored text is not beyond ethical considerations. Authoring a text is not a simple and frivolous act of writing something and releasing it as a finished aesthetic product to be judged solely on its artistic merit; indeed, Foucault distinguishes between a writer and an author by defining the latter as a function of discourse, whose role is "to characterise the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society."[2] While even the simplest note or a pamphlet has a writer, an author implies a more profound intellectual engagement with the authored text – ontologically separate from the biological individual, the author-function "simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions; […] all discourse that supports this author-function is characterised by a plurality of egos."[3]

Authorship, the central concept in this research, will be explored in its three different aspects: the subjectivity of the authorial figures, the dominant conceptions of authorship these figures develop in their texts and, lastly, the instances of self-reading and diversification of their reception/interpretation staged by and within the texts themselves. My main argument is that Rushdie's postcolonial authorship is configured as a "dialogical aesthetics," which postulates juxtaposition and relationality as his basic narrative strategies. Rushdie's dialogical aesthetics subverts the autonomy of authorial subjectivity, the stability of the text's representation and the dichotomy author-reader in such a way that each of the novels incorporates either a representative reader as a character or explores its reception and interpretation. It is through the transgression of the

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[1] Seán Burke, "The Ethics of Signature," in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern. A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 290.
[2] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Authorship,* ed. Seán Burke, 235.
[3] Foucault, "Author," 239.

boundaries between and within the author, the text and the reader as central categories of textual production and meaning-activation that Rushdie establishes his ethics of authorship, which culminates in the destabilisation of the authorial figures' authority, either by the presence of an interlocutor which serves as a means of dialogising the author's discourse, or by creating dual and ambivalent frames of his text's interpretations. This is the crucial way in which Rushdie examines the relationship between the work of art and the world, or art's situatedness in the world – defined by what Edward Said aptly terms the text's "worldliness," which is its

> circumstantiality, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency, [which] are considered as being incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning. This means that a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself.[4]

It is precisely this *situated* aspect of Salman Rushdie's literary engagement, reflected in that of his author-protagonists, that foregrounds what Jane Poyner, in reference to J. M. Coetzee, calls "the ethics of intellectual practice"[5] as the major theme pervading his entire corpus of writing (fictional, essayistical and autobiographical) and that marks his entry into "the long-running and expansive debate about the ethics of intellectualism and the authority of the writer."[6] In the end, I hope to arrive at an overall conclusion about the place, image and authority of the writer, through an approach that will combine the aesthetic with the ethical, in order to find out what it means – for Rushdie and for us as his readers – to be an intellectual in contemporary society.

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[4] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 39.

[5] Jane Poyner, ed., *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006), 3.

[6] Poyner, 2.

My corpus consists of five novels that explore and confirm my central thesis, namely the essential ethical element illustrated by the dialogical aesthetics of Rushdie's *oeuvre* – a selective approach imposed by the problematic itself (the corpus features only the novels in which the figures of writers are also their protagonists) and by considerations of quality, as a reduced corpus allows for a more in-depth analysis of novels that are, by a critical consensus, already described as behemoths and sprawling family sagas and comic epics informed by multiple cultural, religious, literary, political, historical and mythological sources and that, as such, carry the risk of diffusing the critical interest in different directions. The approach followed is not strictly chronological – *The Satanic Verses* imposes itself as the central work because it engages with authorship by staging it in its originary aspect, albeit in the specific context of the birth of Islam's Holy Book, the Qur'an. Its conception of discourse (both oral and written) and literature in particular as differential, ambivalent and pluralised at their very source, along with the equally ambivalent and plural authorial subjectivity that gives birth to it, forms the aesthetic and ethical kernel of Rushdie's view of authorship and writing, throwing a revealing (and revelatory) light on the internal dynamic of the rest of the corpus, which in its totality gives rise to the central premise of this research: that Rushdie's dialogical aesthetics conceives of an inherent ethical value in authorship. Clustered around this central Rushdiean text (published in 1988) are, first, *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), which trace the genesis of authorship, i.e. the birth of the author and his text, followed by *Fury* (2001) and *Quichotte* (2019), wherein the agon shifts from the author to the text itself and its afterlife.

In the first group, the dominant conception of authorship sees the author primarily as a son (of the Indian nation, of Bombay as an urban ideal, of a whole network of filiative and affiliative progenitors that situates him in the national and ideological narrative he embodies or defends) and allows him only textual fatherhood. Saleem and Moraes, the authors/narrators of these novels, are incapable of biological procreation and, as a consequence, see their texts as their true offspring, releasing them into the world to carry their legacy. Since these novels are fictional autobiographies, the dominant presence is that of the writing subject, who is revealed in his split and multiple subjectivity, as his text dramatises the unstable dynamic of his

conflicting and contradictory fictive selves. In the second group of novels, the subjectivity and formative make-up of the authorial figure fade into the background and it is the text itself that "writes" its author, assuming the proportions of an independent creation in which, like in Frankenstein's monster, is distilled the ideological eloquence previously reserved to the author/creator. In these novels, the author is primarily seen as a father, both biological and textual, and the agonistics of the novels resides in the unstable rivalry between the author's creative and procreative legacies. *The Satanic Verses*, as stated above, features as the central text in that it marks the crucial transition from the first to the second group of novels, as its central premise is the bidirectional flow of the creative impulse between creator and creation: in other words, the author is created by the text as much as the text is created by him.

The "Rushdie affair" has undeniably left a deep trace on Rushdie's *oeuvre* and the novels following *The Satanic Verses* are often interpreted as allegories of his predicament, which is that of the creative imagination imperilled or incarcerated (literally or symbolically) by the centres of power. Also, after the unparallelled artistic, cultural and political daring of this novel, its successors have been seen to mark Rushdie's decline as a writer, his aesthetics falling into exhaustion and his postcolonial ideology becoming besmirched by the neocolonial leanings of his status as a literary celebrity and of his American location.[7] Aamir Mufti sees *The Satanic Verses*

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[7] Rushdie's postcolonial and anti-establishmentarian credentials have been also eroded by his being awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) on June 16th 2007, on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's 80th birthday honours. His acceptance of the award was construed as a political statement – that he endorses the establishment, which particularly stood out when compared to awardees who have returned it, such as Rabindranath Tagore and the Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah. Priyamvada Gopal was particularly denunciatory in an article lamenting that "the mutation of this relevant and stentorian writer into a pallid chorister is a tragic allegory of our benighted times, of the kind he once narrated so vividly." Ana Cristina Mendes sees Rushdie's acceptance of the Knighthood "within the framework of a renewed nostalgia for an imagined British community, and hence construed as a symptom of postcolonial melancholia" and "as an example of the numerous symbolic ways Rushdie has written himself into the metropolitan centre, or, alternatively, as a critical intervention from the margin". (Ana Cristina Mendes, "Cultural Warfare Redux: Salman Rushdie's Knighthood," in *Salman Rushdie: An Anthology of 21st Century Criticism*, ed. Ajay K. Chaubey, Janmejay K. Tiwari and Bishun Kumar [New Delhi: Atlantic, 2016], 3-19)

as the culmination of a process in Rushdie's writing marked by a shift from the "politics of constituency" of his two previous novels to "a politics of offence," with the intensification of the author's political engagement in each subsequent novel running parallel with his empathetic detachment from the people and topics about which he wrote, a stance that saw its apogee in the "transgressive politics" of *The Satanic Verses* regarding Islam.[8] According to Roger Y. Clark, up to *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie's fictional universe was steeped in multiple cosmological, mythological and mystical traditions that broke through the surface of the real and explored conflicting views of the universe, reworking other worlds in startling and unexpected ways; in subsequent novels, references to the "tangled web of mythic figures, narrative ambiguity, demonic possession, oneiric shifts, diabolic innuendo, and outright satanic invasion"[9] are gone or remain on the level of metaphor and analogy, never challenging ontologically the realism of our universe. "They do not offer the same kinds of labyrinthine puzzles and paradoxes that are built into the struggles of his characters – or that explode into a world at once magical and real."[10] Madelena Gonzalez identifies an "exhaustion of the Rushdiean aesthetic of transgression," with "the post-fatwa fiction risk[ing] disappearing into Baudrilladean [sic] simulacrum. Increasingly high-tech writing effects a pastiche of a colourful original and the magic realist aesthetic, now used up, survives as a mere parodical echo,"[11] while "the celebratory aesthetics of magic realism have given way to the rampant technophilia of postrealism."[12] No longer "engaged in boundary disturbance," Rushdie is instead reduced to a mere "contemplation of [his] ailing aesthetic."[13]

The dominant critical stance, as can be deduced from the quoted passages, sees Rushdie's novelistic trajectory as a downward spiral of stylistically, linguistically and ideologically impoverished treatment of rehashed

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[8] Aamir Mufti, "Reading the Rushdie Affair: An Essay on Islam and Politics," *Social Text* No. 29 (1991): 95-116.

[9] Roger Y. Clark, *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 189.

[10] Clark, 8.

[11] Madelena Gonzalez, *Fiction after the Fatwa: Salman Rushdie and the Charm of Catastrophe* (Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2005), 4.

[12] Gonzalez, 189.

[13] Gonzalez, 52.

themes. Yet, what captures our attention is Rushdie's insistent preoccupation with authorship, which is the connecting thread permeating his entire *oeuvre*. It is the evolution of his conception of writing as an aesthetic and ethical enterprise that this research undertakes to trace, focusing on its various transformations from one novel to another. Such an integrative approach, aimed at providing a picture of Rushdie's conception of the craft of writing, will consider the exploration of our topic in his individual novels as fragments forming part of a whole: as "ingredients whose flavours leak into one another during the complex 'chutnification' of Rushdie's particular brand of fiction."[14]

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[14] James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 129.

PART I

Chapter 1
Opening Plato's, Derrida's and Rushdie's Pharmacies

Writing as Drug and/or Poison

Socrates: *Yes, because there's something odd about writing, Phaedrus, which*
makes it exactly like painting. The offspring of painting stand there as if alive, but
if you ask them a question they maintain an aloof silence. It's the same with
written words: you might think they were speaking as if they had some
intelligence, but if you want an explanation of any of the things they're saying
and you ask them about it, they just go on and on for ever giving the same single
piece of information. Once any account has been written down, you will find it all
over the place, hobnobbing with completely inappropriate people no less than with
those who understand it, and completely failing to know who it should and
shouldn't talk to. And faced with rudeness and unfair abuse it always needs its
father to come to its assistance, since it is incapable of defending or helping itself.
—Plato, Phaedrus

Standing at a juncture in human civilisation which saw the clash between
orality and literacy, Plato condemns writing for its inability to impart true
knowledge. In his philosophy, such knowledge was seen to have been
imprinted in the soul during its existence in the realm of the ideal Forms;
fallen among the illusions of the present world, the only way for the soul
to recollect that knowledge was through a dialectic. Plato's
communicational ideal is that of the private conversation between a
philosopher-teacher and a chosen student – an intimate dialogue whereby
the "living, ensouled speech of a man of knowledge" is written, along with
knowledge, in the soul of the student.[1] Writing merely imitates this type of
speech and is therefore inferior to it on several counts: it is incapable of
engaging in a dialogue with an interlocutor and of saying anything more
than it has already said; it cannot defend itself when challenged, and it can

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[1] Plato, *Phaedrus,* trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002),
276a, p. 70.

be used and abused by all and sundry, as a written text cannot choose who reads it. The trouble with writing is that it inevitably detaches itself from its original context and, devoid of the presence of the father-author, is left, orphan-like, to roam across time and space. The incapacity of writing to enter into a dialogue with its reader is seen as a weakening of the critical capacity on the latter's part and thus as an encouragement to blind acceptance of its ideas – a danger that Plato implicitly/obliquely hints at by having Socrates, intoxicated by the charm of the written text, willing to roam outside of Athens at the beginning of the dialogue, exiled from his natural urban context like the orphaned text itself.

The word Socrates uses to describe the seductive power of the written text is *pharmakon*, which etymologically means both "drug" and "poison," thus encoding both a curative and a destructive effect. It is repeated in the Egyptian myth of the origin of writing that Socrates narrates to Phaedrus. Namely, the God Theuth (Thoth) presented himself to king Thamus of Thebes to recommend his invention – writing – with the argument that it brings wisdom and improves memory and that therefore it is "a potion [*pharmakon*] for memory and intelligence" (274e). As Derrida points out, the king dismisses this potent potion as "he has no need to write. He speaks, he says, he dictates, and his word suffices. Whether a scribe from his secretarial staff then adds the supplement of a transcription or not, that consignment is always in essence secondary"[2]. Thus Thamus echoes Socrates' own dismissal of writing as derivative of and inferior to speech, much like art is deemed in *The Republic* a mere imitation of the physical reality we apprehend through our senses and which itself is a secondary reality in relation to the realm of the Forms. The god-king presents himself in the Platonic schema as the originator and therefore father of speech/logos; indeed, Derrida says, "one could say anachronously that the 'speaking subject' is the *father* of his speech", and "*Logos* is a son,[3] then, a

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[2] Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 432.

[3] The father-son relationship between utterer/writer and speech/text has profound, not only philosophical, implications, giving rise to Derrida's repudiation of the Western "metaphysics of presence," but also religious ones. In Christianity, the oneness and unity of the Trinity has been the subject of fierce debates, most notably in what has become known as the "Arian heresy" of the 4th century. Arius, the presbyter of Alexandria, claimed that Jesus (the Word/Logos) was not divine in the same way as

son that would be destroyed in his very *presence* without the present *attendance* of his father. […] The specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father."[4] The fatherless text, operating in the absence of its originator, will produce forgetfulness as people will rely on something external to themselves for remembering. Thus, the god has discovered not a remedy for memory, but merely for reminding; his invention imparts not truth (*aletheia*) but a semblance of it (*doxa*); therefore, the reader will remain ignorant but will cherish the illusion of being wise – that is why "men of writing appear before the eyes of God not as wise men (*sophoi*) but in truth as fake or self-proclaimed wise men (*doxosophoi*)."[5] This is how Plato defines the sophists, the real target of his diatribe against writing. While the philosophers use dialectics – logical reasoning conducive to knowledge – by developing memory (*mnesis*), which is the soul's internal way of recalling the eternal ideas acquired in the realm of the ideal Forms, the sophists appeal merely to memorisation (*hypomnesis*), by means of external techniques such as writing that are not conducive to truth. Hence the ambivalent word used as a metaphor for writing – *pharmakon*; both cure and poison, "writing endangers true ideas by offering a simulacrum of truth that need not contain true ideas, yet it is an addition or supplement to true ideas that allow them to be communicated."[6]

The ambivalent (dis)advantages of writing, whose positive capacity for persuasion and argumentation is enveloped by the negative implication that it offers simulacra as a substitution for the real thing, is echoed in the

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God the Father, since he was created by him and therefore had his divinity conferred upon him. God created the world by means of the Word, which was, therefore, "entirely different from all other beings and of exceptionally high status but because it had been created by God, the Logos was essentially different and distinct from God himself[…] The very fact that Jesus had called God his 'Father' implied a distinction; paternity by its very nature involves prior existence and a certain superiority over the son." The synod of Nicaea in 325 rejected Arius's and espoused the theology propounded by Athanasius, his opponent, who imposed his Creed, according to which Christ was consubstantial with and "begotten not made" by the Father. (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God* [London: Heinemann, 1993], 128-30)

[4] Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 432, emphasis original.

[5] Derrida, 438.

[6] Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, "Notes" to Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 448.

equally ambivalent nature of its originator, the god Thoth. The inventor of games (dice and draughts), numbers, calculation, arithmetic, rational science, the occult sciences (magic formulas), astrology and alchemy, hidden texts, etc., he also functions as a substitute for and supplement to Ra, the sun-god, just like the moon supplements the sun and writing supplements speech.[7] Thus, Thoth simultaneously opposes his other (Ra = father, life, speech, origin or orient[,from which the] sun [rises]) by the opposite principle he represents and complements/supplements it:

> Thoth extends or opposes by repeating or replacing,[…] takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for. But it thereby opposes *itself*, passes into its other, and this messenger-god is truly a god of the absolute passage between opposites. If he had any identity – but he is precisely the god of nonidentity – he would be that *coincidentia oppositorum*… He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences. Sly, slippery, and masked, an intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play.[8]

As opposed to Plato's binary, in which Thoth/writing is secondary and inferior to Theuth/speech, Derrida posits a Thoth who is a substitute for and thus an embodiment of his other. In a further destabilisation of the hierarchy, Thoth becomes not only the god of writing but also of creative speech – Derrida quotes Festugière's placing of Thoth at the centre of an alternative cosmogony:

> Since Thoth was a magician, and since he knew of the power of sounds which, when emitted properly, unfailingly produce their effect, it was by means of voice, of speech, or rather, incantation, that Thoth was said to have created the world. Thoth's voice is thus creative: it shapes and creates; and, condensing and solidifying into

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[7] Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 434.
[8] Derrida, 435.

matter, it becomes a being. Thoth becomes identified with his breath; his exhalation alone causes all things to be born.[9]

Dialogising Discourse: Who Speaks/Writes?

Paradoxically, the non-containment of Thoth within the constrictive framework to which Plato consigns him and his opening to the ambivalent nature of language (oral and written) and being (he is both himself and his Other) has served as the basis for effecting a similar deconstructive interpretation of Plato's authority. Since he condemns writing *in* writing, the reader is faced with two possibilities: either Plato's own text is included in his condemnation and therefore it undermines his authorial position or it is excluded on the grounds of being recorded conversations/dialogues between his beloved mentor Socrates and various other people and, as such, comes closest to his ideal of truth-conducive speech. If Plato, by indicting writing via writing, intends his stance to be understood ironically, then what he in fact attacks is not writing *per se*, but the complacent and uncritical acceptance of what the text and its author say; since he defends speech on the grounds that it develops our critical ability, then what he implicitly encourages by attacking writing is precisely our ability to read with an open and questioning mind. However, according to Jasper Neel, Plato is engaged in a much more insidious project: to define what counts as thinking and then to undermine any authoritative position from which one could mount an attack on what Plato has defined as valid thought. Thus, if we accept what Plato presents as truth, then we become like Phaedrus and all the rest of Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogues that end up coming round to his position; if we dare to read Plato against the grain,

> we are outside Platonism and run the risk of appearing incapable of thought because Platonism has already defined itself *as* thought. Thus our attack, rather than threatening Platonism, threatens thought. Plato has built himself a formidable position indeed. He has

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[9] Derrida, 449.

used writing, the one possible means to invent his specialised kind of "thinking," and then denied that means to all who follow him.[10]

Moreover, as Plato's texts are written versions of the Socratic dialogues, they raise the question of authorship: who speaks through Socrates – himself or his pupil? Who, in fact, is the *father* of *Phaedrus*, whose parental presence we should evoke when we engage with the text? In *La Carte Postale*, Derrida suggestively hints at the ambivalent answer to these questions by focusing on a medieval depiction of the two philosophers, whose traditional roles are reversed, for it is Socrates who takes dictation from Plato:

> Socrates, the one who is writing – seated, bent over, docile scribe or copyist, the secretary of Plato, what? He is in front of Plato, no, Plato is behind him, smaller (why smaller?), but standing. With an extended finger, he seems to indicate, to point out, to show the way, or to give an order – or to dictate, authoritarian, magisterial, imperial. Almost naughty [wicked], don't you think, and intentionally.[11]

In other words, Plato appropriates the voice of Socrates and uses the venerated figure of his beloved mentor and teacher as the authoritative foundation on which to build his own intellectual position:

> What speaks is a replacement of the actual speaker, yet the replacement has always already been appropriated by the voice it supposedly replaces. In other words, Plato replaces Plato. He does this by giving up his voice to Socrates, but when we read from the situation of 367, we realise that there isn't a Socratic voice for Plato to take over except for the fictional one Plato himself made up. Plato's maneuver in 367 is really an attempt to hide his own voice. Perhaps Plato's most brilliant insight was to realise how difficult disputing his texts would be if he removed himself from them by

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[10] Jasper Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 12.

[11] Jacques Derrida, quoted in Neel, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing,* 17.

taking on the role of recording secretary for the martyred, authoritatively dead Socrates.[12]

Thus, Plato's strategy not to speak in his own name is revealed as a deeply calculated move to build his own authorial authority by appropriating Socrates' voice to silence the other dissenting voices in his dialogues, which, seen in this light, appear as monologues in which there is only one authoritative voice – Plato's. From this position, he "mounts projects no less ambitious than defining the truth and appropriating the means whereby truth is communicated while seeming to do neither – in fact, while seeming not to be there at all… Socrates' voice lives in the death of Plato's voice, which lives in the death of Socrates' voice. Whichever voice one hears, the other man is speaking. Or at least so it seems."[13]

Plato's texts thus lay open the capacity of writing to externalise the self: while the presential nature of speech allows for an overlap between the speaking and the spoken-about selves, writing operates by means of the distance opened up between them. In writing, the writing self is different from the real self and the narrative voice is inevitably caught up in the differential and split nature of the authorial subjectivity. The presence of self-identity in speech, which by its immediate and unmediated nature also operates in close proximity to thought and understanding themselves, is replaced in writing by an ambivalent and ambiguous narrative voice, which itself stems from the divided "I" of the author – no longer any single, unified authorial self, but split across the text and across texts, a multiple and heterogeneous textual self always already detached from the writing self. Thus, "[t]he writer who attempts self-discovery and self-presentation in writing discovers, perhaps with horror, that what appears in the space called 'self' is continuous play. The concept 'self' is a signifier, a free-floating possibility of meaning; it is not a signified, a fixed, secure point of reference."[14]

The ambiguous and divided (Socratic/Platonic) self in Plato's texts not only represents a paradigmatic example of the nature of the textual self/selves,

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[12] Neel, 8-9.
[13] Neel, 12 and 17.
[14] Neel, 122.

but the dialogic form in which they are expressed has been seen by Bakhtin as the precursor of the novel as a genre. Bakhtin saw the Socratic dialogues as "characterised by opposition to any official monologism claiming to possess a ready-made truth. Socratic truth ('meaning') is the product of a dialogical relationship among speakers; it is correlational and its relativism appears by virtue of the observers' autonomous points of view."[15] The subjects of discourse here are "nonpersons, anonyms, hidden by the discourse constituting them."[16] They do not exist as individualised subjectivities outside of the points of view they express on the subjects discussed in the dialogue; therefore, the overall discourse of the text is engaged in a dialogue with itself, it dissents with and questions itself and in the process destructs or, rather, deconstructs the authorial subjectivity and worldview.

 The novel as a genre is characterised by a radical transformation of the authoritative authorial self. As Julia Kristeva points out, by the very act of narrating, the writer is drawn into the text and becomes a textual self, "reduced to a code, to a nonperson, to an *anonymity*, […] transformed by his having included himself within the narrative system."[17] It is precisely this new positioning of the author in the field of representation that distinguished the novel from the epic:

> the novelist may turn up on the field of representation in any authorial pose…This is not merely a matter of the author's image appearing within his own field of representation – important here is the fact that the underlying, original formal author (the author of the authorial image) appears in a new relationship with the represented world. Both find themselves now subject to the same temporally valorised measurements, for the 'depicting' authorial language now lies on the same plane as the "depicted" language of the hero, and

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[15] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1992), 81.

[16] Kristeva, 81.

[17] Kristeva, 74, emphasis original.

may enter into dialogic relations and hybrid combinations with it (indeed, it cannot help but enter into such relations).[18]

By situating the author within the field of representation of the text, the novel inscribes both as contemporaneous, incomplete and evolving in historical time. In lieu of the epic distance, in which the audience was separated from the portrayed personages and events both temporally (the national tradition unfolding in time between them) and ideologically (on a different value plane), the novel posits the contemporary moment as the framework for observing and valuating the represented world. Never completed and always in a process of becoming, the novelistic character resembles in his processuality the novel itself, which, according to Bakhtin, is defined by its "novelness," which is "whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system."[19] The entire prehistory of the novel that Bakhtin traces (from the Socratic dialogues and the Menippean satire, through the medieval parodic literature, until it finally emerges in its proper form in the Renaissance novels of Rabelais and Cervantes) encodes the novel not structurally but ideologically, so that a novel becomes any literary work that, irrespective of the formal characteristics of the text, acts against the established model and order, against the canon and the established truths and dogmas.

The purpose of this Platonic and Bakhtinian *excursus* is to serve as a philosophical and literary overview of what a culturological and ideological, rather than merely formal, conception of the novel pinpoints as the defining characteristics of the novel in general and of the Rushdiean novel in particular: its profound anti-canonical and transgressive attitude towards the orthodoxies of its time; the fragmented and de-centred subjectivity it portrays, which reflects not only a stylistic or aesthetic practice, but, more importantly, is also an expression of a cultural and ethical outlook; the intra- and inter-textual juxtaposition of conflicting voices, worldviews and texts it establishes; the linguistic, cultural, literary and ontological dialogisation it rests on as a guiding principle; and, finally,

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[18] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (New Delhi: Pinnacle Learning, 2014), 27-8.

[19] Michael Holquist, "Introduction" to Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, xxxi.

the insistent but problematic and problematised image of the author it portrays.

Home, Roots, Rootlessness, Migration: The Double Perspective of Intellectual Migrancy

Rushdie's stance towards the ending of the film *The Wizard of Oz*, which greatly influenced his views on the idea of home and belonging, reveals his predilection for the fictive over the actual, for the expansive "imaginary homelands" of the mind rather than the frontiered geographical spaces of political reality. After her adventures in the magical land of Oz, in the end, Dorothy's magical slippers take her home in the black-and-white Kansas, because, as the saying goes, "there is no place like home." This unsatisfactory ending, as Rushdie points out, led L. Frank Baum to return Dorothy to Oz in his subsequent Oz books, in one of which Dorothy settles there, along with her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry, and becomes a princess. Thus, "Oz finally *became* home; the imagined world became the actual world […] the real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home' but rather that there is no longer any such place *as* home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz, which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we began."[20]

Rushdie's repudiation of the traditional ideas of roots and belonging is informed by his migrant and minoritarian perspective – having been a member of a minority all his life (a Muslim in a predominantly Hindu India, an immigrant in Pakistan, Britain and America), he finds his position enabling rather than disabling:

> I don't think that migration, the process of being uprooted, necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It's not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you come from. The problem is that you come from too many

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[20] Salman Rushdie, *Step across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (London: Vintage, 2003), 32-33.

places. The problems are of excess rather than of absence. That's certainly the feeling I have.[21]

In compliance with his perception of his position as one of excess rather than lack, Rushdie sees his minoritarian perspective and physical migrancy as informing his artistic credo, since he experiences his partial belonging to several cultures not as a phenomenon of incompletion but of pluralisation.[22] The physical distance of migrant writers from both their native and host cultures becomes also an intellectual, critical distance that renders them more capable of perceiving reality and of articulating their counter-hegemonic voice. The dissenting, unorthodox voices of Rushdie's authorial protagonists are enabled by their physical nomadism, which in turn provides the material for their intellectual dissent: Saleem and Moraes are picaresque characters who seek validation for their existence by "migrating" parts of themselves into the body of the nation or into the historical past; Saladin and Gibreel, the protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*, are migrants but also, like most of the other characters, migrate through space and time in different oneiric and symbolic scenarios; Malik and the Author, both immigrants in America, consider themselves not as uprooted but as multiply rooted.

It is in this critical distance, notably from power structures, that Edward Said locates the sign of true intellectualism. The most fruitful terrain for

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[21] Michael R. Reder, ed., *Conversations with Salman Rushdie* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), ix.

[22] In the ironic description of Revathi Krishnaswami, "a new type of 'Third World' intellectual, cross-pollinated by postmodernism and postcolonialism, has arrived: a migrant who, having dispensed with territorial affiliations, travels unencumbered through the cultures of the world bearing only the burden of a unique yet representative sensibility that refracts the fragmented and contingent condition of both postmodemity and postcoloniality. Journeying from the 'peripheries' to the metropolitan 'centre,' this itinerant intellectual becomes an international figure who at once feels at home nowhere and everywhere. No longer disempowered by cultural schizophrenia or confined within collectivities such as race, class, or nation, the nomadic postcolonial intellectual is said to 'write back' to the empire in the name of all displaced and dispossessed peoples, denouncing both colonialism and nationalism as equally coercive constructs". (Revathi Krishnaswamy, "Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)location," *Ariel* 26.1 (1995): 125)

stimulating intellectual work of the kind described and lauded by Said is the state of metaphysical or intellectual exile, which is related to, but not identifiable with, literal, political exile. The exile Said has in mind is an actual but, above all, a metaphorical condition – feeling like an outsider even if one physically belongs. Metaphysical exile is the state of "restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation."[23] Said's equating of exile and intellectualism, however, is problematic (and probably due to his personal experience), especially because, as Bill Ashcroft warns, it is impossible to draw a clear line between geographical displacement and intellectual distancing[24] or to determine how one follows from the other.

Similarly to Said, Rushdie metaphorises his migrant, exilic position, which, following the etymology of the word "metaphor," becomes the defining condition of contemporary man: "The very word *metaphor*, with its roots in the Greek words for *bearing across*, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants – borne-across humans – are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples."[25] The vocabulary of this passage, which condenses various migrations – of ideas, meanings and people – to conclude with an image of frontier-crossing, is indicative of Rushdie's artistic credo: the transgression of taboos, dogmas and orthodoxies and the migration of ideas and knowledge in general across cultures, historical eras and epistemic boundaries. His *oeuvre* is wholly dominated by this dialogical, comparative aspect of perceiving the world and the image of migration captures the entire Babelian multitude of subjectivities, ideas, phenomena and cultures that inhabit his novels, as a result of which no character and culture is seen in isolation, but always in dialogue with (an)other(s). Even

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[23] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual. The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 53.
[24] Bill Ashcroft, "Worldliness," in *Edward Said and the Post-Colonial*, ed. Bill Ashcroft and Hussein Khadim (Huntington, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2002), 88.
[25] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 278-9.

his own novels communicate with and complement each other as ideas, people and events migrate from one to another, thus modifying and diversifying their meanings.

Rushdie is almost ubiquitously perceived as a polarised and polarising writer who, on the one hand, dares to explore the extremes of aesthetic, religious and historico-political discourse, and, on the other, to channel the reception of his *oeuvre* under the umbrella of a critical dominant such as the postcolonial trope of migrancy, hybridity or subversion of established orthodoxies, which sideline other aspects of his novels. Moreover, perhaps more than any other living writer, he has managed to polarise his readership into two intransigent camps that interpret his artistic enterprise as either fully justified in its faithfulness to his artistic imagination, or fully unjustified in its transgressive and irreverent treatment of sacred subjects. Thus, Robert Fraser, in reference to *The Satanic Verses*, points out,

> [t]he fact is that, while Rushdie's methods understandably raised hackles in places where the Qur'an is handled literally with gloves, there is in his difficult and brilliant book a slight nostalgia for a wholeness, or at least for an integration of personality and culture well in line with the requirements of tradition.

> That the mullahs, unfamiliar with the codes of western literary irony, did not perceive this paradox was hardly surprising. That postcolonial critics have proved resistant to it is more interesting. It is also a state of affairs which needs to be explained.[26]

Rushdie himself often seems to encourage such monologic readings of his novels in his essays and interviews, which programmatically lay out a poetics reliant on the dominant themes mentioned above (literal or metaphorical migrancy; cultural and individual hybridity; present-day Bombay [i.e. before it became Hinduised in name and ethos as Mumbai], Mughal India and Moorish al-Andalus as idealised historical eras; an authorial intention to write for and on behalf of the South Asian locations, people and diaspora that are the imagological foundations of his work; and

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[26] Robert Fraser, *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 212.