Sacred and Profane Authorship in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Venko Andonovski's *The Navel of the World*

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The two novels that are the focus of this paper are informed by the politically and culturally subversive ethos of reappraising the biased values and dichotomies established by dominant power structures such as colonialism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism, and religious extremism. To achieve this goal, Rushdie engages with the birth of Islam in seventh-century Arabia and Andonovski with that of Slavic Orthodoxy in ninth-century Byzantium, significant historical moments that provide them with the opportunity to interrogate the supposed purity and/or sanctity of venerated religious figures such as Muhammad and Constantine the Philosopher. This, in turn, serves the function of questioning the authority of religious discourse, as represented by/through these religious authors, by juxtaposing it with that of profane discourse, represented by profane authors such as Salman and Ilarion. Moreover, both writers infuse their fictional authors with aspects from their own respective biographies in order to present a particular image of their authorial persona and of the author in general, namely to uphold an anti-dogmatic, anti-establishmentarian, intellectually alert and rebellious stance.

This article argues that despite the widely different historical, religious, and cultural contexts that inform the novels, both posit profane authorship as that element of dissent and difference that destabilizes and diversifies the conformism of thought and spirit that a dominant discourse demands. Furthermore, this dissenting role of authorship functions as a counter-hegemonic strategy articulating postcolonial resistance to the racist discourse of imperialism in Rushdie's novel and postcommunist resistance to nationalist discourse in Andonovski's. By their renewed, contemporary engagement with the historical, political, and cultural realities of their respective postcolonial/postimperial and postcommunist societies, both authors enter into an open confrontation with the worldviews propagated by the dominant discourses therein, and, therefore, their novels can be inscribed into the postcolonial practice of "writing back," i.e., problematizing established hierarchies and orthodoxies of meaning.

1. Verses and Texts

The very title of Rushdie's novel presents a provocative dilemma as to what kind of verses the author has in mind. The English word "verse" is used both in a literary and scriptural context and therefore, as used in the title, maintains the ambiguity, whereas in the major languages of Islam (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish), the word "ayat" is used to designate specifically the verses of the Qur'an. Therefore, the translation of the novel's title into these languages would emphasize either the scriptural or literary meaning of the word "verse" (Pipes 114-118). At the heart of the novel is the "satanic verses" episode, which is a novelistic reinscription of an incident in the early history of Islam when Muhammad was misled by the devil, masquerading as the angel Gibreel, to allow the worship of three pagan goddesses—Al-Lat, Uzza, and Manat—alongside that of Allah. Suitable verses to this effect are indeed produced, but Muhammad subsequently abrogates them, ascribing their authorship to Satan/Shaitan. Rushdie renders the origin and status of these verses profoundly ambiguous and unclear to attack the notions of purity and homogeneity in religion and identity in general. In order for religion to affirm itself:

> Satan has to be silenced, and yet, it seems, this heresy (of the satanic verses) is precisely what is needed to blast open a religion's hidden power, its capacity to face its own genesis and rethink the terror of its foundational moment, a moment which, finally, may have an aporetic side, a non-closure which necessitates constant self-reflection and re-thinking of its textual traditions. (Mishra 45-46)

The questions of origin and originality are also crucial to Andonovski's novel, at the center of which is the undeciphered inscription in the eastern chamber of the Hagia Sophia. Of uncertain provenance and authorship, the inscription seems to point to "the Navel of the World," which is a symbolical reference to God, the source of light and life that humankind have lost.

The Word, be it oral or inscribed, is endowed with a sacred aura in both novels, which proceeds from the significance that it is accorded in its specific religious context. In Christianity, Jesus is "the Word" of God made flesh in the person of Christ (who "was made flesh, and dwelt among us" [John 1:14]). As the embodied Word, Jesus can be regarded as a divine text, a function that in Islam is performed by the holy book: "the Qur'an is the Uncreated Word of God—an intrinsic part, as it were, of the Divine Essence, […] a part of the Divine Logos" (Ruthven 8). The divine significance of the religious Word imposes upon the would-be decipherer a hermeneutical authority and responsibility. Thus, the appearance of the satanic verses transforms Mahound, the stand-in for the Prophet, from a messenger into a hermeneuticist. Namely, by identifying the contested verses as such

and subsequently abrogating them from the pure essence of the divine Word, he assumes a hermeneutical authority that, on the one hand, establishes an entirely new religion but, on the other, leads to the religious fanaticism of his later incarnations, the Imam and Ayesha. The novel condemns this authoritarian certainty and advocates for the healthy presence of doubt instead. Therefore, as soon as Mahound proclaims the verses satanic, Gibreel immediately intervenes to counter his claim: "*it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me,"* (*SV* 123), i.e. he was the source of both the divine and the satanic verses.

The presence of the undeciphered inscription in *The Navel of the World* similarly allows the text to posit a particular hermeneutics, one that is informed by a profound respect for the written word and preparedness to plumb the depths of the textual meanings. This is achieved by the Philosopher, a saintly and Christ-like figure, whose belief in the oneness of God and His identification with the Word—"God is One, He is Great, the Word is in Him, and He in the Word" (*NW* 39)—encapsulates the almost sacralized veneration of the Word and the Text upon which the novel rests. In *The Satanic Verses*, however, the oral word, manifested as sacred and profane verses, is rendered inherently heterogeneous and differential by being permeated by the satanic. This satanic diversification, as we shall see, is seen as the prerequisite for the transition from the submission encoded in the very nature of religious discourse to the subjectivity required of the author if he is to author a text at all.

Although the satanic perspective plays an identical role in *The Navel of the World*, Andonovski's novel starts from a radically different premise, one that is reverential with regard to the divine identity of the text and, therefore, as such, is opposed to Rushdie's blasphemous intention with regard to Islam and its founder, Muhammad. Andonovski confirms the Bulgakovian belief that "manuscripts don't burn" (Bulgakov 287); only in his novel is the indestructibility of the word guaranteed not by Satan, as in Bulgakov and Rushdie, but by the presence of God in the text, i.e., by the equivalence of Word/God that informs the author's Christian Orthodox perspective.

The novel contains numerous references to embodied texts, i.e., to "the Word made flesh," and *vice versa*, which reinforce the idea that being is writing and both reside in and proceed from God. As Father Mida admonishes the members of the logothete's council, false spiritual fathers led by his own son, Father Stefan, "to burn a Word means to burn God, your Father, on the pyre" (*NW* 72). In a similar way, alphabets and languages do not become fully extinct: just as the written text is an embodiment of the Word/Jesus Christ, the letters of the alphabet and the sounds that they express have their own warmth and, bearing the imprint of the Holy Spirit, speak their own language.

This language can be understood by anyone in whom God resides, like Constantine the Philosopher, to whom they reveal themselves of their own accord, but not by Stefan the Letter-Bearer and the council members, all of whom are represented as antithetical to the Word. Since verses/texts assume conceptual centrality in both novels, both Rushdie and Andonovski tackle the question of authorship and embark on an exploration of the authorial "I" authoring the verses and the texts around which the novels are organized.

2. Who is the/an Author?

Rushdie describes the production of Mahound's Revelation in such an ambiguous way that it is impossible to determine whether it comes from the archangel or from Mahound. The ambiguity is achieved by the fluid subjectivity created by Gibreel's and Mahound's selves: as the dual human/archangelic Gibreel persona is mixed up with that of the Prophet of Islam, the novel hints at the impossibility of pinpointing an originary source or pure essence for religious discourse. The birth of Allah's message is described in gestational imagery, with Gibreel in the process of *becoming* as he awaits the approaching Mahound and ultimately being overwhelmed by the sheer force of the prophet's personality. Continuing the gestational imagery, the text posits an analogy between the relationship of mother-child and of archangel-prophet—they are bound together as if with an umbilical cord:

> But when he has rested he enters a different sort of sleep, a sort of not-sleep, the condition that he calls his *listening*, and he feels a dragging pain in the gut, like something trying to be born, and now Gibreel […] feels a confusion, *who am I*, in these moments it begins to seem that the archangel is actually *inside the Prophet*, I am the dragging in the gut, I am the angel being extruded from the sleeper's navel, I emerge, Gibreel Farishta, while my other self, Mahound, lies *listening*, entranced, I am bound to him, navel to navel, by a shining cord of light, not possible to say which of us is dreaming the other. We flow in both directions along the umbilical cord. (*SV* 110)

The revelation is induced by a dragging of the cord, "the miracle start[ing] in my his our guts," with Mahound generating the power that will force the words out of Gibreel's mouth, upon which "the voice comes." Gibreel is not an entity external to Mahound, but the foetus inside the prophet's metaphorical womb whom the dragging of the umbilical cord will bring out into the world. This positionality of both archangel and prophet destroys the ostensible superiority of the former, as divine and human messenger become one. The "something trying to be born" is, of course, the divine revelation of Allah, but the pronominal and ontological confusion ("my, his, our," "my other self")

suggests that it is born out of the total extinguishing of consciousness and subjectivity.

On a further level of self-estrangement, the voice that speaks from and through Gibreel is not his: "*Not my voice* I'd never know such words I'm no classy speaker never was never will be but this isn't my voice it's a Voice" (*SV* 112). Another layer of ontological complexity is added by means of the irresolvable uncertainty of who Gibreel really is, as he is represented as an ontological fusion consisting of the archangel, Satan, Mahound, and the Indian actor undergoing a crisis of identity. Overwhelmed by the strength of Mahound's personality, he describes himself as merely "*some idiot actor having a bhaenchud nightmare*" and helplessly appeals both to Mahound and, ultimately, to the reader, "*what the fuck do I know, yaar, what to tell you, help. Help*" (*SV* 109).

Thus, Gibreel is represented as a fluid, non-definable subjectivity that operates on several ontological and narrative levels: both human and archangelic, dreamer and participant in his dreams, source of the divine revelation and an unwilling agent from whom the revelation is forced out, separate from and identical with Mahound. Just as he is one and many, so the revelation is both divine and satanic, and Mahound is both its source and messenger. Ultimately, Gibreel's decentered, plural, and unstable self is an emblem of the identitary difference that is Satan, the traditional master of dissimulation and disguise.

If the search for the authorial "I" in *The Satanic Verses* reveals a plural and ontologically fluid source, *The Navel of the World*, while seemingly going in the opposite direction, i.e., positing God, who is One, as the original textual source, in the end also deploys a confusion of authorial selves. The decipherment of the mysterious inscription in the Hagia Sophia requires that Ilarion and Constantine the Philosopher depart in search of its supposed original, located at the "Navel of the World," a mountain next to the city of Kermanshah, which bears the Behistun inscription. To get at the true meaning of the inscription, written in an alphabet that no one can read, the Philosopher needs "to transfer it from rock to parchment" because he needs to feel the particular warmth of the letters and thus their meaning (*NW* 107). The Philosopher's painstaking and reverential copying of the inscription is also a literal and a symbolical ladder-climbing: the higher he climbs on the ladder carrying him to the beginning of the text, the more dangerous the enterprise becomes, because the beginning contains the word "I," the essence of the real author, which is inappropriate, irrespective of the signature. The anonymous authorial "I" thus contains within itself the real creator of the word and is divorced from the signature, which can be appropriated by anybody. Therefore, when the Philosopher reaches the "I" heading the entire inscription, which to the awed Ilarion seems to be in the very sky, thus reinforcing the divine characteristic of the word/Word, and tries to make an imprint of

the first word, which contains the essence of the text's originator, a bolt of lightning hits the mountain, the earth quakes, and the sky darkens, whereupon Constantine finally deciphers the inscription.

The significance of Constantine's insistence on the sanctity and inviolability of the "I" heading the inscription is fully revealed on their return to Constantinople, where they find out that Stefan has already deciphered the inscription with the help of his father's notes. The comparison of the two nearly identical inscriptions reveals a telling difference; namely, in Stefan's version, the signatory is Solomon, while in the Philosopher's, it is Darius. This means that Darius's signature at "the navel of the world" was fake, as he merely erased Solomon's and put in his own name, usurping Solomon's authorial "I." The navel of the world, therefore, is not in the middle of the mountain (because it contains not the original but a copy), but it is Solomon's cup, on which the original inscription was made by King Solomon, who drew his wisdom therein, becoming a just and beloved ruler. Once he fell into sin, dissipating his life on drink and women, however, the wisdom of the cup dried up. The cup was stolen and lost over the centuries, until somebody had the inscription written on the Behistun mountain as a reminder of the ephemerality of wisdom on account of having had too many passions in the cup of life. This inscription was later appropriated by Darius and was copied by some wise ancestor of the Byzantines, who brought it to the Hagia Sophia to preserve its wisdom, but also, as we shall see, to convey something else.

The authorial signatures of both inscriptions end with the number 909, which reveals the architectonics of the act of creation. The zero in the middle stands for the source of creation, the primordial chaos out of which the Author fashions a new world, in an act of *imitatio Dei* that binds the divine and human creators with an indissoluble bond. God is, in fact, the original author, whose authorial, creationary self-man appropriates in order to become a creator like (or instead of) him. The number 9 carries the Christian symbolism of "a triple perfection, since the Holy Trinity is repeated three times in the number nine" (*NW* 127). Standing on both sides of the zero in the middle, it represents two readers: one who reads the surface meanings and another who reads the hidden ones and can therefore be described as a *satanic reader*, for it contains the Devil's perspective. Stefan is a representative of the first type of reader, which is one that seeks a final reading and a fixed understanding, one that is dogmatic and radically opposed to the second, satanically inflected reading practiced by the Philosopher, which is nourished on intellectual restlessness and the ability to read between the lines/letters, thereby penetrating into the very soul and essence of the written word. The ideal reader posited by the text, therefore, would be one who is able to read simultaneously through both the traditional/orthodox and the satanic/unorthodox perspectives.

Thus, the satanic element is foregrounded in both novels as a necessary element in the acts of creation and interpretation, without which the (oral) word and the (written) text would be one-dimensional and depthless. Simultaneously, the satanic principle plays more complex roles in both novels.

3. Diversifying the Word: A Satanic Hermeneutics

Since the Qur'an in Islamic tradition represents a part of the divine Logos, Rushdie's destabilization of its source by insinuating the satanic into its divine essence introduces an element of alterity. The effect of the satanic verses is to undermine the authority of divine revelation by doubling and therefore diversifying its source. Satan's very appearance in the biblical narrative introduces:

> *difference* into a universe that, according to the biblical narrative, was created to be unified. For example, while God created the universe and "everything he had made" to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31), Satan explicitly introduces a concept of difference, namely "good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), implying the possibility that not "everything" was "very good," and thus, questioning the truth of God's word. Satan's use of words therefore dismisses truth and divine authority as knowable categories of interpretation. (Sauter 116)

Etymologically, Satan's name means "Adversary" in Hebrew, and, as such, he can be conceived of not as embodying a metaphysical principle but as playing an oppositional and dissenting role, which is the aesthetic philosophy of both novels. He does this by relying on his oratorical mastery in proffering alternative interpretations of scriptural messages and exposing the differential, ambiguous, and inconstant nature of language. In Rushdie's novel, the satanic verses appear in order to express an already existing uncertainty regarding the source of the revelation Mahound preaches, an uncertainty of which he is very much aware, as he wonders whether he is merely the messenger bearing Allah's words or their source. This dilemma is not resolved: the narrative tone simultaneously discredits Mahound by emphasizing his businessman-like character (he is portrayed as "*profit*-motivated rather than *prophet*-motivated" [Clark 169]) and hence his pragmatic motivations in giving shape to the revelation (divine *and* satanic) and ennobles him by infusing him with the consciousness of the archangel in such a way that the emergence of the religious discourse flows both ways along the umbilical connection between them.

Both Rushdie and Andonovski repeat and confirm the traditional literary activation of the devil as the carrier of a satanic hermeneutics or, as Caroline Sauter states, "a modern, 'deconstrutive,' differential hermeneutics" (Sauter 117), opposed to the traditional, theological one,

which stems from God. The appearance of Satan, in the guise of a snake and speaking with a snake's forked tongue, in paradise introduces the difference of "evil"—in fact, difference as evil—into the homogeneous world created by God in which everything was "good" and faithful to its essence, presential, unequivocal, and pure. Satan's evilness is to function as a contrast to and an opposite of God, whose words he renders ambiguous by introducing double meanings, aporias, paradoxes, and contradictions.

The Navel of the World emphasizes this point by placing the Devil in a crucial position in the eastern chamber, from where his eyes equally see you wherever in the chamber you are, always reading a different, *an-other* inscription and therefore yielding different and differential meanings. Seen through the orthodox (and Orthodox) reader's perspective, the inscription pays homage to the saintly, venerated Solomon, whose wisdom serves to glorify God and the prince (Solomon) whose glory shall be witnessed by all. Seen through the Devil's perspective:

> King Solomon is a liar
> And as much a thief as any ruler.
> […]
> And Solomon is no poet.
> Another "I" abides in his mouth
> He adorns himself with the wisdom of others.
> (*NW* 139)

The Devil reveals that "even Solomon was not the creator of the inscription attributed to him, but an unknown poet, who sold his wisdom, his cup, for a handful of gold in order to survive" and ultimately "knows the real 'I' of every text" (*NW* 140).

The devil is an embodiment of paradoxes and inconstancy, but also the possibility for self-invention: from the fixed, God-given identity as the brightest angel, Lucifer (the Angel of Light), to his fall and expulsion from heaven, acquires the slippery ontology of the unstable identity, one that is di-versified, diabolical, and antagonistic. The prefixes di-, de-, and dis- derive from the Indo-European words for "two," implying division, discord, and other related meanings, results of the Fall (Forsyth 219). As he rejects the identity conferred upon him by God, he is the prototype of the self-made man, the man reinventing himself, the man born anew, while the immutable essence of divine selfhood is the heresy that needs to be sidelined.

Rushdie's novel is permeated by the satanic nature of logos, operating through the differential function of satanic-fictional verses. As Vassilena Parashkevova states, since the Latin word *versificare* derives from the oppositional semantics of *versus*:

> the activity of *versifying* – the production of erosive verses, magic spells, commandments, prophecies and satirical poems… partakes of this quality of

> being against established discourses, of producing satanic interpretations of the dominant order of things or of reading *against* the grain. (Parashkevova 77)

The very semantics of the words, containing the oppositional *versus*, subsuming the meanings of both "verses" and "against," throws into sharp relief the contradictoriness and semantic openness of language/discourse around which the entire novel revolves. Ironically, the ultimate manifestation of the satanic hermeneutics espoused by the novel was the "Rushdie affair," whereby the Ayatollah Khomeini, the real-life prototype of Rushdie's fanatical Imam, made Rushdie the protagonist of the text he himself authored—the *fatwa* calling for Rushdie's death. In proffering a final, authoritative interpretation of Rushdie's novel as blasphemous with regard to Islam and Muhammad, Khomeini subordinated the semantic productivity of the novel to the single and final authority of the religious discourse that Rushdie had set out to dismantle in the first place. Having created his own version of the Ayatollah, in the furore over his novel, Rushdie in turn became the creation of the latter's text, with his predominantly Muslim readers engaged in "the construction of an author to fit a particular reading of the book" (Fhlathúin 277). In this way, Rushdie effectively became a powerless fictionalized character trapped in his own text. In fact, the affair made it clear that, contrary to the postmodernist sidelining of the author and reliance on the text as a generator of meaning, authors are inevitably amenable to an ethical recall. For, whenever specific political or historical developments are traceable to a text, then "the rarefied notion of artistic impersonality [a notion central to *The Satanic Verses*] implodes, and society finds itself in search of an author" (Burke 488), which is in line with the inappropriability of the authorial "I" insisted upon in *The Navel of the World*.

4. Sacred and Profane Authorship

Rushdie's and Andonovski's novels use the religious contexts of Islam and Orthodox Christianity, respectively, in order to explore the birth of literature as a deviation from religious discourse and the birth of the author, i.e., the writer of fiction, as a partial or total repudiation of sacred authorship and authority. In other words, the sacred Word becomes counterposed to the profane word, which denotes the birth of literature and of the profane author. The dichotomy between sacred and profane authorship is evoked by means of authorial pairs—Salman the scribe/Mahound in *The Satanic Verses* and Ilarion/Constantine the Philosopher in *The Navel of the World.*

Salman is the unscrupulous scribe of the Recitation who distorts it to prove Mahound's inauthenticity as a Prophet of God and, as such, functions as an authorial alter ego through whom the other Salman,

i.e., Rushdie, voices his protest against the monologic discourse of religion. Salman faithfully takes down the divine Revelation until, in a dream, remembering the "satanic verses" episode, he identifies with the devil and starts producing *other*, satanic verses of his own, interpolating them with Gibreel's. This is a crucial moment in the novel that marks the transformation of the scribe/copyist into an original creator:

> As he narrates the circumstances of his loss of faith, Salman traces his evolution from scrupulous scribe (who repeats) to imaginative writer (who makes up tall tales). In this sense, he is much more than the embittered unreliable narrator of Mahound's Medinan years. As he re-enacts the satanic interpolation by substituting fiction for fact and tampers with the prophet's original message, Salman becomes a follower of the archetypal fiction-maker. (Hennard 172)

It is this satanic, *dis*-obedient perspective that enables Salman to break away from the submission encoded in Mahound's sacred discourse and to forge his own authorial subjectivity. As Mahound's oral Recitation, as we saw, is already corrupted, i.e., satanically diversified at its source, Salman functions as another satanic voice diversifying the supposed purity of Allah's Holy Book, the Qur'an, and thereby undermines its status as an incarnation of the Divine Logos. Salman becomes Shaitan's human equivalent and Mahound's secular counterpart. In writing his novel, Rushdie lets the imaginative power of literature speak on behalf of the repudiated scribe, who loses his place in the community of believers (a fact sealing the separation between the secular and the religious) and in the end departs to his native Persia in order to ply his craft as a fiction writer proper.

Another authorial figure assumes Salman's antagonistic mantle after the latter's departure: the Jahilian poet Baal, whose name in the Bible and Christian tradition evokes the devaluation and subsequent demonization of once supreme and valued deities. Baal (or Ba'al, meaning "Lord") was a prominent god in the old Canaanite religion; originally indistinguishable from Yahweh, he later became his primary enemy and the chief villain of Israelite religion. In the Christian tradition, Baal has multiple identities: he is Satan's main lieutenant, the first and principal king in Hell, ruling over the East, or the demon Beelzebub, which, on account of the pun on the "name — "zebûb" being a Hebrew noun meaning "fly"—has become the "Lord of the Flies," or Satan himself (*New World Encyclopedia*).

Bearing in mind these connotations of his name, Baal becomes another authorial figure who actively resists and undermines Mahound and his religion of submission. Therefore, he, too, can be defined as satanic in the sense in which the adjective is employed in the novel. Persecuted by Mahound, Baal becomes "the secret, profane mirror of

Mahound" (*SV* 384), writing profane verses, a veritable profane Qur'an. At the end of the novel, he asserts himself as the divinely inspired poet of ancient tradition—a poet not of divine revelation but of love.

The fact that the undermining of both religion and language is carried out by the authorial figures of Baal and Salman attaches a special importance to the responsibility arising out of authorship. Salman and Baal jointly pluralize and thereby undermine the conceptual purity of both the oral and written divine revelation. Setting the episode in the indicatively named city ("jahilia" designates the state of ignorance before the advent of Islam), Rushdie takes an initial state of "ignorance" as its conceptual center around which to explore the trajectory of literary discourse and its subversive and resistant function in relation to power.

Andonovski's Ilarion follows an authorial trajectory similar to that of Rushdie's Salman. Ilarion represents his authorial vocation as deriving from, but nevertheless different from and, at times, even antithetical to, the divine Logos manifested in the Gospels and in the person of the Philosopher. His manuscript reveals the author's growing awareness of his gradual emancipation from the authority of the mediaeval Byzantine *auctores* (writers sanctified by tradition, authoritative figures in a certain area of knowledge such as Aristotle in dialectic, Cicero in rhetoric, or the Bible in theology) and the resulting autonomy of the field of the modern author (Pease 264). These two forms of authorship—sacred and profane—are represented as being at a disjunction, as if they were mutually exclusive: as soon as he becomes a Tale-Weaver, Ilarion stops being an Ascender of Ladders, a descriptor meaning "one who ascends towards God." As he triumphantly announces, he received the former name when, as a six-month-old child, he started narrating stories that had no basis in reality but were purely fictional, unlike the real histories that really happened and that need to be told faithfully:

> So, as I noted earlier: in some respects I was better than the Philosopher, who was wise and learned, but he could not see what only I could see, and he knew not how to weave tales in his mind but could only repeat those of others. But He chose him to abide in Him, because He detested the imaginary. For in Holy Scripture it is pointed out that into the heavenly realm, the City of God, dogs, fornicators, murderers, and idolaters will not be admitted, nor those who bear false witness, who lie. And the Tale-Weavers do lie, and they want to lie. (*NW* 26-7)

Ilarion's authorial *Bildung* develops in relation to two alternative epistemologies and hermeneutics, represented respectively by Stefan the Letter-Bearer and the Philosopher, onto whom his text attempts to be grafted and tied, as to its authorial father.

The Philosopher's mission to decipher the mysterious inscription that has brought misfortunes upon the Byzantine kingdom is, in fact, a search for a pristine and unequivocal authorial "I," which, as we saw, leads to the recognition that Satan's is invariably the *other* voice interwoven with that of the author/creator, either Divine or worldly. However, even while embracing this satanic, diversified authorship, the text does not thereby relativize authorship. Rather, it insistently emphasizes the great responsibility it confers and is very careful to distinguish the real from the fake authorial "I."

Thus, one of the very first actions Constantine performs upon his arrival in Constantinople is to unmask Stefan the Letter-Bearer's credentials as the inventor of a new alphabet, which the latter has falsely appropriated as his own "flesh and blood" (*NW* 53), for taking another's "I" as one's own (like Darius did with Solomon's and Solomon with the unknown poet's) incurs the wrath of God. This episode is an allusion to the unparalleled achievement of Constantine (monastic name Cyril) and his brother Methodius, known as the "Apostles to the Slavs," who were the founders of the first Slavic alphabet and the first Slavic literary language, the first translators into Old Church Slavonic, and the first Slavic enlighteners and educators. Andonovski does not allude to these events directly, but their monumentality looms in the background notwithstanding, being the standard against which Stefan the Letter-Bearer's false intellectual credentials and Ilarion's profane authorial *Bildung* are measured.

In so far as the recognition of the satanic nature of the text entails a reading of both what is written and what is not but is nevertheless implied by the text, Constantine endorses this differential hermeneutics of which the Devil forms an inalienable part, in spite of his inscription in the saintly, Christ-like imagery that sets him apart from the false spirituality presiding at the logothete's court. The Philosopher's hermeneutics does not regard the differential, satanically diversified kind of writing/reading as impure and, consequently, contrary to God and the Divine Logos. Indeed, the true knowledge produced by such writing/reading endows the author/reader with an insight of a special kind, such that brings him closer to Christ (who is the Word incarnate). However, as Ilarion clarifies on the very first pages of his manuscript, his writing proceeds from a position of godlessness. He has been rejected by God, who no longer resides in him because he has tried to decenter God's throne: "And the Lord expelled me from before His face with these words: 'Be gone from My face; thou decided to reshape and complete that which I never wanted to alter, recreate, or finish'" (*NW* 21). Ilarion's profane authorship thus echoes Salman's in that it arises out of an opposition to the divine one, which manifests itself through the Philosopher in *The Navel of the World* and Mahound in *The Satanic Verses*.

Although Ilarion's ideas of authorship and hermeneutics are largely aligned with the Philosopher's throughout the narrative, he ultimately forges a different authorial path, one that is made possible by a different intellectual kinship. Ilarion becomes aware of this kinship when, among Father Mida's papers, he finds his own genealogy, which tells him that he is, in a strange way, the child of the mysterious inscription, which is the semantic center of the novel. The inscription addresses a woman, who is identified with the legendary cup from which Solomon drew his wisdom. In Macedonian, the word for "woman" is "жена," and therefore the text begins with the letter "ж," an eroticized letter that, in Ilarion's imagination, resembles a woman with her legs and arms spread apart, as if enticing the reader into the erotics of interpretation. In Slavic mythological imagery, this letter symbolizes the female principle in the act of creation, the tree of life (Chausidis 169-170), and is opposed to the male principle, represented by the passive and static letter "о," which in the novel is equated with the Devil, who is portrayed in the oval fresco of the chamber (Mojsova-Chepishevska 276-277). When he entered the chamber to copy the inscription, Father Mida became entranced by the beauty of the letter "ж," which transformed into a beautiful girl, and out of their union, Ilarion was born. The narrator/author, therefore, is a product of the union of a body that became letters (Mida) and a letter that became flesh (the girl), his authorial self a doubly repeated equivalence between *being* and *writing*. As this equivalence evokes Christ, the Word incarnate, the symbolism of Ilarion's identity serves to divinize the secular author and to impart authority to his craft. This is also emphasized by Ilarion's age at the time of writing (33, which is also Jesus's age at the time of the crucifixion) and the place from which he writes (in the temple of wisdom that is the Hagia Sophia, which was also called "Church of the Holy (or Divine) Wisdom").

However, the woman-like letter is also the horrible spider spinning its web in the middle of the chamber, on whose back is the small cross, upon which the scroll with the inscription is placed. Thus, the chamber that contains the secret of Ilarion's origin brings forth the triple authorial symbols of the spider, the woman/letter, and the cross, which combine the elements of tale-weaving, erotic engagement, and faith as the necessary prerequisites for a text to be born.

Although the Philosopher's hermeneutics acknowledges the satanic subtext hidden in every text (he reads the inscription from the Devil's perspective and is prepared to interpret it to the logothete), it can be defined as divine/sacred in the sense that it relies on truth as an absolute category (and the absolute is related to God). He fearlessly follows wherever the text and its meanings lead because for him they are inevitably inscribed in the text of the world/nature created by God. Ilarion's authorship tentatively holds to this hermeneutics by a loose thread, by means of the element of faith symbolized by the cross, but

his is ultimately a profane authorship, propped up by a different foundation, namely the erotics and the skill of the profane word that the author-spider weaves into his text, which emphasize the elements of playfulness, relativity, de-absolutisation, illusion, even manipulation, and lies. For, wishing to protect his brother Stefan from the truth that the Philosopher is about to reveal the following day, Ilarion moves the inscription, and the other, differential, satanic reading, which reveals Stefan's depraved sinfulness as the source of the curse tormenting the kingdom, is lost in the process. The Philosopher leaves for Rome, Stefan is rehabilitated, the kingdom is healed, and "all the letters contained only one meaning, only one soul inhabiting each creation and event" (*NW* 142). Ilarion's profane authorship, therefore, unlike Salman's, leads him to eliminate the satanic thread interwoven in the word/text, which results in the same dogmatic monologism propagated by religious discourse, in opposition to which Salman's authorship arose. Notwithstanding this difference, in both cases the profane authors write from an anti-religious position: Salman is banished from Mahound's religious community and Ilarion from God's grace, for, as he states, God no longer resides in him.

5. Articulating Dissent: Postcolonial and Postcommunist Perspectives

Rushdie's and Andonovski's deployment of a religion's originary moment to interrogate the supposed purity and/or sanctity of religious discourse is embedded within a contemporary cultural and political framework that enables them to launch a scathing critique of their respective postimperial and postcommunist environments.

Andonovski's novel subverts the orthodoxies underpinning its own dissenting discourse: not only the orthodoxy of Orthodox Christianity but also that of the postcommunist Macedonian society of the 1990s, which is the contemporary setting of the novel, representing its second part. Written as a diary, it dissects the inner turmoil of Jan, the author of the first part of the novel. The two parts of the novel establish a parallelism between Jan and Constantine the Philosopher, for both strive to decipher a mysterious inscription, "an unknown script that is erotic (and heretic)! One script concerns the eros towards God, the other the eros towards a woman. […] But I wanted to tell one single story, the story of our eternal pursuit of meaning, of the essence and purpose of this world, a pursuit symbolically called 'the navel of the world'" (Andonovski, interview for *Makedonsko Sonce*). Jan's quest for meaning, i.e., for his own "navel of the world," is, like Ilarion's and the Philosopher's, and, ultimately, the author's, an attempt to undermine the notion of a monolithic truth, which places Andonovski's novel in the tradition of postmodern Macedonian novels that counter

the monologism of (post)communist and nationalist discourses (Andonovski, "The Palimpsests of Nostalgia" 274-275).

Jan's is an-other, dissenting voice, like that of Constantine the Philosopher and Ilarion, Gibreel, and Salman, disruptive of the cultural conformity imposed by the political party in power, which sees Jan as nationally estranged and not patriotic enough, unwilling to subdue his individual "I" to the collective identity promoted by the new political system. His individualist and internationalist outlook comes into conflict with the parochial spirit of his environment, and this clash dooms his love for Lucia. Never fully belonging, he joins a circus and departs for Europe in a self-imposed exile, embracing a bohemian and dissolute life style until something breaks in him, he loses his power to perform his reckless acrobatic acts, and returns home intending to have a final reckoning with Lucia and then dedicate his life to God. However, his crossing of cultural and national borders, both literally and figuratively, seals his identitary fragmentation, and he ends up committing suicide, like Rushdie's Gibreel. Unlike Gibreel and unlike Ilarion, who, as we saw, ends his narrative with his futile longing to see the celestial light he saw when he was in God's grace, however, Jan is granted a glimpse of the transcendental, for just as he is about to jump in front of a train, he is suffused with a divine, "primal light" (*NW* 243). In granting the author this mercy, the novel reaffirms the sanctity of the authorial craft and vindicates the authorial prerogative to undermine "imposed orthodoxies of all types," and to protest against "the end of debate, of dispute, of dissent" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 396).

Rushdie's novel performs this task primarily through the distribution of characters through the various narrative levels. Represented as dream sequences, the Jahilian episodes enjoin on the reader the task "to decipher, contrapuntally, what stands outside the peculiar space of the text that demands representation seemingly only through dreaming" (Langlois 44). Interrupting the main plot of the contemporary fictive reality of the protagonists, the dream sequences form three subplots that, on account of their oneiric status, should represent a weaker, subordinate narrative level: as dreams, they are supposed to be less "real" than the reality of their dreamer Gibreel. Yet, paradoxically, Mahound, the Imam, and Ayesha, the prophetic figures featuring in Gibreel's dreams, are ontologically stronger than him and subdue him to suit their own ends. Such is the power of the imaginatively created dreamscapes that their inhabitants abandon their original context and migrate into the "real" world of 1980s London—in this way, "London, Bombay, and Jahilia [become] mere imaginary locations (or are they?) which fuse in the dream journey of the sacred space which becomes hybridised, haunted, and renewed" (Yacoubi 38) — under contemporary guises but retaining their original names.

Ultimately, it is through the politics of naming that Rushdie effects a recuperative decolonizing strategy of (mis)appropriating discourses, which is articulated across the narrative levels and the subplots themselves rather than within them. Mahound as a religious figure is "recuperated" by a comparison with his later incarnations, the Imam and Ayesha. Through the contrast between him and the cold and almost inhumane religiosity of the other two prophetic figures, Mahound comes across as a character who can effect a recuperative reconfiguration of the meaning of Islam. Moreover, since he is ontologically conjoined to Gibreel, Mahound can be regarded as one of the novel's cultural nomads and, as such, can be inscribed into the nomadic model of the

> palimpsestual inscription and reinscription, a historical paradigm that will acknowledge the extent to which cultures were not simply destroyed but rather layered on top of each other, giving rise to struggles that only increased the imbrication of each with the other and their translation into increasingly uncertain patchwork identities. (Young, quoted in Bell 127)

The "blasphemous" choice of the name "Mahound," as the narrator claims, springs from the contemporary postcolonial context, that of Britain of the 1980s, which is represented as a racist, bigoted society oppressing its immigrant minorities. In this respect, the text seems to follow an ideology of decolonization, for the othered name Mahound, used in mediaeval times to refer denigratingly to Muhammad as a satanic figure, is one of a series of insulting tags – "whigs, tories, and Blacks" (*SV* 93) – whose carriers appropriate and turn into "strengths," countering their belittling semantics by giving them an ennobling connotation.

The strategy of re-naming or re-signification has as its aim a radical restructuring of the (self-) perception of the concerned groups; once this is achieved, an overall change in society, one based on greater equality and emancipation, is inevitable. The narrator places his choice of the name "Mahound" in this contemporary context and in such a comparative framework along the vertical axis, i.e., across the narrative levels; it does function as a positive re-evaluation of its originally negative semantics. In this way, the novel's supposed blasphemy is somewhat diffused, and Muhammad/Islam can be incorporated within the novel's postcolonial agenda of "turning insults into strengths" (*SV* 93). The oppositional postcolonial stance of the novel is also reinforced with the activation of the motif of the umbilical cord in the relation between Gibreel and Rosa Diamond, who is represented as a guardian of English identity. The irruption of Gibreel's minoritarian, colonized alterity into Rosa's national(ist) narrative disturbs her serene confidence in the glories of English

history, and she finds herself unable to "look her history in the eye" (*SV* 153).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it can be stated that both Rushdie and Andonovski, writing from widely different cultural and religious contexts, explore the theme of authoring texts and meanings by means of the complex dynamic between sacred and profane authorship. Rushdie envisions profane authorship as an inherently resistant and subversive corrective to all forms of power, which springs from literature's very oppositionality to religious discourse, seen as oppressive, dogmatic, and monologic. Andonovski, on the other hand, does not dismiss the religious so easily. On the contrary, he ends the first part of his novel with Ilarion's unsatisfied longing to see again the halo of divine light encircling Constantine the Philosopher's body, a sign of his being in God's grace and of his and the Philosopher's God-given ability to see with inner eyes, to see the invisible. Andonovski dissects the agonistics within literature and profane authorship themselves and, by means of a convoluted game of various hermeneutics and hidden meanings, draws attention to the traps and pitfalls embedded in the text itself and to its satanically polysemous and aporetic nature. Ultimately, for both authors, authorship implies an anti-dogmatic outlook, intellectual nomadism, and restlessness, characteristics that they both consider to be inherent to their craft. As such, authorship also functions as a subversive authorial strategy for critiquing colonialist and nationalist discourses that they see as intrinsically inimical to difference, dissent, and un-orthodoxy, which are the ideals they champion in their texts.

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