"All Names Mean Something": Salman Rushdie's "Haroun" and the Legacy of Islam

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"All Names Mean Something": Salman Rushdie's *Haroun* and the Legacy of Islam

Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) celebrates the triumph of storytelling and imagination over raw power and dogmatism. The fairy tale was published shortly after Rushdie was put under protective custody following the death verdict issued by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini. The book's date of release has played a significant role in its critical reception. Some critics and reviewers have drawn connections between the fairy tale and its author's life, observing that both Rashid Khalifa, the storyteller in *Haroun*, and Rushdie himself are threatened by edicts of zealotry and separated from their families, and that both try to reclaim their identities as storytellers through the aid of (what else but) a marvelous story.[1] In reference to Rashid's city with a forgotten name, Alison Lurie wonders, "under how many false and forgettable names, in how many sad cities . . . has Mr. Rushdie had to conceal himself in the past two years since the publication of his novel 'The Satanic Verses'?" (59). Other critics have downplayed the reading of *Haroun* as an allegory of authorial biography and mainly favored a formalist approach, advocating that the book is about stories and storytelling.[2] Regarding the

1. To date, much of the critical reception of *Haroun* has been in the form of book reviews. In varying degrees, all critics note similarities between the book's plot and the author's life. Still, a number of them are more inclined than others to read the text as an allegory of authorial biography; see the reviews by Alison Lurie, James Fenton, and David Appelbaum.

2. See the reviews by Dean Flower, Denis Donoghue, and Edward Blishen and critical studies by Carlo Coppola, Jean-Pierre Durix, and Clara Clairborne Park. Among these, Coppola and Durix also acknowledge numerous biographical allusions in the fairy tale.

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various poetic and folk traditions of the older and rich cultures (Persian, Indic, Arabic) that received the new creed. The two developments have historically been concurrent and convergent, rather than clearly separable—especially for the artists who have practiced their creativity in the fluid intersection of culture and doctrine.[4] This complex legacy of Islam echoes throughout Rushdie's *Haroun*. The fairy tale's celebration of stories and storytelling, going back to *The Arabian Nights*, allows us to align the text with Islam's cultural tradition, while the characterizations and setting descriptions in *Haroun* also compel us to recall core concepts of doctrinal Islam. Particularly significant are the names of the fairy tale's main characters and setting, which serve as clues to the fairy tale's preoccupation with the legacy of Islam. With remarkable consistency, the narrative recalls the inherently dual phenomenon of religious and cultural Islam and invites us to consider two crucial questions: first, whether or not a mutually inclusive kinship, albeit a tense one, exists between religion and the tradition of stories, since they are two equally integral and convergent domains of human existence, and since both are governed by the essential human longings for self-affirmation and transcendence; and, second, whether or not this essential convergence serves as grounds for reconciliation between the Islamic faith and the pluralistic cultural traditions of its community. The task of this study is to suggest that *Haroun* answers both questions affirmatively.

4. In *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson differentiates the two developments of Islam by proposing the noun "Islamicate" to denote Islamic civilization. Hodgson's extensive discussion of the Islamicate makes clear that (1) it has evolved inextricably from Islam, and (2) its evolution has been governed by patient syntheses of the folklore, oral traditions, and asethetic conventions within a forever-broadening intercultural community. In the more recent study *Discovering Islam*, Akbar Ahmed makes a similar distinction between what he calls "the ideal" Islam—based on the Qur'an and the prophet Mohammed's example—and the actual experience of Islam as a historical phenomenon. Ahmed states, "The demarcation of Muslim societies is . . . not a division between white ideal and black non-ideal but an ongoing relationship between the two marked by areas of grey" (5). In its history, this relationship or convergence has been accountable for forceful attempts at uniform orthodoxy, although more often it has inspired a plea for reconciliation within the community. *The Shahname* by Firdawsi (A.H. 321–411), *Layla and Majnun* by Nizami (A.H. 535–98), *The Conference of the Birds* by Attar (C. A.H. 627), and the *Mathnawi* by Rumi (A.H. 605–72) are among the classic texts that testify to the fluid intersection of culture and doctrine.

book's recurrent question "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" Dean Flower writes: "It is difficult not to imagine Rushdie himself here, sorely beset by Muslim fanaticism these past few years, asking himself the same question: what use are stories indeed, if they get you murdered? But in fact the book contains no messages for Ayatollahs, no topical nudges. It is wiser and deeper than that." Flower adds, "What the story is really about is the story" (319). His comment against "topical" interpretation points out the inherent limitations of a biographical approach, which runs the risk of overshadowing the more enduring issues raised in the fairy tale—"censorship, freedom of expression, and the importance not just of stories, but all art, in human experience" (Coppola 230). Yet a purely formalistic, story-for-story's-sake approach can have its drawbacks, too, since it can undermine the cultural context from which *Haroun* draws much of its substance. This cultural context, which ought to be understood in its broadest sense and beyond Rushdie's current ordeal, is shaped by the author's experience of India, the West, and, of course, Islam. All of these, Rushdie states, "are present in me in a very vivid way" (qtd. in Fenton 31), and they have, in varying degrees, influenced Rushdie's fiction since his first novel, *Grimus* (based on the Sufi classic *The Conference of the Birds*, by Attar). *Haroun* is no exception.

Various critics, Carlo Coppola and Jean-Pierre Durix among them, have already identified the Indian and Western influences in Rushdie's fairy tale.[3] Here I wish to focus on the narrative details in *Haroun* that are particularly evocative when approached from the perspective of the legacy of Islam. By legacy, I refer to the complex evolution of Islam both as religion and as culture, characterized by a persistent and tense interplay between religious doctrine and the

3. Concerning the Indian motifs and influences in *Haroun*, Coppola finds "an unmistakable" similarity between Haroun's town K and the Indian state of Kashmir; he states that the name Mr. Buttoo is "doubtless a pun on Bhutto, as in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto" (231); and he notes "imaginative punning in . . . Urdu, especially with characters' names: Princess Batcheat, Prince Bolo, King Chattergy, Guppees, Chupwalas, etc." (234). Both Flower and Durix also identify the eleventh-century Sanskrit text *Katha Sarit Sagara*, or "The Ocean of Streams of Story," by Somadeva, as one of the classical sources of Rushdie's fairy tale. Regarding the Western influences in *Haroun*, Durix points to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and *Alice in Wonderland* and Lurie identifies Norton Juster's *Phantom Tollbooth* as probable influences.

In the current highly polarized debate on "the Rushdie affair," a project to read Rushdie's fairy tale from the perspective of the Islamic legacy may seem precarious. The furor over *The Satanic Verses* has created rigid opinion camps intent on either transforming Rushdie into a martyr for free speech or demonizing him on grounds of blasphemy against Islam. Taking place in what Edward Said calls "the urgent conjunction of art and politics, which can be explosive" (308), the debate on "the Rushdie affair" is about the freedom of creative expression versus the sanctity of religious dogma, and it should not subordinate, much less supplant, literary criticism of Rushdie's fiction—as it already threatens to do. Said's comment about the "reams of print" on Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* illustrates the threat: among the hundreds of essays, "only a tiny proportion discussed the book *itself*; those who opposed it and recommended its burning and its author's death refused to read it, while those who supported his freedom to write left it self-righteously at that" (328). The early reception of *Haroun* has not been very different either; as Akbar Ahmed reports: "Responses to it became a matter of honour, a comment on the author and his plight rather than the book itself. . . . The saga of Rushdie had surpassed anything written in children's books" (167). Stressing the importance of discussing "the book itself" is not necessarily a call for pure formalism. Instead, it is a call to prioritize the text and to investigate questions and issues prompted by the text and not by the conditions extraneous to it. In reading *Haroun*, then, I explore correlations between the fairy tale and Islamic legacy for the reason that the text seems to draw part of its narrative substance and energy from this legacy. I observe a reconciliatory kinship between cultural and religious Islam because that quality is apparent in both *Haroun*'s representation of the Islamic legacy and in the actual evolution of a legacy underlain by cultural plurality and patient synthesis, rather than univocity and circumscription.[5]

5. No doubt the long-standing portrayal of Islam as a monolithic, fundamentalist, and exclusively religious phenomenon currently serves the advocates of both free speech and religious dogma equally well; nevertheless, it is, for the most part, an egregious portrayal in that such Islamic fundamentalism has historically been national or regional in character, and more a feature of the state than of the community as a whole. For extended discussions of the nature and cultural causes of the misrepresentation of Islam

Rushdie's book opens with a dedicatory acrostic verse. The first letters of each line spell Z-A-F-A-R, the name of his son (which means "triumph" in Arabic), and the middle line voices the caution "Fairy lands are fearsome too." The verse encapsulates the spirit of the fairy tale about the little boy Haroun and his dream-journey to the moon Kahani—an adventure which involves as much fear as it does fantasy (Donoghue 38). Initially, Haroun's quest is personal, intended to find a cure for his father, Rashid Khalifa, who becomes unable to tell stories when his wife Soraya abandons them. Aided by Iff the Water Genie and Butt the Hoopoe, Haroun travels to Kahani in order to renew his father's "subscription" to the Sea of Stories, also known as the Ocean of the Streams of Story. Soon, however, the journey assumes universal proportions when the boy discovers a greater threat to his father's stories than his mother's desertion. The Ocean has become polluted, and the Wellspring of all stories is about to be plugged by the villainous Khattam-Shud, the fanatic of silence and darkness. Rashid eventually joins Haroun on the journey, and the adventurers come to realize that the Ocean is being polluted due in part to the zealotry of Khattam-Shud and his Chupwalas, and in part to the neglect of the Guppees, the creatures who are supposed to preserve the stories (146). The pairing of opposites, Khattam-Shud and the Guppees, as culprits suggests a crucial causality: the enemies of stories triumph if and only if (Iff) the guardians of the tradition neglect their mission. Furthermore, in light of the common history enjoyed by the Chupwalas and the Guppees prior to the rupture between their peoples, *Haroun*'s plot involves more than the typical fairy-tale conflict between the good and the evil. It is also about the good naively creating the evil, thus suggesting an internal strife. The wonderful reunion of the Chupwalas and the Guppees after the Wellspring is saved signifies the recuperation of the original state of harmonious coexistence.

Haroun has plenty to say about cultural continuity, freedom of creative expression, and the destructive effects of zealotry on imagi-

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and third world movements, see Said's last chapter in *Culture and Imperialism* or Ahmed's *Postmodernism and Islam*.

nation. The tale's heroic battle involves the "Library" of Guppee soldiers—who are called "Pages" and grouped into "Chapters," "Volumes," and "Books" under the command of "General Kitab" (meaning "book" in Arabic)—fighting against the Chupwalas, the muted, shadowy soldiers who can see only in darkness. Their battle styles are strikingly different. The Guppees love arguing over every single detail of war strategy and enjoy "openness, . . . powerful bonds of fellowship" (185). The talkative fellows "appear as a materialization of a utopian society in which freedom of speech is not limited to a vague principle but is respected as a real right in all situations" (Durix 117). The silent Chupwalas fight like a "disunited rabble" because "their vows of silence and their habits of secrecy had made them suspicious and distrustful of one another. . . . [They] betrayed one another" (185). The Guppees' final victory, then, is a triumph (*zafar*) of creative expression over silence and of cultural continuity over stagnating uniformity. The same victory also affirms the human "confidence in variety, possibility, in the uncertainties and surprises of a shared, public freedom, in its slow and irregular tendency toward good" (Park 463).

Emerging from this rich, pluralistic narrative are details that recall the legacy of Islam, as the narrative abundantly draws from doctrinal and cultural Islam in shaping both the main characters—antagonist and protagonists—and the entire milieu and scope of Haroun's journey. The most inviting clues are the names: Haroun and Rashid Khalifa, Khattam-Shud, and Kahani. These names evoke multiple meanings and often resist simple definitions; they invite cumulative interpretation, both religious and cultural in substance, which illuminates the complex nature of their bearers.

Early in the narrative, attention is first drawn to the significance of the names through an exchange between Haroun and his father. Rashid cautions his son that "All names mean something," and that the little boy must be alert not merely to names that are meaningful as such but also to those whose slight phonetic variants evoke significant meanings, as in the "Franj" (French) "Kache-Mer" and "Kosh-Mar" (40). "Kache-Mer," Rashid explains, is "the place that hides a Sea" and may be taken to refer to each of Rashid's fairy tales, which come from and contain the Ocean of the Streams of Story;

"Kosh-Mar" is "nightmare," which suggests the "fearful" potential of fairy tales already mentioned in the dedication to the book. This qualitative difference resulting from a slight phonetic variation signals the negative potential of a positive name, and vice versa—hence the kind bus driver Butt, the corrupt politician Buttoo, and Haroun's benevolent companion Butt the Hoopoe. These early instructions by Rashid are as much for readers as for Haroun, and they guide our interpretation of the names of the fairy tale's main characters and setting.

Haroun, Rashid Khalifa, and Khattam-Shud

The author states in the appendix, "About the Names in this Book," that Haroun and Rashid are "named after the legendary Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun al-Rashid, who features in many Arabian Nights tales. Their surname, Khalifa, actually means 'Caliph'" (216). Rushdie's definition intends to locate *Haroun* in the same narrative tradition as *The Arabian Nights*. Likewise serving the author's intention is the "legend" of the Caliph, the details of which are not explained though naturally evoked by the name. Haroun al-Rashid's rule (786–809) witnessed the flourishing of Islam not merely as a religion but as a civilization of diverse cultures with literary and artistic grandeur; the Caliph also established positive ties with both Christendom and the Far East and faced internal opposition on account of these ties. Thus epitomizing tolerance, openness, and the delicate balance between cultural and religious lives, Haroun al-Rashid is an appropriate namesake for Rushdie's son-father team, whose task necessitates the annihilation of the intolerant monist Khattam-Shud, in order to save the Ocean of the Streams of Story—the repository of cultural wealth and diversity. As Carlo Coppola argues, "Haroun and Rashid are, in fact, two aspects of one person," namely Haroun al-Rashid: "On the one hand, Rushdie's Haroun ar-Rashid [*sic*] is as the father the creator of artistic works; on the other, he is also as the son the protector of these works" (235–36).

Besides their obvious roots in the cultural legacy of Islam, the names of the little boy and his father also carry religious significance. Each name—Haroun, Rashid, and Khalifa—evokes

doctrinal concepts which, in turn, illuminate the name-bearer's full characterization. Haroun is the Arabic version of Aaron, Moses' brother, who in Islam plays a special role with regard to God's revelations. The Qur'an posits a complementary relationship between the brothers wherein Haroun represents "the esoteric dimension as Moses represents the exoteric. . . . Exoterism is the domain of rituals, of moral precepts, of institutions; esoterism, that of transcendent wisdom and mystical union, of realization through direct knowledge of the Divine" (Glassé 9). The two complementary domains come together under the principle of *Wahdad al-Vujud*, the absolute and all-embracing Oneness of Truth. Rushdie's father-and-son pair reflects a similar relationship which encompasses both the ritual of storytelling and the transcendent scope of stories.

Rashid's function as a storyteller echoes that of Moses. His name means "the Guide" (also one of the ninety-nine names of God), and he is an unquestioning servant of his calling, knowing that his stories come to him from a source outside himself, and through a "Process Too Complicated To Explain" (17). Rashid serves initially as a guide to his little boy Haroun, who proves formidably curious on the workings of stories. If Rashid is a faithful "subscriber" to the Sea of Stories (17), Haroun simply cannot "desist from this Iffing and Butting and be happy with the stories [he] enjoy[s]" (18). Early in the journey along the Sea of Stories, the little boy's esoteric potential is made apparent in two instances. The first is when Haroun chooses the Hoopoe bird as transportation to Kahani: "'So it's the Hoopoe for us,' [Iff] the Water Genie said, sounding almost impressed. 'Perhaps you know . . . that in the old stories the Hoopoe is the bird that leads all other birds through many dangerous places to their ultimate goal' " (64). The journey to which Iff alludes is described in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, where the "ultimate goal" of the birds' journey is the attainment of God. The second instance occurs when Iff the Water Genie gives Haroun a small bottle of Wishwater. Upon drinking from it, Haroun experiences a transformation which strongly echoes the mystic trance described by Sufism: Haroun notices that "the golden glow was all around him, and inside him, too; and everything was very, very still, as if the entire cosmos

were waiting upon his commands" (70).[6] The son is also more reflective than his father and privy to the deeper meanings of things and deeds he observes. While in the twilight shores between Gup and Chup, Haroun and Rashid encounter Mudra, the Champion Warrior of Chup, who "speaks" the silent language of gesture. Whereas his father, the Shah of Blah, translates (renders exoteric) the warrior's gestures, Haroun notices and appreciates the subtle truth "that silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly)" (125). Likewise, during the book's heroic battle, the father and the son fight to uphold the exoteric and esoteric manifestations of truth/stories, respectively. In the battle against the Chupwalas, Rashid guides the "Library" of Pages and General Kitab to rescue the Gup princess Batcheat, the "graceless" epitome of freedom of speech, while Haroun is accompanied by the fantastic creatures in his attempt to save the Wellspring, the very Source of Stories. The little boy even "dives" into the Sea of Stories and "sees" the Wellspring, an act not unlike the esoteric union with transcendent wisdom frequently described in Sufi poetry.[7]

Between the father and the son, then, Rushdie's fairy tale offers us two caliphs rather than one: Haroun Khalifa and Rashid Khalifa. In his own manner, each is the custodian of the Sea of Stories, and, as importantly, each is incomplete without the other. Haroun is af-

6. A further indication of the esoteric nature of the Wishwater in the fairy tale is that it functions very much like wine does in Sufi poetry. Both induce a spiritual transformation through which the drinker attains a transcendent state of oneness with the universe, as illustrated in the following lines by the thirteenth-century mystic Jelaluddin Rumi:

> Gone, inner and outer,
> no moon, no ground or sky.
> Don't hand me another glass of wine.
> Pour it in my mouth.
> I've lost the way to my mouth.
> (*Unseen Rain* 69)

For other examples, see Rumi's *Mystical Poems* or *Like This*.

7. Images of diving and drowning are prevalent in Sufi poetry; they signify the mystic's willing surrender to the Divine Beloved, both the object and the source of his longing: "We stare at the infinite, suffering ocean. / We fall in"; or "O lovers, lovers, this day you and we are fallen into a whirlpool: who knows how to swim?" See *Mystical Poems of Rumi*.

ter the essence of stories, while Rashid gives them shape and form. Haroun beholds the Wellspring of all stories, while Rashid perpetuates their tradition. Haroun is the hero of the great journey, but it is Rashid who tells his little boy's story, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, at the end of the narrative (205). That Haroun and Rashid must come together to complete their caliphal mission also accords with the Islamic principle of *Wahdad al-Vujud*, the necessary wholeness of the esoteric and the exoteric dimensions of Truth.

Both Khalifas are also necessary to overcome the arch villain Khattam-Shud. Quite neatly corresponding to the exoterism of the father and the esoterism of the son, there are two manifestations of Khattam-Shud in the tale: his corporeal self and his shadow self, each capable of acting independently, and both committed to the eradication of the Ocean of the Streams of Story. The corporeal Khattam-Shud perpetuates his doctrine of silence, while his shadow plots to plug the Wellspring of stories. Rashid (the exoteric) fights the corporeal Khattam-Shud, while Haroun (the esoteric) faces the tyrant's shadow. The match between Rashid and the corporeal self is that between opposing forms: story versus dogma. The match between Haroun and the shadow self is that between opposing essences: imagination versus raw power, wisdom versus the desire to usurp, to subdue and control (161). The corporeal Khattam-Shud holds as hostage the Princess Batcheat, a prolific storyteller, albeit a terrible one, who juggles old stories to create new ones (106). The villain's shadow self holds as hostage the Wellspring which is the source of stories, just as Haroun is the source of this particular story. At the end, the corporeal Khattam-Shud is crushed under the weight of his giant idol, Bezaban, whose name means "without a tongue" (215); the tyrant's fate symbolizes the self-destructive excesses of silence and the triumph of those with tongues, the guardians of speech and stories (191). In turn, the shadow self meets his death as the glaring sunlight melts the "solid" shadows which he has created (175)—again an appropriate end, wherein the symbol of elemental wisdom overcomes that of pervasive ignorance (Durix 117).

What is the nature of the evil contained in the divided selves of Khattam-Shud? The correspondences between the tyrant and the father-son team already indicate that Khattam-Shud's evil is perva-

sive and elemental, directed both at the story tradition, its long chain of transmission, and at the source of stories. Further substantiating these qualities are the multiple meanings and uses of the villain's name in the narrative. In the appendix, Rushdie defines Khattam-Shud in terms of its vernacular meaning: " 'completely finished,' 'over and done with' " (216), which refers to the villain's task of eradicating speech, stories, imagination, and wisdom. Rashid uses the name in the same folksy manner when he despairs over his inability to tell stories:

> "Khattam-Shud," [Rashid] said slowly, "is the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even of Language itself. He is the Prince of Silence and the Foe of Speech. And because everything ends . . . at the finish of everything we use his name. 'It's finished,' we tell one another, 'it's over. Khattam-Shud: The End.' "
>
> (39)

It is worth noting that Rashid knows of Khattam-Shud well before he and his boy discover that a villain by that name is poisoning the Ocean of the Streams of Story. Rashid's foreknowledge indicates that the evil of Khattam-Shud is omnipresent and must be heeded at all times, and that the actual poisoning of the Sea of Stories is a recent manifestation of this evil. The latter is confirmed by Haroun's companions, Iff the Water Genie and Butt the Hoopoe, who first discover that their sea is being polluted when they transport Haroun to Kahani.

Yet Khattam-Shud's evil is not entirely self-initiated. Butt the Hoopoe tells Haroun that the Guppee scientists have built an invisible "Wall of Force" to separate the lands of Gup and Chup. The Guppees have also brought the rotation of the moon to a permanent stop, thus dividing the unity of Kahani and leaving the Chupwalas in perpetual darkness and the Guppees in perpetual sunlight (80). Consequently, the Chup ruler Khattam-Shud's evil actions are indirectly encouraged by the Guppees' self-protective measures—as well-intentioned as they are selfish. These measures are also shortsighted and futile, since the evil that is being forcefully shut out is omnipresent and has to be reckoned with constantly, not ignored. In this context, then, the good becomes as accountable as the evil for the latter's perpetuation.

Khattam-Shud bears striking resemblance to *Iblis*, or *Shaytan*, the Satanic figure in Islam. According to doctrine, *Iblis* is thrown out of heaven, though he is left in a state of waiting until his annihilation on Judgment Day. Having thus been rejected by God, *Iblis* represents separation and otherness within God's universe, as Khattam-Shud does on the moon Kahani. *Iblis* is also omnipresent. The prophet Mohammed is recorded to have said, "There is no one among you who does not have a *shaytan* as his companion placed in charge of him" (Muslim, *al-Jami' as-sahih*, 8:139, qtd. in Awn 48). Consequently, the believer must acknowledge (rather than ignore) the presence of *Iblis* by taking "'refuge in God from Satan the stoned one' . . . before reciting the Koran, and before . . . undertaking ritual action" (Glassé 166). In ordinary life as well, it is the believer's responsibility to practice goodness in order to appease evil.

One particularly revealing similarity between Khattam-Shud and *Iblis* involves a method by which *Iblis* manifests himself to humans—by defining "good as evil because of a shadow of imperfection, and evil as good because of a reflection of perfection" (Glassé 166). *Iblis*'s method foments relativism and doubt, thus serving to annihilate the Absolute Oneness (*Wahdad al-Vujud*) of God's universe. Khattam-Shud effects the same aberration in the Chupwalas. He is responsible for more than turning the good people of Chup into agents of his evil. The Champion Warrior's Shadow explains to the party of Gup that, as a consequence of the tyrant's divisive will, "in the Land of Chup, Shadows are considered equals of the people to whom they are joined. . . . What's more . . . a Shadow very often has a stronger personality than the Person, or Self, or Substance to whom or to which it is joined! So often the Shadow leads, and it is the Person or Self or Substance that follows" (132). Still worse, Khattam-Shud has managed to separate his shadow from his self and has induced other shadows to do likewise. The results of this rupture are the abnegation of both individual and social identity due to chronic self-doubt and distrust of others. Concerning the fate of the Ocean of the Streams of Story, Khattam-Shud's method and goal are similar in kind to those of *Iblis*. The tyrant explains to Haroun, "Now the fact is that I personally have discovered that *for every story there is an anti-story.* I mean that every story—and so every Stream of Story—has a

shadow-self, and if you pour this anti-story into the story, the two cancel each other out, and bingo! End of story" (160). That for every phenomenon there is an opposite phenomenon and, more significantly, that they "cancel each other out" is inherent to *Iblis*'s vision of a relativistic universe bound for self-destruction.

In remarkable accord with his commitment to the terminal aberration of harmony and order, Khattam-Shud's name itself echoes aberrant combinations of numerous Islamic concepts: (1) *khatm* either means (a) "seal," as in Seal of Prophecy (Glassé 353), or refers to (b) the ultrapious act of reciting the "complete" Qur'an (Gibb and Kramers 252); (2) *shuhud* either means (a) "consciousness" or refers to (b) the Transcendental Self, the Omniscient (Glassé 370); (3) *khata* and (4) *ithm* respectively mean "error" and "sin." Each of these concepts seems to inform Khattam-Shud's character. He is *khatm-shuhud* (1a and 2a) because he attempts to seal human consciousness by perpetuating his doctrine of silence. He is also *Khatm-Shuhud* (1a and 2b), an antiprophet, if you will, because he wants to seal the Wellspring, the very source of all stories. In order to manufacture every single anti-story, he has had to accomplish *Khatm* (1b), that is, he has to have read them all (160)—which, ironically, elevates him to *Shuhud* (2b). Furthermore, as Rashid Khalifa discovers after the battle, the mighty tyrant who almost sealed the Wellspring permanently is nothing but "a skinny, scrawny, snivelling, drivelling, mingy, stingy, measly, weaselly, clerkish sort of fellow" (190). His surprisingly ordinary, in fact, disappointingly diminutive physique suggests that his evil streak results from a *khata*, a terrible error in human nature; he is a grotesque whose acts of self-affirmation take the form of *ithm* (sin) and aim at subverting everything good. This idea is further supported through Khattam-Shud's divided foil in the fairy tale, Mudra and his Shadow, whose division signifies a distortion of his being. Unlike the tyrant, however, the Champion Warrior of Chup constantly struggles with his Shadow counterpart, though not in order to subdue it but to preserve the integrity of his person (124–26). In a way, Mudra's struggle evokes the most difficult kind of *jihad*, the internal and constant pursuit of the wholeness of being, thus serving as a true alternative to Khattam-Shud's acts.

When viewed in light of doctrinal Islam, Haroun, Rashid, and

Khattam-Shud attain considerable depth and a distinctly transcendent quality. Khattam-Shud as an *Iblis* figure becomes more than a petty tyrant or an arch censor; the "skinny, scrawny" ruler assumes almost tragic proportions as he tries to live up to the destiny of demonic grandeur assigned to him by the Gup Eggheads who naively commit him to perpetual darkness. (In Kahani's design, he is indeed a "clerkish sort of fellow.") Rashid and Haroun as complementary agents of exoterism and esoterism represent more than the continuity of the story tradition. They also represent the necessary interdependencies of individual fate and universal harmony, human memory and transcendent truth, the particular language of stories and the all-embracing essence of universal design. Furthermore, from these interdependencies springs the transcendent dimension of stories, which is as essential to their survival as is the ritual of storytelling. Because of this dimension, stories satisfy more than the human faculties to imagine and to create. As in the case of Haroun, they fulfill the elemental longings for self-affirmation (to be whole in mind, body, and spirit) and to belong to a suprapersonal, transcendent continuity.[8] The little boy decides to save the Ocean of the Streams of Story because he realizes that all his life he has been molded by his father's stories, that he has become a believer in them, and that his being is therefore tied to their survival (137).

It is important to note that the traits of doctrinal and cultural Islam found in the main characters are convergent; that is, these traits are mutually enriching and woven inextricably in order to create complex characterizations which, in turn, echo the equally complex interplay between the two dimensions of Islam. Still, does this convergence signify an inherent kinship between doctrinal and cultural Islam? Based on the characterizations alone, the answer would have to be Not entirely. The characterizations certainly point to the

8. Rushdie affirms the transcendent quality of art in his essay "Is Nothing Sacred?" In reference to a question asked by Carlos Fuentes on the function of art, Rushdie states: "He [Fuentes] then poses the question I have been asking myself throughout my life as a writer: *Can the religious mentality survive outside of religious dogma and hierarchy?* Which is to say: Can art be the third principle that mediates between the material and spiritual worlds; might it, by 'swallowing' both worlds, offer us something new—something that might even be called a secular definition of transcendence? . . . I believe it can. I believe it must. And I believe that, at its best, it does" (420).

compatibility of doctrinal and cultural Islam. However, the religious attributes primarily reinforce the characters' cultural function (that is, the perpetuation or the destruction of stories) and, therefore, go only so far as to suggest that the tradition of stories is like the religious tradition, but not necessarily vice versa. The idea of kinship is, at the most, implied through the protagonists' appeal to the same human needs and the antagonist's embodiment of the same evil as those addressed by religion. While the characters evoke it by implication only, the kinship is made evident in the nature of Kahani, with its Ocean and Wellspring. This very object of the characters' struggle not only incorporates attributes of both cultural and religious Islam but also signifies unequivocally that culture and religion originate from a single Wellspring and that the continuity of both depends on the selfsame struggle.

Kahani and the Ocean of the Streams of Story

In the appendix, Rushdie defines *Kahani* simply as " 'story' " (216), and just about everything on this moon fits the name. Kahani has a general aura of fantastic reality. There are the Plentimaw Fish in the Sea of Stories, busily "sucking in Story Streams and blowing them out again," thus producing new stories from the old (84). There is Mali the Floating Gardener in charge of untangling and cleansing the story streams (83); he is the "defender of the richness, variety and inventiveness of the imagination" (Durix 119). The Pages of Gup form an army of books through "Pagination and Collation" (115) and follow the orders of General Kitab, general book himself. True to their commitment to speech, albeit of light variety, the Gup parliament is called "the Chatterbox," the king "Chattergy," the princess "Batcheat," and the female page "Blabbermouth."

The seemingly straightforward noun *Kahani* bears critical connotations in the context of the Islamic religion. As a variant of *kahin* (soothsayer) or *kahinah* (divination), *Kahani* brings to mind the contentious distinctions drawn by Islamic doctrine between *rasul* (prophet) and *kahin*, between prophecy as authentic transmission of divine revelation, on the one hand, and divination as fortunetelling through dreams and visions, on the other. Both prophecy and *kahinah* involve an ecstatic state of surrender through supra-

personal inspiration wherein the subject becomes a conduit to mantic visions and knowledge. Nevertheless, the pre-Islamic tradition of *kahinah* is deemed blasphemous in the Qur'an—as an obvious matter of accountability. Despite the doctrinal stance, however, the fine line between *kahinah* and prophecy has not been altogether clear, especially at the genesis of Islam, in the person of the prophet Mohammed.

The lore surrounding Mohammed's life often blurs the distinctions between prophetic emanations and those of *kahinah*, as he was known to experience mysterious visions and callings. There is, for instance, the much-revered story of young Mohammed's vision in which two men appear to him, open his heart, and remove the one black speck of impurity from him, thus preparing him for his prophetic mission (Rodinson 56). During his first Divine Call, Mohammed himself was so shaken by the circumstances that his sacred biography records him to have said: "Now none of God's creatures was more hateful to me than an (ecstatic) poet or a man possessed [*kahin*]; I could not even bear to look at them. I thought 'Woe is me—poet or possessed. Never shall Quraysh say that of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest.' " He is ultimately saved by the voice of the angel Gabriel, who reassures him that he is not a *kahin* but "the Apostle of God" (Williams 60). The *kahinah*/prophecy ambivalence prevails in Mohammed's life as a *rasul* also:

> [Mohammed] was an ecstatic and had "true dreams" like [the *kāhins*]; his *daimonion* (ṣāḥib) was the (holy) spirit, whose place was later taken by the angel Gabriel. His revelations are, like the utterance of the *kāhin*, comprised in *sadj'* [mysterious pourings] and sometimes begin with the usual abstruse oaths; even the forms which he was still using for administering justice and settling disputes in Madīna during the early years of his stay there correspond in their main features to those of the pagan kāhin and hakam [judge].
>
> (Gibb and Kramers 207)

In Mohammed's case, then, *kahinah* may be viewed not as an end—that is, an authoritative truth-claim—but in complicity with prophecy, wherein its mediative function is subsumed by the intensely overpowering and arguably supreme experience of divine transmis-

sion. The name of Rushdie's moon, Kahani, inevitably brings to mind this lore, given its popularity among Muslims and the long duration of the pre-Islamic *kahinah* tradition well into the second century of Islamic history—in spite of strong doctrinal opposition. Does the name Kahani intend to suggest, then, an affinity between "poetry" and revelation, and by doing so invite us into a moon which somehow accommodates both? It seems it does.

From the way the moon comes into being in the fairy tale to its general geography, Kahani recalls fantastic stories as much as the religious tradition. Haroun's entire journey to Kahani and back takes place in the course of a few hours during a troubling night in the corrupt politician Buttoo's yacht, *Arabian Nights Plus One*, where the little boy and his father anxiously await Rashid's storytelling engagement in the morning. The narrative is sufficiently ambiguous regarding the start and end of the journey to suggest that Kahani occurs to Haroun in a dream vision. This possibility is reinforced by the way Rashid later appears in Kahani, much to Haroun's amazement. Rashid comforts his son by explaining that he has arrived through "Rapture," a process in which one summons dreams, just as Haroun presumably has done: "with sufficient skill, a person may choose to wake up in the place to which the dream takes him; to wake up, that is to say, *inside the dream*" (99–100). In light of Rashid's definition, the experience of Rapture resembles the experience of *kahinah* as much as it does that of prophetic agency, since it involves a form of mantic transformation wherein Haroun and Rashid not only summon a dream vision but are subsumed by it also. Even though it can be personally willed, Rapture has an intensely overpowering quality which forces Haroun, the dreamer himself, to respond to the wonders of Kahani with a distinct sense of surrender (*islam*).

It is difficult to resist hearing the echoes of Mohammed's vision of his purification and his first Call in Haroun's rapturous transportation to Kahani. Perhaps even more strikingly, Haroun's journey alludes to the prophet's legendary night journey to Jerusalem, on the back of Buraq, the half-mule, half-donkey winged animal. Of Mohammed's experience, the sacred biography records: "the Apostle used to say, 'My eyes sleep while my heart is awake.' Only God knows how the revelation came and what he saw. But whether he

was asleep or awake, it was all true and actually happened" (Williams 67). The prophet's wife A'isha is also recorded to have said, " 'The Apostle's body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night' " (Williams 66). These testimonials acknowledge God, rather than Mohammed, as the prime mover in the experience; yet their descriptions of the ambivalent state between sleep and awakeness, dream and actuality, spirituality and corporeality resemble very much the state of Rapture as experienced by Haroun and Rashid. Although this allusion is not elaborate enough to suggest an all-inclusive correspondence between the two journeys, it is nevertheless highly revealing, since it rests on the most commonly known details of Mohammed's journey and, therefore, suffices to bring to the foreground the religious implications of Haroun's travel to Kahani.

Haroun discovers in Kahani a divided community living in two regions of conflicting beliefs and values, which also evoke the Islamic (di)vision of the world. The Eastern and Western banks of the Ocean of the Streams of Story are homes to Guppees and Chupwalas respectively. The East is the land of ceaseless light, wisdom, openness, and commitment to traditions; as such, it looks like *Dar al-Islam*, the realm of enlightened believers. The West is the land of "Perpetual Night," ignorance, and intolerance, and it resembles *Dar al-Harb*, the realm of unbelievers who must be brought into *Dar al-Islam* through *jihad*. The land of Gup advocates intellectual diversity from the sciences to the arts, in the belief that truth rests on its own merits and therefore can withstand differences of opinion. Likewise, decisions about the community are always reached through debate and consensus. In principle, what is supposed to unite the Guppees is the imperative to uphold their collective traditions—an imperative which, Iff the Water Genie admits, they have been neglecting. From the perspective of Islam, the defining traits of the Guppees are reminiscent of the respect for *ijma* (consensus) and *sunna* (tradition) that has characterized the history of the Sunni, the largest and most pluralistic of the Moslem sects. Life in the land of Chup, however, is quite different. Victims of Khattam-Shud's zealotry, the Chupwalas have become idolaters, forced to follow the Cult of Dumbness and to worship the giant idol Bezaban (101). Brute power is the sole basis of authority, as the muted citizens are put to work in the tyrant's grand project to destroy all tradi-

tions. The land of Chup reflects the dehumanizing and ultimately self-defeating excesses of fanaticism which stand in stark contrast to *sunna* and *ijma* as well as the Qur'anic concept of "*ummah-i-wast*, the middle nation" (Ahmed ix), advocating moderation. Ironically, as a result of Khattam-Shud's zealotry, the Chupwalas have become deserving of the term *djahiliya*—which denotes any form of "unworthy, nominal Islam" (Cragg 360), besides its more familiar reference to the pre-Islamic era of ignorance and idolatry in Arabia.

That Kahani's division breaks in two an originally unified community also has significant implications regarding an Islamic world. The division is the self-righteous work of the Guppee scientists, the Eggheads, who halt the rotation of the moon and effectively commit the land of Chup to darkness and tyranny. While the Eggheads' measure is aimed at singling out Khattam-Shud as the uncontestable agent of evil in Kahani, it results in the sacrifice of the innocent Chupwalas (215). Given its origin, then, the division of East and West represents an internal rift in the community. In Islam, this kind of rift would signify a disharmonious society which contains *Dar al-Harb* in its midst not merely because of a villainous insurgent but also because the society has undermined both its core values and the well-being of its entire membership.

A worse outcome of the Eggheads' action is the formation of a third, intermediary realm in Kahani, namely, the Twilight Strip on which the Guppees have built an invisible Wall of Force. Stretching along the Ocean of the Streams of Story and between light and darkness, this amorphous region is the domain of temptation for the Gups and of envy and resentment for the Chups. The Gup princess Batcheat is kidnapped by the Chupwalas on one of her secret wanderings in the Twilight Strip (103). The Strip also testifies to the paradoxical nature of the Guppees' values: it suggests that the Guppees either legitimate ignorance and intolerance so long as they are shut off, or admit to the strength of ignorance and intolerance over wisdom; in either case, the Guppees undermine what they are supposed to uphold, namely, the supremacy of enlightenment and openness. The paradox would be no less felt within an Islamic community that deals with internal difference in ways that foster strife, terminal fragmentation, and the corruption of the faith and the faithful.

Perhaps the most problematic feature of the Twilight Strip and its

invisible Wall of Force is that, ultimately, they do not shut off what they are intended to because the Ocean of the Streams of Story can still be entered by both the Guppees and the Chupwalas. As such, then, the Strip and the Wall testify to the futility of deliberate discrimination within a system of values which by its very nature accommodates difference (remember the argument-loving Guppee army). Again the analogy to doctrinal Islam is hard to resist. One of the earliest articulations of Sunni canonical law, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar,* by Abu Hanifa (d. A.H. 150), affirms the necessity to acknowledge and tolerate rather than suppress "Difference of opinion in the Community [since it] is a token of Divine mercy" (Glassé 126). Even when differences lead to discord, Islam relies on the process of *ijma* (consensus) to cope with discord. Accordingly, then, the Ocean of Story Streams must bring together the Guppees and the Chupwalas, as it does at the end of the narrative.

Kahani's Ocean is the most richly developed element in the fairy tale, involving a complex web of highly evocative details, from its forever replenishing streams of stories, its Plentimaw Fish, and its Old Zone (where the ancient stories are stored) to Walrus, the grand comptroller, and its Wellspring. In the Ocean, all individual story streams originate from the Wellspring, the Source of Stories. The Plentimaw Fish are the custodians of this "sea awash in heteroglossic plurality" (Park 455); they use their many mouths to feed on the streams and to replenish them by mixing pieces from existing stories and creating new ones. Iff the Water Genie explains to Haroun:

> "when they [the Plentimaw] are hungry they swallow stories through every mouth, and in their innards miracles occur; a little bit of one story joins on to an idea from another, and hey presto, when they spew the stories out they are not old tales but new ones. Nothing comes from nothing . . . ; no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old—it is the new combinations that make them new."
>
> (86)

This continuous process of intermixing gives the story tradition its self-generative quality. Furthermore, the Plentimaw always travel in pairs and speak in rhymed couplets, indicating that the creation of stories is governed by the principles of harmony and compatibil-

ity. While the Plentimaw shape the evolution, or the outward form, of the story tradition, the Wellspring endows the tradition with a distinctly transcendent essence. In a manner reminiscent of *Wahdad al-Vujud*, each individual story stream not only constitutes a part of the whole but also contains the whole Ocean, by virtue of sharing a prime origin. Thus born out of and constantly enriched by an omnipresent source, the Ocean also becomes a living continuity where the past, the present, and the potential future simultaneously coexist (72).

The complex nature of the Ocean also sheds light on the Walrus, one of the most curious details in the fairy tale. Unlike the names of all other characters and settings, his does not readily evoke any meaning other than its own. Even though the Islamic term *al-Arsh* (meaning both the throne of God and the human heart and thus suggesting transcendence and corporeality) sounds like a phonetic variant of *walrus*, it is not as close and convincing a variant as those evoked by the other names. More than anything else, the etymological origins of the noun seem to make it an apt name for the Ocean's comptroller general. Because it derives from both *whale* and *horse*, *walrus* involves, like Kahani's Ocean, a physically improbable combination that transcends its constituent parts in the body of the animal. (As such, the walrus is both real and fantastic—unlike, say, the unicorn, which is only the latter.) The name given to the animal is coined from the words for whale and horse in several languages (Dutch, Danish, Old German, Old French, Old English, Swedish, Norwegian), suggesting a curiously omnipresent morphology. The Walrus in the fairy tale, then, suits his Ocean, which simultaneously contains, is contained in, and transcends its individual story streams.

Though the Walrus does not lend itself to Islamic interpretation, there is still plenty in Kahani's Ocean that does. The fairy tale describes the Gup general Kitab as "a weatherbeaten old gent with a rectangular uniform made of finely-tooled gold-inlay leather, of the sort Haroun had sometimes seen on the covers of old and valuable books" (89), which strikingly resembles the precious and reverential look of the printed Qur'an. Indeed, this resemblance proves highly relevant, since both the formal and the transcendent aspects of Kahani's Ocean send us to certain core characteristics of

the Qur'an, particularly those underlying its transmission, composition, and overriding scope. According to doctrine, God's revelations came to Mohammed in an extended chain of transmissions, each varying from the other in length and message. The individual chapters, the *suras*, in the Qur'an do not often sustain extended narratives in the conventional sense; rather, each contains a series of compatible messages revealed in close proximity, at a given time and place. Despite this feature, the *suras* nevertheless come together within a single grand narrative on the grounds that each single word, each single letter in the Qur'an embodies divine truth because each originates from a single source, *Umm al-Kitab:* the all-embracing heavenly book from which the preceding and the present revelations have come. Each Qur'anic *sura*, then, functions like the story streams in Kahani's Ocean which testify to the omnipresence of both the Prime Wellspring as the Source and the Ocean itself as the grand narrative. Again because of the same unifying principle, the *suras* can be read either in part or in varying order, to suit the particular occasion of the reading. In this respect, each reading of the *suras* is not unlike the Plentimaw's re-creation of new narratives from the existing ones, in which the existing ones are neither destroyed nor undermined but brought together in new, harmonious, and compatible wholes.[9] Finally, regarding their scope, many of the *suras* in the Qur'an retell the Judeo-Christian scriptural stories (that is, about Abraham, Noah, Joseph, Aaron and Moses, Solomon, Jesus and Mary). The "new versions" of the "old stories" restate with additional urgency the essential truths which have been neglected by the believers. The closing verses of the Joseph *sura* state:

> All of the apostles we have sent before you
> were men of those regions,
> to whom We sent Our revelations.

9. When Haroun is terrified that Butt the Hoopoe may be scrambling the stories by speeding along the story streams, the mechanical bird replies: "No problem! . . . Any story worth its salt can handle a little shaking up!" (79). His brusque manner of speaking notwithstanding, Hoopoe's remark recalls the reasoning behind the possibility of reading the Qur'anic *suras* in any given order, since they contain in equal degrees the overriding essence of the whole—the essence which itself is immutable.

Have they not traveled on the earth and seen
what befell the people before them?
. . . . . .
Verily in their accounts is a lesson for men of wisdom.
This is not a fictitious tale,
but a verification of earlier Books
and a clear exposition of every thing,
and a guide and grace for those who believe.

(12: 109–11)

These verses, together with innumerable others in the Qur'an, illustrate the doctrinal view of Islam as an Abrahamic faith—that it is the culmination of the entire tradition of monotheism originating with Abraham, the first believer. In this respect, Islam restores the original covenant with the Divine. Remarkably, a similar message is present in Iff the Water Genie's remorseful musings about the pollution of the Ocean: "We are the Guardians of the Ocean, and we didn't guard it. Look at the Ocean, look at it! The oldest stories ever made, and look at them now. We let them rot, we abandoned them, long before this poisoning [by Khattam-Shud]. We lost touch with our beginnings, with our roots, our Wellspring, our Source" (146). The Qur'anic verses and Iff's words illustrate a vital characteristic common to religion and stories: they acquire their meaning and authority by preserving and renewing the past and by guiding us through that past on to the "Wellspring" of transcendent truths about "our beginnings, . . . our roots, . . . our Source."

Given this common characteristic, it is understandable why the Walrus cannot restore the Ocean to its original purity by himself but instead must receive the help of Haroun and Rashid Khalifa. What renders the Walrus and his Eggheads weak against the Ocean's pollution is the fact that the transcendent and physical nature of the Ocean does not accommodate the story traditions alone but those of Islam as well. Thus their pollution requires the work of Haroun and Rashid, whose combined strength derives from the esoteric and exoteric sources of both religion and stories and can therefore conquer the common enemy of both traditions.

Ultimately, Kahani's Ocean offers us a most remarkable metaphor for the legacy of Islam, which has unfolded less along an un-

bending path of uniformist precepts than as a sea of convergent currents. The introduction of Islam into the diverse communities in the Middle East, Near East, and Africa has resulted in an international community and a cultural infusion so dynamic and pervasive that it is quite difficult, if not irrelevant, to extract the contributions of a particular national or communal culture to the evolution of either another culture within the Islamic world or the vibrant cultural amalgam called Islamic civilization. This fluidity may also explain why *The Arabian Nights* is a central artifact in the Islamic world and why Rushdie's fairy tale often alludes to the classic. The innumerable instances of cultural infusion and synthesis that mark the text's chain of regenerations ultimately parallel the dynamic convergences that have characterized the actual formation of the Islamic legacy. The young bride Scheherazade's counterpart in the actual world, one could say, is the vital impulse of any community to renew itself, to internalize outside influences, and to negotiate and reconcile internal rifts in ways that will ensure its survival and integrity.

The rich array of evocative and allusive material which characterizes the nature of Kahani's Ocean makes it truly a sea of reconciliation, a reserve where the traditions of religion and stories converge. This convergence, however, is not achieved by undermining the sacredness of religious Islam in order to bring it to the level of culture and the tradition of stories. Rather, it is achieved by pointing to their compatibility and by invoking such inherently existential and spiritual imperatives as faith, self-affirmation, and oneness with a transcendent continuity, imperatives which are common to both traditions, regardless of the differences in form and substance by which each accommodates them. In Kahani, faith springs not from the edict of any singular and discriminating dogma but from the transcendent dimension inherent to human existence; this kind of faith seeks and finds its due fulfillment in the transcendent essence of both religion and culture.[10]

10. Lines by the Sufi poet Rumi embrace the same kind of convergence as described through Kahani's Ocean—a convergence in whose roots are inherently human longings and whose goal is the believer's union with transcendent continuity, represented in the poem as the Friend:

> Two hands, two feet, two eyes, good,
> as it should be, but no separation
> of the Friend and your loving.

Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is indeed about the triumph of language and stories over dogmatism and raw power, but language and stories are the bearers of cultural tradition as much as of religious tradition; they are the very means of expressing and confirming one's sense of belonging to a suprapersonal, transcendent continuity. The fairy tale demonstrates that on such essential and common grounds, there can be no animosity between religious and cultural stories. The animosity results from our neglect of what binds us together and the Khattam-Shuds of the world who mandate only one form of expression in the extreme and to the absolute exclusion of other forms. As such, then, the central conflict and its eventual resolution in Rushdie's fairy tale recalls the complex legacy of Islam which, in its most universalist manifestations, has upheld tolerance and harmonious convergence of culture and religion, and which, in its most divisive and dogmatic episodes (and they should be viewed no more significantly than as trying episodes in a continuum governed by universalist aspirations) has undermined its own legitimacy by fomenting strife and bad faith within its community. If *The Arabian Nights* is repeatedly evoked in *Haroun*, it is not merely because the tales epitomize the cultural diversity which predates Islam. It is also because *The Arabian Nights*, itself having undergone Islamic infusion, testifies to the reconciliation between the faith and the inherent plurality of its culture(s). Rushdie's fairy tale offers us the same testimony in its attempt to articulate a universalist aesthetics firmly anchored in the inalienable human desire for self-expression, one that upholds the diversity of forms through which self-expression is possible.

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> Any dividing there
> makes other untrue distinctions like "Jew,"
> and "Christian," and "Muslim."
> (*Unseen Rain* 21)

After reading *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, one can add "the storyteller" to Rumi's list.

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