Secular Discourse and the Clash of Faiths: 'The Satanic Verses' in British Society

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> *Let us never believe that the way in which the people in power tell us to look at the world is the only way we can look, because if we do that, then that's a kind of appalling self-censorship.* (Salman Rushdie).[1]

> *In Britain we believe in live and let live ... Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and Rastafarians are all welcome to our tolerant society. But there is only one law for all of us ... Those who say their deep religious convictions prevent them from obeying the law of this land should quit Britain immediately and go and live in a country where the conflict does not exist.* (*Sunday Sport*, 19 February, 1989 — editorial on Rushdie).

> *So the battle over* The Satanic Verses *is a clash of faiths, in a way. Or, more precisely, it's a clash of languages.* (Salman Rushdie, *The Observer*, 22 January, 1989).

I

Britain's prized tolerant and pluralist society began to exhibit the power of its master code from the beginning of 1989, following the highly publicised second attempt at book burning by Bradford Muslims in January, 1989. (The first protest in Bolton, in December 1988, failed to get any media coverage—so it was repeated after advice that the national media be duly invited!).[2] Text burning was encoded and enmeshed into two curiously related histories: that of Nazism and that of the history of religious bigotry and intolerance. Hence, from a major national quality paper: 'following the example of the Inquisition and Hitler's National Socialists, a large crowd of Muslims burnt some copies of the book' (*The Independent*, 16 January, 1989). The next day *The Times* carried a leader entitled: 'Islamic intolerance'. Neither paper was incensed by two earlier events: the burning of the new immigration rules by several Labour Members of Parliament outside the House of Commons in late 1988 and the burning of the US flag in America (the latter meriting a Supreme Court decision). The anguish, anger, powerlessness and frustration of the Muslim community was instead represented as an attack on 'free democracy' by *The Times* leader, entirely failing to show why an act of
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dissension within a free democracy is so divisive. Neither paper immediately explored the significant differences of opinion or the political and internal power struggles within the British Muslim community, thereby rendering 'Muslims' as intolerant book burners, not unlike Nazis and Inquisition members. The fact that British Muslims have little or no political power compared to the Nazis or Inquisition already indicates the distortions of production. Consequently, the discourse of the quality papers paralleled and matched those of their shadows, such as the *Sport on Sunday*[3].

One major issue underlying the analysis and interpretation of the 'Rushdie Affair' concerns the power of the prevailing master code to present and represent events in our society. Such representations disclose the controlling ideology concealed within the dominant discourse employed by media, government, and overtly and covertly other ruling agencies that produce and manage consensus within society. Michel de Certeau aptly writes that 'Discourse can be dissociated today neither from the origins of its production nor from the political, economic, or religious praxis that can change societies and, at a given moment, makes various kinds of scientific comprehensions possible.'[4] I shall rhetorically call this dominant discourse 'secular fundamentalism'. It is a phrase that Rushdie has refused of himself.[5] The use of the word 'fundamentalism' mimics the verbal grenade tossed into the allegedly rational conversation in which much of the debate has taken place. Secular fundamentalism can be said to represent an unquestioned authority given to a particular revelation of the way things are; in this case, a secular metaphysics with its attendant political and social baggage. There are of course varieties of secular fundamentalism, but I shall be concentrating on one in particular, that put forward by Rushdie in his commentary on the controversy surrounding his book. I believe, however, that his views are widely shared on these matters.

The purpose of this essay is not to join in with certain right-wing coalitions, both religious and secular, in a tirade against 'our decadent society'. Nor is to join in with radical left-wing analysis, which is often weakened by a secularist starting-point that renders it incapable of presenting the issues in a manner sensible or appropriate to many Muslims. First, my purpose here is to show how Rushdie's book lodges itself into the dominant discourse of secular fundamentalism regardless of Rushdie's intentions. And, secondly, to show why this form of secular discourse is incapable of properly addressing the issues raised in a religiously pluralist society.

But three disclaimers are also necessary. This is not an article either defending or opposing Rushdie's right to publish *The Satanic Verses*. Neither is it a literary or theological verdict on the book, although, as an Asian 'immigrant' myself, Rushdie's book was very significant for me personally. It represents a literary monument to the confusing and bewildering process of multiple identities, transformation and mutation

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that takes place in the dislocation and re-location of cultural and ethnic identity.[6] (And, although not myself a Muslim but a Christian, his questioning of textual authority and religious experience were also—though to a lesser extent—of interest to me.[7]) Finally, I would not wish to cause Mr Rushdie any further pain and suffering in his exile by this essay, but have written it in awareness of his own ardent championing of the rights to free speech and dissension.

<center>II</center>

In an otherwise thoughtful open letter to Rushdie, Michael Dummett made one particularly odd comment: 'For now you are one of us. You have become an honorary white: merely an honorary white intellectual, it is true, but an honorary white all the same.' Dummett's point was, of course, that a former hero of Britain's ethnic minorities was now seen to betray that community: 'you can never again credibly assume the stance of denouncer of white prejudice.'[8] But it is surely a mistake to translate what is also a *religious* issue into one purely of *race*. There are, after all, a growing number of white Muslims, and Muslims themselves have rightly[9] questioned the issue being presented in categories of race.[9] The more important point here was that Rushdie had aligned himself with a long history of Western denigration of Islam (although this may not have been his purpose). This denigration had once been the imperial discourse employed by western Christian powers, and then taken over by secular colonialism with equal vehemence and with equal political and social interests at stake. Edward Said rightly located the phenomenon that Dummett was trying to explain. He voiced the question that people from the Islamic world would ask of Rushdie: 'Why must a Moslem (*sic*), who could be defending and sympathetically interpreting us, now represent us so roughly, so expertly and so disrespectfully to an audience already primed to excoriate our traditions, reality, history, religion, language, and origin? Why, in other words, must a member of our culture join the legion of Orientalists in Orientalising Islam so radically and unfairly?'[10] Rushdie, in other words, had adopted the dominant discourse of the majority of white intellectuals, that of secular fundamentalism—in which Islam met its typical fate of re-presentation.

The history of the production of Islam for Western consumption has been widely documented.[11] Here, however, it is only relevant to highlight two main features noted by most commentaries. First, the economic and military might of Islam and its proximity to the West has always been and still is a central factor in the portrayal of Islam. This factor also needs to be located in the imperial conquests by the Western powers and their fear of competitors. The main tradition of Islam's portrayal by Europe occurs within the context that, by the end of World War I, Europe had colonized 85% of the earth. Second, Orientalism was initially conducted by predominantly Christian scholars whose religious concerns further skewed the production of Islam that was then carried
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over into more recent secular scholarship built on earlier Orientalist foundations. For example, one of the foundation texts of the Orientalist tradition was Barthelemy d'Herbelot's massive, learned and influential dictionary *Bibliotheque orientale* (1697), which, after supplying the Prophet's names, notes: 'This is the famous imposter Mohomet, Author and Founder of a heresy, which has taken on the name of a religion, which we call Mohammedan ... The interpreters of the Alcoran and other Doctors of Muslim or Mohammedan Law have applied to this false prophet all the praises which the Arians, Paulicians or Paulinists, and other Heretics have attributed to Jesus Christ, while stripping him of his Divinity.'[12] Note the following. The charge that Mohammed was an imposter relates to his rival status to Jesus. After all, he follows Jesus and is the last of the great prophets, thereby rendering Jesus into a John the Baptist! If however he is an imposter, the supersessionist chain is broken. Hence, Islam becomes a form of Christian heresy, a second-rate Arianism. As Rana Kabani notes, 'For a thousand years Muhammad was described by a long line of Christian detractors as a lustful and profligate false prophet, an anti-Christ, an idolator, a "Mahound" '[13]. Second, the concentration on Mohammed skews Islam into a religion of the founder (an imposter), rather than of the Koran (a book whose credentials are thereby questioned). The 'Quran was seen as the product of the events of the life of the Prophet, but rather as a deliberate contrivance than as God's revelation in response to particular needs.'[14] Daniel continues, that Christians did not then realize that their hermeneutic strategies applied to Islam would eventually be turned upon themselves. This leads to a further point. After the decline of Christianity in the West the 'latent' images of Islam were not fundamentally altered, but only their 'manifestations'. By 'latent', Said means the deep underlying 'almost unconscious' representations of the Orient's 'eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability', among other characteristics.[15] By 'manifestations', he means the various styles in which this representation is perpetuated. Hence, in the eighteenth century, the development of Orientalism was different only in its methods (such as philology), 'which in turn were naturalised, modernized, and laicized substitutes (or versions of) Christian supernaturalism.'[16]

The point to note, then, is that the offence given by Rushdie follows this pattern of portrayal, so that the catalogue of accusations against Rushdie by the Muslim community match almost exactly the latent images transmitted within Western history.[17] Take, for example, the imposter charge against Mohammed. Rushdie employs two devices, curiously mirroring an essentially imperialist and racist tradition. Control over the language of designation is central. Mohammed becomes Mahound, the name of 'the medieval baby-frightener, the Devil's synonym'.[18] Rushdie's self-conscious use of this name would perhaps

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indicate his mockery of this denigrating tradition, but for the way in which Mahound is then viewed as an imposter, a 'smart bastard', a canny "businessman' who cleverly gains power, sleeps with so many women that his beard turned 'half-white' in a year, and dictates a book of 'spouting rules' primarily concerned about sex and excrement. The Oriental image is perfectly replicated.

Or again, if the Prophet is an imposter, then, in Daniel's words about medieval representations of the Koran, it is rendered 'as a deliberate contrivance' rather 'than as God's revelation in response to particular needs.'[19] Rushdie presents the Prophet as incapable of discerning between the inspiration of the devil and the archangel and, furthermore, unable to recognize that his dictations to Salman the scribe were being changed. Salman, Rushdie's namesake, describes his constant changing of the text: 'Little things at first' which went unnoticed by the Prophet, and then a 'bigger thing. He said *Christian,* I wrote down *Jew.* He'd notice that surely; how could he not? But when I read the chapter he nodded and thanked me politely, and I went out of his tent with tears in my eyes.' (367—68) Salman thereby deconstructs the Koran's authority, replacing it with the only other authority he knows: his own. In reply to the question why is he sure that the Prophet will kill him, 'Salman the Persian answered: It's his Word against mine.' (368) Divine connections severed, Salman (in a dream sequence) can now render the Koran 'as a deliberate contrivance'. During the early days of Islam, 'Mahound had no time for scruples, Salman told Baal, no qualms about ends and means.' The Prophet became obsessed with 'rules, rules, rules', 'rules about every damn thing, if a man farts let him turn his face to the wind, a rule about which hand to use for the purpose of cleaning one's behind ... how much to eat, how deeply to sleep, and which sexual positions had received divine sanction, so that they learned that sodomy and the missionary position were approved by the archangel'. Rushdie lists in his catalogue of Koranic concerns the vilifications and latent images heaped upon Islam: eccentricity, backwardness, sexual proclivity, inferiority to civilized behaviour, and stupidity in being taken in by the false authority of the Prophet. And then, finally, the age-old charge of the 'deliberate contrivance': 'Salman the Persian got to wondering what manner of God this was that sounded so much like a businessman. This was when he had the idea that destroyed his faith, because he recalled that of course Mahound himself had been a businessman, and a damned successful one at that, a person to whom organization and rules came naturally, so how excessively convenient it was that he should have come up with such a very businesslike archangel, who handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal God.' (363—4) The encoding of Islam's origins has come full circle with startling predictability.[20] One mutation in the novel reflects the author's adoption of Western secularist categories by which to present Islam, a presentation which has a long imperialist and racist history.

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One more example. Take the typical images of the Orient's 'feminine penetrability' (mirrored by Mahound's proclivity): that eventually the twelve whores who imitate the Prophet's wives become 'so skilful in their roles that their previous selves began to fade away', and they are then married off to Baal, who pretends to be a eunuch at the brothel, with the result that 'in that den of degeneracy, that anti-mosque, the labyrinth of profanity, Baal became the husband of the wives of the former businessman, Mahound.'[21] Here in a single image not only does Rushdie transmit the latent tradition of Orientals' rapaciousness and sexually exotic nature, but also, in weaving this image into one of identity with the Prophet's wives, renders it deeply offensive to many Muslim readers. It is not good enough to claim repeatedly that nearly 'all the people who are being so insulted and provoked and disgusted have not really read the book', as Rushdie has done.[22] The political manipulation of many Muslims cannot be discounted, but there are genuine questions here that cannot be caricatured. When one examines the catalogue of images in Rushdie's book and notes their correlation with the representation found in the archives of Orientalism, Parekh's comment becomes pertinent: 'In retrospect what strikes one about the Muslim protests ... is not so much their intolerance as their timidity, not their feelings of rage but a sense of hurt, not their anger but their distress.'[23]

My main point, I repeat, is *not* that of literary, historical or theological judgement on the value of *The Satanic Verses*. It is upon the way in which its production of images and international distribution and promotion via a multinational organization, match, and thereby become aligned to, the denigratory imperialist patterns of production and dissemination of the image of Islam in Western history. It is curious that Rushdie never addresses this issue. One commentator rightly notes that 'Rushdie does not inquire why his book has provoked such strong reactions and what deep nerves it has disturbed; he is convinced that it is all a result of political manipulation, massive misunderstanding or egregious innocence'.[24] This peculiar blindness to the politics of representation may be partly accounted for by Rushdie's intellectual pedigree, as he himself admits, lying more in European secular Modernism than in the Arabic or Muslim world.

III

Before proceeding, I must now briefly justify my comments about Muslim frustration, anger and *powerlessness* if my criticism of the discourse of secular fundamentalism is to be put in its proper social and political context; its inability to provide the basis for a truly religiously pluralist society. There is surely very little question that the philosophical and intellectual heritage stemming from the (Western) Enlightenment forms the latent plausibility structure within which we live. This has been argued by historians, sociologists, philosophers and ethnographers.[25] I

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have already noted the way in which some of the British press dealt with the issue, and fuller documentation and analysis of press treatment does not considerably alter this image; that of an insensitive and quite anti-Muslim and sometimes equally racist press.[26] What recourse to the law did British Muslims have in Britain's pluralist and tolerant society?

Concerning the law, it is clear that confusion exists on the question of religious freedoms and rights. Leave aside the following ironies: the government allowing public death threats to be made on TV by British residents against a citizen without prosecution, and then publicly condemning the Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncements; or, most of the literary elite protesting strongly about any change of law concerning free speech while we are told by author Brian Clark that Rushdie was ready to take legal action to stop production of Clark's intended play *Who Killed the Writer?*[27]; or that there was silence by many of the same literary figures to the stopping of Jim Allen's play *Perdition,* deemed offensive to Jewish sensibilities.[28] Many Muslims have pointed out that the British legal system has been inadequate to cover their case, thereby increasing Muslim alienation and marginalization.

The race laws fail to take seriously the way in which the Muslim community may define itself: *religiously,* rather than *racially*. Many Muslims define themselves religiously in terms of the *Ummah*, being the Muslim community or people, a definition that is transnational and transcultural. Britain's approximately one million Muslims are made up from differing national, racial and linguistic groups, many of whom would see themselves first as Muslims rather than in primarily racial categories. As one British Muslim puts it, 'When the identity of a religious or cultural group has not been properly defined, its major characteristics, and the problems and challenges it faces, cannot be fully appreciated.'[29] Once again, the dominant discourse here fails even to recognize the Muslim as Muslim, but renders his or her identity in codes alien to the self-understanding of the community.

What about the libel laws, an established and prized restraint on free speech? The law in Britain is structurally aligned to two premises which make it difficult for a Muslim complaint to proceed. First, slander and libel tend to relate to the individual rather than group or community. For the latter, one usually needs to go to the race relations laws! Second, there is minimal protection for the dead being libelled. In the words of an American Muslim, it can be argued that 'Rushdie is libelling women who have been dead some 1400 years—the wives of Prophet Muhammad', but 'Reputations of people who have been dead for so long have very little protection under Western concepts of libel and slander.'[30] There are, of course, the laws of seditious libel, for it could be argued that the book raised widespread discontent and disaffection among Her Majesty's subjects. This was one of the two points of law raised in the High Court hearing in April 1990 (*Regina v. Bow Street Magistrates Court, Ex parte Choudhury*). Three senior British judges ruled that

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sedition would be shown if the book attacked Her Majesty or Her Majesty's Government or some other institution of the state—and the book, according to them, did not. (The obvious trenchant criticisms of Mrs Thatcher in the book were clearly not appropriate!)

So, could this religiously offended group turn to the specifically religious laws against blasphemy? No. Present laws are designed to protect Christianity alone, a judgement upheld in the April 1990 High Court case. As Muhammad is not considered divine, even if very highly venerated, recourse to a law of blasphemy may nevertheless seem odd. But the law has been widely interpreted in its history to include all sorts of charges. In 1729, for example, the Cambridge don, Woolston, was successfully prosecuted for arguing that miracles should be interpreted allegorically and not historically. (Today his fate could be a professorship or bishopric!) But let me quote from a British Muslim spokesman: 'Having been told for the last forty years that Britain is a democratic society and that its laws apply equally to all citizens, they discover that this law has applicability to one community and excludes others.'[31] So the race laws prove inadequate (for Islam is not a race), as do the libel laws, and the blasphemy laws only cover one religious tradition, the Christian. Douglas Hurd announced within a month after the book burnings that there would be no changes in the blasphemy laws, either to repeal them entirely or extend them, followed by a similar pronouncement from John Patten five months later. Sebastian Poulter has argued forcefully against the reasons given by Patten, as well as the double standards of the press and government on the legal issues. One reason given by Patten, for example, concerns the difficulty in defining religion. However, none of the human rights treaties defines what is encompassed by religion. Furthermore, 'in the past the British authorities managed to frame a statutory provision on blasphemy, both for India and for various African colonies, without troubling to define the term "religion" '.[32] The prevailing legal archives can be perceived to be inimical to Muslims as they understand themselves. It is in this context that the discourse of secular fundamentalism shows itself as inadequate to a truly multi-religious society. For when Muslims who have been legally disempowered demonstrate in a free society in frustration, they are rendered as Nazis. How tolerant is this free society and on whose grounds is such tolerance based? Let me turn to Rushdie's secular fundamentalism to begin to answer this question.

IV

Before turning to Rushdie's sophisticated defence against being called a secular fundamentalist, let me look at a very succinct formulation of just such a position published in a brief letter in a national newspaper:

> The events following the publication of Salman Rushdie's
> *The Satanic Verses* highlight the fundamental obstruction to
> the further development of society. Belief, that is the

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dogmatic rejection of reason and the acceptance of ideas on the basis of 'faith' alone, provides man with a box to hide from the realities of life. Belief, be it religious or political, has been the major cause of war, conflict and disunity ... To build a better society and a better world we must be prepared to question and to reason; belief obstructs the path towards achievement of this ultimate aim.[33]

The naivety of this letter is staggering, as are its unquestioned assumptions. First, there is the cherished belief that it is possible to live without beliefs—itself, very obviously, a belief. Then, there is the assumption of such a thing as reason which operates universally and regardless of context or the tradition within which it works; an idea which is itself historical and also questionable, as MacIntyre has shown so persuasively.[34] There is also the Cartesian presumption that reason and doubt are the sole means to truth. Such 'faith' (for what else can this be?) goes unquestioned, as does the large barrage of beliefs entailed by such views.[35] There is, further, the notion of a 'better society and a better world' which only those who renounce their beliefs can enter—or, more precisely, only those who agree with the author's beliefs can enter. Finally, there is the totalitarian ideology implanted within this proposal, that no mode of discourse other than itself can facilitate the conditions where other discourses can survive!

The manifest falsity and implausibility of these proposals are significant, for they reflect many characteristics of what I would call 'secular fundamentalism': that is, the authority of doubt and the universality of reason, the deconstruction of the authority of any tradition or religious claim to truth, and the belief that harmony will arrive when there is consensus, or (bluntly put) the common acceptance of secular fundamentalism. When we turn to Rushdie's Herbert Read lecture, *Is Nothing Sacred?*, there are similar characteristics to be found, indicating the inability of this mode of discourse to even understand the problems of a religiously pluralist society, let alone try and advance a solution towards promoting better harmony.[36]

Rushdie's argument is that in a 'post-modern age' (12) which has witnessed the death of god, it is only literature that can appropriately fill the gap of transcendence which remains after the demise of religion (7). In fact, 'literature and religion, like literature and politics, fight for the same territory' (I:20) —and, one may add, with similar intentions: to define and thereby control that territory and the procedures of dispute consequently permitted and sanctioned. Rushdie continues: 'Religious faith, profound as it is, must surely remain a private matter. This rejection of totalized explanations is the modern condition.' (9) Part of the modern condition is therefore to resist total ideologies, so that Rushdie, approvingly and not without irony in the light of his own condition, quotes Buñuel: 'I would give my life for a man who is looking for the truth. But I would gladly kill a man who thinks he has found the
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truth.' (9). The post-modern man or woman therefore affirms 'the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself, the acceptance that all that is solid *has* melted into air, that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs' (9). Such a person knows that 'there are no rules' and that 'there are no answers' (10). In short Rushdie describes himself as a 'modern, and modernist, urban man, accepting uncertainties as the only constant, change as the only sure thing' (I:19). With the death of god and now the apparent demise of communism in opposition to liberal capitalist democracies, Rushdie envisages literature as the only subversive force in this society capable of properly questioning 'by opposition, its own ideas.' (14) And so what of secular fundamentalism? I quote Rushdie in full: 'Do I, perhaps, find something sacred after all? Am I prepared to set aside as holy the idea of the absolute freedom of the imagination and alongside it my own notions of the World, the Text and the Good? Does this add up to what the apologists of religion have started calling "secular fundamentalism"? And if so, must I accept that this "secular fundamentalism" is as likely to lead to excesses, abuses and oppressions as the canons of religious faith?'(5). Rushdie's answer to both questions is 'No'. I remain unconvinced by his argument.

Rushdie seems to believe, like our letter writer, that it is possible to have no beliefs, and therefore presumably no World, Text, or Good. He writes 'I have never in my adult life affirmed any belief' (I:19), yet he provides us with a manifesto replete with metaphysical, ethical and epistemological beliefs. It expresses the dominant Western secular world view, but we should be alerted by Rushdie's own words in another context: 'Let us never believe that the way in which the people in power tell us to look at the world is the only way we can look.' Rushdie reveals a system of explanation with substantial truth claims (the phrase 'the truth is' occurs often in Rushdie's lecture in relation to points he is making). The following doctrines are proclaimed as if natural truths: the death of god, that all that is solid melts into air (a Marxist slogan), that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs, that there are no ethical values or rules and certainly no answers. The quotation from Buñuel is doubly ironic, for it seems manifestly clear that Rushdie has found and preaches the truth as he sees it: a godless universe which is self-created and socially constructed, in which all rules, duties and obligations are human-made and open to change, in which the individual has Promethean rights to question and to write, and a universe nevertheless in which love is worth striving for.

I am certainly not against a person holding such a view. What seems dangerous and ironically uncritical is the lack of recognition that such a position embodies a World, a Text and a Good—in short a lack of recognition of its 'sacred' discourse. Such an Achilles heel is precisely the source of persecution of others, for if you do not realise that you have territorial interests to protect, you will be most indignant at what appear to be unprovoked attacks—clashes of discourse, struggles to define and

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shape mutually desired territory. Within Rushdie's lecture there is a clear *World* view, a godless universe in which morals and rules are self-created and a matter of choice. Ethics cannot be related to the divine—a view totally hostile to Islam and some other forms of theism. There is also a definitive *Text,* or textual tradition, in which such a view is enshrined—the Herbert Read Lectures or the other texts and mentors quoted by Rushdie that provide 'maps of our inner natures' (9). His favourite Christian theologian, to go by frequency of citation, is, not surprisingly, Don Cupitt. And, of course, there is a valuation of the *Good*—the absolute freedom of the artist. Susan Mendus rightly notes that the fundamental conflict is about two different starting-points, not about rationality and tolerance: 'the basic question for liberals is "How can we justify individual free speech?"; whereas the basic question for Muslims is "How can we vindicate the reputation of God?" It is not obvious that the former is more rational than the latter.' [37]

Nowhere at all does Rushdie discuss the possibilities of the legal restraints or moral constraints to free speech; two distinct but equally important questions and ones most central to the controversy. Nowhere does he discern the ironies involved in the fact that free speech for one may be the suppression of truth for the other who has less access to power than the speaker. Nowhere at all, as he has written in *Shame,* does he recall that 'every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales.' (38) Instead he reminds us that the 'radical truth' contained in the 1950s comic heroes is that 'exceptionality was the greatest and most heroic of values; that those who were unlike the crowd were to be treasured the most lovingly' (12—3). But then we realise why such truth is affirmed so passionately in a world full of uncertainty (and this truth is radical, as it is liberal individualist, Nietzchean and Romantic): 'the novelist is characterised by unlikeness'. Therefore the novelist must be treasured lovingly over the mass, the crowd. Rushdie suddenly becomes aware at the end of the lecture of his 'slightly messianic tone' and claims to refrain from 'the idea of the writer as secular prophet' (14). This rhetorical gesture is required by Rushdie's creed, and he therefore ends by saying that nothing can be declared sacrosanct; presumably even the claims sustaining his position. If this was the case his position would collapse and Rushdie seems to realise this as he slips in a small concessionary sentence: 'The only privilege literature deserves—and this privilege it requires in order to exist—is the privilege of being the arena of discourse, the place where the struggle of languages can be acted out.' (15).

It can only be an act of exceptional naivety to ignore the social and political conditions upon which Rushdie is implicitly insisting, as well as the possible world views that such a proposal entails. In this small concession, Rushdie is smuggling in through the back door not only sacrosanct social conditions, but a political and religious order that would sanction such privileges: a sacred World, Text and Good. That he
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does not discuss the massive implications of these privileges is indicative of the dangers to which such secular fundamentalism is prone, in believing that it is creedless. It is also indicative of a false consciousness that such a view parades as basically tolerant, unideological and free of 'totalized explanations'. *Any* cognitive belief about the nature of reality, other than that we cannot know it, is deemed untrue. *Any* understanding of ethics as formed within a community in response to values and goals related to a transcendent reality, or an authority outside the self, is deemed untrue. *All* such views can be allowed in the private domain, but they cannot claim a social reality—as does the dominant view, that of secularism. All such views are to be reinterpreted and re-presented within the framework of the metaphysical, ethical and epistemological assumptions of secular fundamentalism. To provide the basis of a religiously pluralist society by means of an ideology that resists, reinterprets and deforms the central features of many religions as they would define themselves is curious. It is even more curious when such an ideology is paraded as being free from basic assumptions and dogmatic starting-points that apparently render religions so troublesome in a 'free society' in which *nothing must* be held sacred.

A further point worth noting is Rushdie's caricatured picture of religious faith and his consequent insensitivity to the problems of a religiously pluralist society. 'Love' and 'Faith' are polarised at the very beginning of the lecture, an odd twist from a novelist so opposed to binaries, such as good and evil, true and false. The lover will 'finally accept that your tastes, your loves, are your business and not mine. The True Believer knows no such restraints. The True Believer knows that he is simply right, and you are simply wrong... Love need not be blind. Faith must, ultimately, be a leap in the dark.' (3). Now, in the statement that one's private (religious) beliefs are one's own business there is a concealed liberal secularism that is in some ways odd coming from Rushdie. Odd, because he as a novelist, and with his sense of the novelist's purpose in society, must realise two things. First, that beliefs are not private events but have social consequences, and the power of the novelist, as defined by Rushdie, lies precisely in this role. Second, as a staunch political critic he should realise that 'your' tastes and business *are* mine—if *you* have the power to structure the economy, the political apparatus, the discourse that governs my life. Those who normally proclaim that certain beliefs (usually religious) belong only to the private domain are usually the ones who are happy with the status quo regulating and controlling public discourse. (However, we should recall Rushdie's warning to us against accepting the view of those in power, although in this case the one in power is himself!) It is also superficial to oppose love and faith in this way. Both are based on leaps in the dark, and both need not be blind. Equally so, both can be resistant to listening to questions and entertaining doubts. But to split them in this binary fashion and then rhetorically pour scorn on one half, only reflects contempt for a serious

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examination of the clash of languages, the clash of faiths.

My argument has been that Rushdie's secular world view should be acknowledged for what it is: inimical to any authority outside the self, hostile to any idea of beliefs which derive their authority or sanction from outside the self, and consequently fundamentally unable to understand or deal with alternative and contrary world views except in terms of pejorative encodings, e.g. blind faith, fundamentalism, and a form of zombism (i.e. those who continue to live in a world that is godless as if it were not!). Cartesian doubt, a Kantian agnosticism, and the Romantic view of the artist are the European sacred cows of Rushdie's world. If they collapse, so does the universe of discourse that produces and legitimises such a world view. Only once these issues are made explicit, torn free from the dominant discourse which renders them as 'liberal tolerance', can the real questions raised by living within a religiously pluralist society be pursued.

I am well aware that the problems of living in a religiously pluralist society which is genuinely tolerant and intelligently understanding are immensely complex. There is always the question of the particularity of the prevailing discourse and the way in which it manages, shares and distributes its power. The Rushdie Affair makes it abundantly clear that there is a 'clash of faiths', a 'clash of languages', and simply preserving the current dominant discourse is unsatisfactory in achieving the aims of religious tolerance and freedom—as I have tried to indicate. I am also aware that religious alliances against secularism are equally problematic. This is clear when the Archbishop of Canterbury calls for 'a strengthening of the law against blasphemy to cover religions other than Christianity' (*The Independent,* 22 February, 1989; although in 1990 he changed his mind) while the Chief Rabbi argues that there is no need for Jews to try and be covered by this law (*The Times,* 9 March, 1989) and the Western Buddhist Order argues that 'So long as the blasphemy laws remain unrepealed they can be used; and so long as they can be used the Buddhist does not enjoy full freedom of expression.' The latter view was endorsed by Ven. Vajiragnana of the London Buddhist Vihara in September 1989.[39] I realise too that the question of religious (and non-religious) harmony within society is irreducibly tied to political and economic factors. For example, some Muslim groups closely allied to Iran may utilize the Rushdie Affair to promote their power struggle with non-Iran aligned Muslim groups.

However, the main purpose of this essay is to provide space for these issues to emerge and be discussed and to place them on a map that is only faintly drawn. I have tried to do this by an excavation into the dominant discourse that represents events in our society in such a way as to present itself as the only face of 'liberal tolerance', while concealing its own idols that remain unquestioned. To deconstruct this edifice demands consultation towards the production of a new one.

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1　From an interview on the *Bandung File*, Channel 4, 14 February 1989, cited in edited L. Appignanesi & S. Maitland, *The Rushdie File*, Fourth Estate, London, 1989, p. 29.

2　See B. Parekh, 'The Rushdie Affair and the British Press: Some Salutory Lessons', in *Free Speech*, Commission for Racial Equality, 1990, p. 62.

3　For some analysis of internal Muslim differences see M. Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1990; A. Al-Azmeh, 'The Satanic Flame', *New Statesman & Society*, 20 January, 1989, pp. 16—7; B. Parekh, 'Between holy text and moral void', *New Statesman and Society*, 13 March, 1989, pp. 29—33; T. Modood, 'Religious Anger and Minority Rights', *The Political Quarterly*, July-September, 1989, pp. 280—84.

4　M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 30. I am indebted to Ken Surin for this quotation as well as the inspiration of his excellent article: 'A Certain "Politics of Speech": Towards an Understanding of the relationship Between Religions in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger', in ed. G. D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, Orbis Press, New York, 1990. See also M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1972 (ET), esp. Pt. II.

5　S. Rushdie, *Is Nothing Sacred?*, Granta, Cambridge, 1990, p. 5.

6　See A. Needham, 'The Politics of Post-Colonial Identity in Salman Rushdie', *The Massachusetts Review*, 29, 1988/89, pp. 602—24; S. Amanuddin, 'The Novels of Salman Rushdie: mediated reality as fantasy', *World Literature Today*, 63, 1989, pp. 42—5.

7　Rushdie sanctioned this wider application 'to just about any religion' in an interview given to *India Today*, see eds. Appignanesi & Maitland, ibid, p. 39.

8　M. Dummett, *The Independent*, 11 February, 1990, p. 21.

9　See M. Ibn Ally's contribution to *Law, Blasphemy and the Multi-Faith Society*, Commission for Racial Equality, 1989, pp. 21—2. This should not obscure the undoubted racism in much of the representation of the events and issues.

10　From American writers in support of Rushdie (February, 1989), cited in eds. Appignanesi & Maitland, ibid, p. 117. See Said's *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978; and also, *Covering Islam. How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981. He uses the word 'Orientalism' to indicate the systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient. Said's own attitude to the Rushdie affair is ambivalent.

11　See Said op. cit. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, University Press, Edinburgh, 1960; and *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1975. Daniel acts as a counterbalance to some of Said's excesses, as does R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1962.

12　Cited in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 66.

13　R. Kabani, 'Words for Rushdie', *New Statesman and Society*, 31 March, 1989, p. 27. Kabani, however, fails to point out that Rushdie is aware of the medieval usage of 'Mahound'.

14　N. Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, p. 231.

15　Said, ibid, p. 206.

16　Said, ibid, p. 122; see also P. Hacker, *Kleine Schriften*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1978, for essays tracing certain modern Hindus' self-representation in the image of the German Romantic tradition in which German Orientalists had constructed Hinduism; see also N. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, especially part 1. P. Almond has now provided an archaeology of Buddhism within British Orientalism in *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.

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17   This is why Brennan is incorrect in locating Rushdie's critique in the Sufi tradition, an interpretation not supported by Rushdie's essays. See. T. Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: The Myths of the Nation*, Mcmillan, London, 1990.

18   S. Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, Viking, Penguin, 1988, p. 93.

19   Daniel, ibid, p. 231.

20   For a more detailed discussion of Rushdie's portrayal of Islam in the book, see S. Akhtar, *Be Careful with Muhammad! The Salman Rushdie Affair*, Bellew Publishing, London, 1989, esp. chs 1—2; B. Parekh, 'The holy text and the moral void', ibid; A. Mazrui, 'The Satanic Verses or a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair', in *Free Speech*, Commission for Racial Equality, 1989, pp. 79—103.

21   Rushdie, ibid, pp. 382—83.

22   Rushdie, *Bandung File*, ibid, p. 30.

23   Parekh, 'The Rushdie Affair', ibid, pp. 61—2.

24   B. Parekh, *The Independent on Sunday*, 11 February, 1990, p. 21.

25   See, for example, O. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; P. Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, Penguin, London, 1979; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Duckworth, London, 1981.

26   See B. Parekh, 'Rushdie and the British Press', *Social Studies Review*, November 1989, pp. 44—7.

27   *The Independent on Sunday*, 11 February, 1990, p. 21.

28   The further irony is that the same theatre that removed *Perdition*, the Royal Court, mounted Tariq Ali and Howard Brenton's play *Iranian Nights*—appropriately criticised for perpetuating gross misunderstandings of Muslims by D. Caute, in 'Iranian Nights', *New Statesman and Society*, 25 April, 1989, pp. 14—6. See also S. Benton's catalogue of socially accepted limitations to freedoms in British society: 'Do we really want freedom?', *New Statesman and Society*, 3 March, 1989, pp. 12—3.

29   Ally, ibid, pp. 21—2.

30   Mazrui, ibid, p. 85.

31   Ally, ibid, pp. 23—4.

32   See S. Poulter, 'Cultural Pluralism and its Limits: A Legal Perspective', in *Britain: A Plural Society*, Commission for Racial Equality, 1989, pp. 3—28; see also the excellent legal discussion of S. Lee, in *Law, Blasphemy and the Multi-Faith Society*, pp. 4—20; and A. Allot, 'Religious Pluralism and the Law in England and Africa. A Case Study', in ed. Ian Hamnett, *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief*. Routledge, London 1990, pp. 205—26.

33   *The Independent on Sunday*, 11 February, 1990, p. 20.

34   See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Duckworth, London, 1988.

35   See F. Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986 for a penetrating criticism of Cartesian foundationalism.

36   All subsequent page references given in the text, and those with 'I' preceding the page number, refer to Rushdie's article in *The Independent on Sunday*, 14 February, 1990.

37   S. Mendus, 'The Tigers of Wrath and the Horses of Instruction', *Free Speech*, pp. 3—17.

38   S. Rushdie, *Shame*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1983, p. 71.

39   Appendix E, *Law, Blasphemy and the Multi-Faith Society*, p. 89, and p. 39 for Ven. Vajiragnana's agreement on the WBO's statement, made before the Rushdie Affair.

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