

Between Cultural Imperialism and the Fatwa: Colonial Echoes and Postcolonial Dialogue in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

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The first novel Salman Rushdie published after going into hiding was *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.¹ Many reviewers and critics have assumed that the novel must be a creative response to the death sentence pronounced by the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran and have consequently interpreted it as an allegory of free speech or of literature. While this novel is undeniably an allegory at some level, a more careful analysis reveals that its allegorical surface is ambiguous and invites a different reading. In fact, Rushdie simultaneously sets up and deconstructs such a simple allegorical interpretation.

Under the circumstances of its publication, it is understandable that many readers of the novel assume its main significance to lie in exposing the mechanisms of dictatorship that oppress free speech in general and freedom of the imagination in particular. As one critic puts it: "*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* can hardly be read as anything other than an allegory of Rushdie's present predicament."² Clearly, Rushdie's readers were expecting to find a creative response or reaction to his personal situation in his new work. As the history of literature shows us, writers working under oppressive regimes often write allegorically, transposing their message into elaborate codes to elude detection by censors. Examples abound in the literature of the Soviet era, not to mention Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in recent American literature. However, it is important to point out that although *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was published in 1990, it was conceived to entertain his young son Zafar while he was writing *The Satanic Verses*, that is, long before the *fatwa* was pronounced on him. "It was part of a deal so I could finish *The Satanic Verses*."³ Moreover, the two novels clearly share similar artistic and political concerns which most interpreters of *Haroun* have ignored. Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha argues that "Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* attempts to redefine the boundaries of the western nation, so that the 'foreignness of languages' becomes the inescapable cultural

¹ Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta, 1991) 161. All subsequent references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

² G. R. Taneja, "Facts of Fiction: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*," *The Novels of Salman Rushdie*, ed. G. R. Taneja and R. K. Dhawan (New Delhi: ISCS, 1992) 198.

³ Quoted in D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 108.

condition for the enunciation of the mother tongue.”⁴ Strikingly, this description would fit *Haroun* just as well since it also deals with issues of cultural and political confrontation, of boundaries and languages, of exclusion and identity, of interpretation and (re)definition. In this paper I will first explore the aspects of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* that seemingly lend themselves to a simplistic reading as an allegory about free speech, while simultaneously presenting a critique of the allegorical interpretation. Then I will offer a postcolonial analysis that sheds light on those elements of the novel which are often glossed over in the allegorical interpretation. I will argue that *Haroun*, generally considered a minor work, in fact achieves a good deal more than a narcissistic retelling of Rushdie’s suffering under the *fatwa* and that it clearly continues the political and aesthetic concerns of his earlier work.

The interpretation of the novel as an allegory about democratic and artistic freedom is favored in the Anglocentric world. In the shadow of the *fatwa*, the novel tends to be seen as the author’s plea for the unfettered expression of the imagination. Accordingly, the evil Cultmaster Khattam-Shud is considered to be a portrait of the Ayatollah Khomeini. As one scholar explains, “one cannot help but make the connection between Khattam-Shud and Rushdie’s own chief persecutor, Khomeini, the voice of the *fatwa* that seeks to impose the most final of silences on Rushdie’s utterances.”⁵ The allegorical interpretation identifies a set of binary oppositions clearly signaled in the microcosm of the second moon of the earth called Kahani (meaning “Story”), where most of the action is set. J. P. Durix points out that “As in medieval allegories, the situation is presented in black and white. The characters’ names sum up their main characteristics.”⁶ The moon is divided into a sunlit half called Gup with talkative inhabitants and a dark half called Chup with “quiet fellows” inhabiting it. R. S. Krishnan identifies a “war between Speech and Silence ... fought on many fronts: between good and evil, between freedom and repression, between democracy and dictatorship.”⁷ The ruler of the dark side, Khattam Shud (whose name means “completely finished”), wishes to silence all the beings and stories on this planet by poisoning the Ocean of Stories—the repository of culture, history, and literature on the moon. Poisoning the stories is imperative for him because each story contains “a world, a story-world, that I can not Rule at all” (161). This villain stands in opposition to the Guppees, who are characterized by their love of stories and incessant chattering. The novel’s hero, Haroun, becomes involved in the subsequent war between the two peoples. Thanks to his courage, the Ocean is

⁴ Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. H. B. (London: Routledge, 1990) 317.

⁵ Catherine Cundy, “Through Childhood’s Window: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*,” *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. D. Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994) 338.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Durix, “‘The Gardener of Stories’: Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*,” *Reading Rushdie* 345.

⁷ R. S. Krishnan, “Telling of the Tale: Text, Context, and Narrative Act in Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*,” *International Fiction Review* 22 (1995): 68.

saved so that the source of stories can continue to produce an unimaginably rich collection of new stories. Freedom of speech, democracy, and creativity are rescued from murderous censorship. Thus, in an allegorical light, the plot suggests that the story is a creative response to the death sentence passed to silence a writer whose story world offended religious authorities in Iran. As J. P. Durix comments: "So eventually, the story sees the ... triumph of light over darkness, of freedom over tyranny, of life over rigidity and sterility."⁸ However, this reading disregards the novel's ending. Haroun comments on his own solution to the conflict: "From now on, Kahani will be a sensible Moon ... with sensible days and nights" (176). Light does not triumph in the novel's resolution; rather, it returns to the dark side while darkness returns to the light side. It is a return of alternating night and day that improves the relations on the Moon, an equal distribution of light between its two sides, an end to the separation of the Moon into Eternal Daylight in the North and Perpetual Darkness in the South. The solution puts an end to segregation, "it is a victory ... over our old Hostility and Suspicion" (193). This ending then does not suggest "a triumph of light over darkness," as J. P. Durix would have it; rather, it shows a triumph of plurality and dialogue over monologic, hegemonic views.

"An allegory is a narrative in which the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived so as to make coherent sense on the 'literal,' or primary, level of signification, and also to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events."⁹ To understand the secondary or allegorical meaning, a certain amount of decoding is necessary. If *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is indeed an allegory, then in the eyes of some critics its second level of signification points to an allegory of Western democracy and free speech. Yet, the narrative has several elements that contradict this allegorical level of signification. Allegory must have a decodable meaning if it is to signify at all, and its meaning cannot stand in contradiction to its own textuality. In fact, if this novel is read on the textual level, plot and text clearly contradict each other. For instance, from the (Anglocentric) Guppee perspective the narrative foregrounds the opposition between light/speech/democracy and darkness/silence/dictatorship on Kahani, but the plot resolution requires the complete deconstruction of these oppositions by destroying the Guppee technology that is responsible for purloining sunlight from the Chupwala side. Conversely, the Guppees lament the poisoning of their Ocean, but admit that they themselves have neglected it for too long—and, arguably, neglecting one's heritage can bring about its destruction in the long term. The kidnapping of the Guppee princess is an evil act indeed, but significantly, at the time of her capture, Princess Batcheat was trespassing on the Chupwala territory. She appears to be fascinated despite herself by the "enemy" realm, and Guppee society in general seems to share that fascination with the dark side of the moon. On the linguistic level, too, the

⁸ Durix 346.

⁹ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988) 4.

narrative undermines the neat binary oppositions that the allegory seemingly sets up. The very words in the phonetic minimal pair Gup and Chup sound very much alike to English-speaking readers. This underlines the essential similarity of the two cultures and points to the fact that the perceived differences between the worlds they signify are only arbitrary. Moreover, the suffixes attached to them to form nouns (Gupp-ee and Chup-wala) appear to refer to a colonizer-colonized situation. In English, the suffix *-ee* forms nouns to denote relation, whereas in Hindi, the suffix *-wala* (or *vala*) is used for this purpose.¹⁰ It is notable that the frame story itself is set on the Indian subcontinent, as Rushdie explicitly indicates to his readers in the glossary (217). It is conceivable then, that the main aesthetic and political concern of *Haroun* is not a simple allegory about the freedom of speech but rather a further exploration of the postcolonial condition that is central to his work before as well as after *Haroun*.

As in so many of his novels, Rushdie initially sets up a particular framework only to deconstruct it afterwards. This is the case with the allegory of Western democracy in *Haroun*. Admittedly, on the surface the narrative carries several characteristics of the allegory of ideas. In the dream narrative, most of the names of the characters and the locations seem to point toward a fight between democracy and dictatorship reminiscent of the Cold War with its clearly polarized world. First, the characters appear to be personifications of certain vices or virtues (the Land of Gup with their names deriving from English and/or Hindustani words denoting speech, the Land of Chup with people whose names refer to silence). Second, the fact that the main narrative takes place within a dream also places it in the allegorical tradition. In this context, it is important to note that Haroun is introduced into this dream world by Iff, the Water Genie, himself an inhabitant of Gup. Thus, the Guppee point of view prevails in the dream narrative, allowing their moral code to take on the mode of established authority. It is their world and their Ocean of Stories that Haroun sees threatened by the evil side, and since he loves stories and is on a quest to recover his father's storytelling gifts, he seems to succumb to the view presented to him. However, the text itself points in a different direction from the one suggested by an allegorical reading. What undermines the allegorical view is that Haroun shows his outsider (and therefore independent) status whenever he resists the Guppee point of view, or questions their way of arguing: "That's totally illogical" (79). When they finally encounter the first representative of the "evil" side, Haroun resists the rigidity of the binary oppositions that seem to characterize the two sides: "But it's not as simple as that" (125). And he points out the obvious uses of opposition which the two peoples of Kahani have not taken into consideration, namely, complementation and cooperation: "Opposites attract, as they say" (125). At this stage the narrative itself significantly splits into two strands following the hero first and catching up with the rest of the Guppee army later, after Haroun's ingenious solution. At this point in the novel, Haroun becomes a

¹⁰ See "wallah" or "walla" in *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*.

leader who makes decisions independently, and his solution to the crisis indicates that he has not succumbed to the rigid, black-and-white Guppee worldview. This has enabled him to identify the true cause of the conflict and find a solution that eliminates the root of the problem, namely, polarization itself on the moon. This solution, which subverts the all-pervasive schismatic mode of thinking, is exactly what Ashcroft et al. identify as one of the hallmarks of postcolonial texts: "The 'Empire writes back' to the imperial 'centre' ... by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery ... as an essential way of ordering reality."¹¹

The Anglocentric allegorical interpretation outlined above clearly privileges traditional Western values and reads the story as a moral tale in which good defeats evil. In doing so, however, it passes over numerous elements of the narrative that do not square with such a moralizing account. First of all, it overlooks the inconvenient fact that the "good side" is implicated in the creation of the "evil side" and that the hero, as noted above, categorically rejects the clear binary oppositions. It disregards the instances when the "good side" is subjected to ridicule by the narrator and the protagonists. It also fails to explain what really motivates the archvillain's irrational desire to poison the Ocean of Stories—apart, that is, from a certain mad megalomania typical of villains in popular crime stories, themselves the products of moralizing Western discourse. Nor can this traditional interpretation fully account for some curious elements in the resolution of the novel, such as the fact that only the leader of the dark side dies, and not even at the hands of the hero. Instead of providing the solution to the conflict, his death is only a side effect of it. Nor is there any explanation of why the so-called light/good side suffers partial defeat when their technology is destroyed by the hero. More surprising still is the fact that Haroun is even rewarded by the Guppees "for the incalculable service ... done to the peoples of Kahani" (200). Such subversions and reversals are unusual in allegory, which depends on a clear and unequivocal meaning for its moral message to be effective. In postcolonial texts, on the other hand, subversion is not at all uncommon. Postcolonial critics Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin make the claim that "A characteristic of dominated literatures is an inevitable tendency towards subversion."¹² Consequently, it can be argued that, in a postcolonial light, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* exposes the physical and psychological damage caused by the tyranny of colonialism and imperialism. This is very much in keeping with Salman Rushdie's other novels and essays, in which he writes from the perspective of the ex-colonies in dialogue with the ex-colonizer. His often-cited phrase "the Empire writes back" is fully applicable to what takes place in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Thus, following up the subversive elements and reversals of the narrative is likely to yield interesting new insights.

¹¹ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002) 32.

¹² Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 32.

As I have indicated above, the binary oppositions that structure the seemingly allegorical story are in actual fact deconstructed in the narrative. They are also subverted by the protagonists' views and actions. To begin with, the "geography" of the moon Kahani and its distribution of light and darkness suggest a colonial conflict rather than a simple opposition between the freedom of speech and censorship, as the main geographical divide on the moon is not between East and West, but between North and South. The sunlit Land of Gup is in the north of Kahani, whereas the perpetually dark Chup is in the south. Correspondingly, the inhabitants of the north are characterized as good and their enemies as evil and threatening. It is impossible for the reader not to think of his or her own world, with its historical divide between the light-skinned colonizers from the North (i.e., Europe) and the darker-skinned peoples from the South (i.e., the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and Australia). It is also worth mentioning that the metaphor of light and darkness was all-pervasive in colonial discourse. In keeping with their "civilizing mission," the "enlightened" colonial societies were bent on eradicating the savage customs, pagan religions, and ignorance of the dark peoples. This mission provided the ideological framework for the colonizers to appropriate and exploit the world's resources for their own benefit. That is exactly what happens on Kahani too. The Eggheads (technocrats and engineers) of Gup invent a way to stop the rotation of their planet, which allows them to appropriate daylight, a most vital resource, from the Chupwalas. The story's oppositions are in keeping with the colonizer's traditional rhetoric. As Abdul JanMohammed explains, "the colonial mentality is dominated by a Manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object."¹³ Thus the darkness can also be interpreted symbolically as the dark-skinned and therefore ugly colonized Other whose customs were considered dark, savage, and dangerous by Europeans. As postcolonial critic Edward Said remarks: "the emblematic Black[']s 'ugliness, idleness, rebellion' are doomed forever to subhuman status."¹⁴ Taken together, these allusions in the novel show that the two sides of Kahani are eerily reminiscent of Britain and her colonies.

Rushdie's narrative clearly subverts this Manichean duality. To this end, the author systematically questions the legitimacy of the Guppees' values. The colonizer Guppees are satirized in various ways. Their Parliament is called "Chatterbox," pointing to the excessive production of discourse at the power center of democracy. At the same time, the glossary informs the readers that Gup means gossip, nonsense, and fib (218). This information leads one to believe that the Guppees' tales are not to be trusted. The author also ridicules the romance between the Guppee Prince Bolo (whose name means "Speak!") and his beloved,

¹³ Abdul R. JanMohammed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) 4.

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994) 121.

the kidnapped princess Batcheat ("Chit-chat"), whose voice is described by a Chupwala ambassador in this way: "She torments our ears with her songs!" (181). Haroun's father, Rashid, clearly agrees: "It was the most horrible voice Rashid Khalifa ... had heard in all his life" (186). This is a subversion of the beauty ideal of the Western woman imposed on the colonized. A further subversive colonial reference in *Haroun* involves the description of the Guppee army in battle. On seeing their red nosewarmers, Rashid, the storyteller, remarks: "this is beginning to look like a war between buffoons" (179). The Guppee army is also equipped with helmets whose lights make them look like "a regiment of angels or saints, because they all had shining haloes around their heads. The combined wattage of these 'haloes' would just about enable the Guppees to see their opponents, even in the Perpetual Darkness; while the Chupwalas, even with their fashionable wrap-around dark glasses on, might be somewhat dazzled by the glare" (179–80). This description clearly ridicules the self-appointed "saints" of colonial history. At the same time it points out that the colonizers' vision was impaired, although the colonized natives, like the Chupwalas, had a "genuine admiration of European technology."¹⁵ Their vision did not penetrate the darkness of the Other and their rhetoric did not enlighten the Others' minds.

The novel suggests that self-proclaimed good can be seen as evil and thereby collapses the opposition of both. There are indications that the light side of Kahani is not as innocent and good as it is made out to be by the Guppees. It becomes clear that their pride in their technological achievements—the cause of the current conflict—is utterly misplaced. In their arrogance they seem entirely ignorant of the dire consequences the loss of light has for the Chupwalas, and the likely psychological and political repercussions that result from the loss of a most valuable resource. A. R. Aji sums up the effects brought about by stopping the rotation of Kahani: "the Chup ruler Khattam-Shud's evil actions are indirectly encouraged by the Guppees' self-protective measures.... In this context, then, the good becomes as accountable as the evil for the latter's perpetuation."¹⁶ It is significant therefore that the solution to the conflict involves the complete destruction of this technology: "The immense super-computers ... had finally blown themselves apart" (172). The fact that the Guppee government rewards Haroun for this destruction instead of punishing him points to an admission of guilt on their side.

The (mis)use of language is a further element of the Gup-Chup conflict and is indicative of a colonial subtext. Not only has the Guppee side stolen light, they also have appropriated speech and the definition of what is meaningful. The Anglocentric allegorical interpretation views speech as the symbol of democracy and personal freedom of expression. However, the incessant chitchat in Gup can

¹⁵ JanMohammed 4.

¹⁶ Aron R. Aji, "'All Names Mean Something': Salman Rushdie's *Haroun* and the Legacy of Islam," *Contemporary Literature* 36.1 (1995): 113.

also be interpreted differently. According to Foucault, overproduced discourse reveals an obsession with an underlying but unacknowledged cause: “a society which ... speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises.”¹⁷ While Foucault’s text is primarily concerned with sexuality, this idea is applicable to a colonial context. It calls to mind all the historical, (pseudo-)scientific, anthropological, and fictional discourses generated by the colonizing powers observing and describing the dark, dangerous colonized races.¹⁸ Similarly, Guppee “chit-chat” in the novel about the dark side can be seen as obliquely relating to their repressed guilt over stealing the sun from Chup. In contrast, the dark Other is silent—arguably, only to the ears of the colonizer. Its message is either incomprehensible or goes unheard because its language and culture are unrecognized by the colonizer. This condescending attitude has a long tradition; indeed, the ancient Greeks defined all foreigners unable to speak Greek as barbarians,¹⁹ because their language was seen as unintelligible babble. Similarly, the word ‘nemets’ in the Slavic languages, meaning mute, dumb, was used to designate the German-speaking peoples whose language was incomprehensible to them. Prince Bolo’s racist remarks betray exactly this kind of attitude when confronted with an unknown language: “What’s the fellow saying? ... Can’t make out a single word” (129). Implied here is the colonizer’s superior attitude toward the Other: “Really, why people can’t speak properly, it beats me” (129). He also designates as inhuman the sounds a Chupwala warrior makes when trying to speak the Guppee language: “You call those grunts *fluency*?” (130). It follows that the silence of the dark side on this moon could be seen as the result of a deliberate effort by the light side not to “hear” it.

Thus speech and silence emerge not as absolute opposites in the novel but as two types of textuality: speech stands for verbal language whereas silence is represented by Abhinaya, the language of gesture,²⁰ which is the Chupwala means of communication. The former is clearly privileged over the latter by the proponents of the allegorical interpretation. This privileging calls to mind the valorization of English in colonial discourse over the languages of the colonized peoples, thereby also encoding condescension toward the unknown and unappreciated cultures of the subjected races. However, as R. S. Krishnan observes: “the narrative simultaneously privileges both speech and silence.”²¹ Haroun himself ruminates on the beauty of silence as opposed to speech, thus effectively reversing the binary opposition: “silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly)” (125). The dangers in this

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998) I: 8.

¹⁸ Said 130–32.

¹⁹ See “barbarism” in *Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language*.

²⁰ “Abhinaya is in fact the name of the Language of Gesture used in classical Indian dance” (217).

²¹ Krishnan 69–70.

opposition are shown in the fate of the Ocean of the Streams of Stories. The Guppees seem to think they own the Ocean, claiming it for themselves: "We are the Guardians of the Ocean" (146). This cultural appropriation provokes the resistance of the dark side symbolized by their desire to destroy the Ocean. Poisoning the Ocean is a resistance strategy akin to Caliban's desire to burn the evil Prospero's books: the appropriated stories are tainted with ideology and need to be neutralized. Khattam-Shud has discovered that "for every story there is an anti-story ... and if you pour this anti-story into the story, the two cancel each other out, and bingo! End of Story" (160). In fact, the location of the Ocean's source, in the dark Old Zone at the South Pole, points to the unacknowledged fact that both civilizations sprang from the same roots. Indeed, its neglected state indicates the Guppees' desire to "forget" the history of these roots. "We let [the stories] rot, we abandoned them, long before this poisoning. We lost touch with our beginnings, with our roots" (146). In a similar fashion, the colonizers' civilizing efforts were supported by European historians in the nineteenth century who "systematically edited out the non-white elements" at the roots of European culture and identity in order to be able to maintain the myth of racial purity and white superiority.²²

Misinterpretation and psychological damage are inevitable in situations where the colonizer reserves the right to interpret the colonized. The colonized Others must learn to communicate in the colonizer's language and are taught to see themselves in the distorted light of the colonizer's perspective. According to Edward Said, "In the system of education designed for India, students were taught not only English literature but also the inherent superiority of the English race."²³ In the novel, the Guppee side goes into battle armed with books: their army is a Library consisting of Pages organized into Chapters and Volumes (113–15). Books, the symbols of enlightenment and the dissemination of knowledge, were on the other hand also the weapon of choice for the indoctrination of the colonized races. In his previous novel, *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie exposes this dynamic in the words of one such victim: "They describe us.... They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct."²⁴ Sadik J. Al-Azm goes even further when he argues that in *The Satanic Verses* Saladin Chamcha's metamorphosis "into a goatish monster ... takes place only in the beholding eye of the white racist society."²⁵ In effect, no matter what the colonized subject looks like, he or she is an animal/monster to the colonizer simply by virtue of being Other. Significantly, Chamcha initially believes in his own monstrousness, for he has internalized the white man's picture of him. Such internalization can lead to a psychological split in the mind

²² Paul Cobley, *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2001) 39. See also Said 16 and 132.

²³ Said 121.

²⁴ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*. (London: Vintage, 1998) 168.

²⁵ J. Al-Azm Sadik, "The Importance of Being Earnest about Salman Rushdie," *Die Welt des Islams, International Journal for the History of Modern Islam* 31 (1991): 36.

of the colonized and the postcolonial subject. As Carl Plasa summarizes Frantz Fanon's theory of the racialized subject's psychic constitution: "the consequence of the Fanonian *black man's* identification with whiteness is a splitting and self-estrangement."²⁶ Exactly this dynamic is dramatized in the metaphor of the fight between the Shadow and Self of Chupwala warriors. Their self and shadow have independent personalities that are often engaged in a bizarre silent battle with each other (132). Goonetilleke interprets this battle as part of the allegory of free speech: "The suggestion is that mistrust is an ingredient of totalitarianism."²⁷ In a postcolonial light, however, this fight symbolizes the two conflicting self-images of the colonized and the postcolonial subject. The archvillain Khattam Shud, however, has gone too far: "he has separated himself from his Shadow!" (133), becoming a split personality. This represents an extreme and irredeemable case, as the change he has undergone is irreversible. This would make him too rigid to be able to adapt to the new era of cooperation dawning at the end of the narrative, and he must therefore die.

The nonviolent resolution of the novel is in reality the reversal of colonial appropriation. In other words, it is an act of decolonization. Haroun's solution is at once ingenious and considerate of both sides. Unlike typical heroes of children's stories and fairy tales whose mission it is to kill the villain,²⁸ Haroun does not resort to violence. Killing Khattam-Shud would simply mean fighting the symptom without removing its cause. In an extraordinary act of wish fulfillment he restores Kahani to its original state of alternating day and night. As a direct result, the villain is crushed by his own giant sculpture as it falls and the Chupwalas are freed from his tyranny. Thus light returns to the Land of Chup physically and metaphorically as well. Sunlight, the appropriated resource, reappears, allowing the positive self-identity of Chupwalas to be restored. Haroun shows a unifying/synthesizing impulse that is in stark contrast to, say, Joseph Conrad's notorious colonizer figure Kurtz—who writes in his infamous notes "Exterminate all the brutes!" As a consequence of Haroun's wish "Peace broke out ... a peace in which Night and Day, Speech and Silence, would no longer be separated into Zones by Twilight Strips and Walls of Force" (191). Such a peaceful resolution offers an alternative world that allows true equality and dialogue between the two cultures of Kahani. Suspicion is supplanted by "Openness between Chup and Gup" (193). The two sides realize that they have a lot in common and are willing to achieve a more fruitful interaction. Haroun realizes this potential fairly early when he points out that these two opposing sides would complement each other if they were only willing to accept each other: "If Guppees and Chupwalas didn't hate each other so ... they might

²⁶ Carl Plasa, *Textual Politics from Slavery to Postcolonialism: Race and Identification* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2000) 101.

²⁷ D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) 117.

²⁸ Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997) 104–105.

actually find each other pretty interesting" (125). The description of the Chupwala warrior's face visualizes this point. The complementary colors painted on his face—green skin, scarlet lips (129)—visually underscore a nonmanichean interpretation that reads difference in terms of complementation. The resolution of the narrative can thus be read as a postcolonial nonviolent utopian fantasy in which difference is truly accepted as complementation without the subjugation and demonization of other cultures.

Rushdie's utopian vision goes even further and shows that true (world) democracy is multivocal and its participants are in "a dialogue" with each other (193). Accordingly, the utopian solution also ensures that the Chupwalas do not have to speak the Guppee language, a foreign tongue in which their identity cannot be voiced with power. Instead they can use interpreters to make themselves understood. One such translator is the storyteller Rashid, an outsider, who takes on the task of interpreting the language of gesture used by the Chupwalas. This is reminiscent of how Rushdie—his virtual namesake—mediates between two cultures in his fiction. A new generation of interpreters is also emerging on Kahani in the figure of the female Page Blubbermouth, who will "act as go-between for the Guppee authorities and those of Chup" (191). She is eager to learn about the Chup culture to be able to mediate without deliberate or inadvertent misinterpretation. A central utopian vision—the most subversive one of all from a colonial perspective—is realized in the unqualified dialogue between ex-colonizer and ex-colonized. In this context, then, the choice of his protagonists' names is far from accidental. Haroun al-Rashid (AD 786–809), the famous Caliph of Baghdad, "epitomize[s] tolerance, openness, and the delicate balance between cultural and religious lives, [thus] Haroun al-Rashid is an appropriate namesake for Rushdie's father-son team,"²⁹ who strive for and achieve similar tolerance and balance in their story world. If the shadow of the *fatwa* makes Rushdie a victim of religious fanaticism, it is also true that he is a secondary victim of imperialism. Thus the fulfillment of the author's utopian wish would eliminate the cause of his specific predicament.

On returning from Kahani to Earth, Rashid finds that his storytelling powers have been restored, and he rewards Haroun by making him the hero of a story. This turns out to be the same story that the readers have just finished reading, about a boy who single-handedly solves a crisis on the second moon of the Earth called Kahani. This circularity embedded in the narrative testifies to the mutual influence that the imagination and reality exert on each other. A significant effect of this influence is most clearly seen in the last pages of the narrative. Rashid and Haroun's home is in a "sad city ... a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name" (15). When father and son arrive home, they find out that the inhabitants have "remembered the city's name" (208). It is Kahani, meaning "story" (209). If forgetting one's name symbolizes loss of identity, then the ultimate effect of

²⁹ Aji 109.

Haroun's heroic achievement is the restoration of this identity. Given that their city is set in a place very closely resembling the Indian subcontinent, this can be interpreted as the recovery of the cultural identity of a once colonized people who, as the name of their city implies, have reappropriated their cultural heritage and their stories from the colonizer's condescending attitude and can once again derive pleasure and pride from them. Moreover, since this return takes place after Haroun wakes up from his dream about Kahani, which takes up most of the narrative, it can be argued that this novel is also about an ex-colony waking up to a new understanding of the postcolonial condition and to a possible way out of its political and psychological conflicts. Seen in this light, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a "minor" novel according to some critics, takes its rightful place among Rushdie's other works dealing with the postcolonial condition.