

Rushdie and the Romantics: Intertextual Politics in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

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Salman Rushdie's novella *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) has been read largely as a reconciliatory work, a modern-day fairy tale for children in a deliberately light-hearted vein by the beleaguered and recently divorced novelist whose publication of *The Satanic Verses* two years earlier had resulted in the *fatwa* declared by the Ayatollah Khomeini. In a powerful and uncompromising critique of the work, however, Srinivas Aravamudan has taken Rushdie to task for the alleged ideological baggage of the tale, arguing that the conflict between the land of Chup and the land of Gup—in other words between silence and free speech—represents “a banal didactic fiction” which essentializes “censorship and literature as Manichean opposites” (327). Other critics have been more favourably inclined, pointing out literary influences and ambiguities that indicate a less polarized reading of its message.¹ My purpose is to add to these latter interpretative voices, pointing out the extent to which the tale makes sophisticated use of a number of literary allusions from various Romantic-period texts, notably those by Coleridge and De Quincey, and, in doing so, introduces a self-consciously literary element into its fabular generic mode. I will also suggest that these allusions introduce a far stronger political element to the work, leading us to a neglected though significant context to the fable: Rushdie's long-standing interest in Kashmir, the land of his ancestry, as of Saleem Sinai's in *Midnight's Children*, and the origin of the eponymous Shalimar the Clown in his latest novel.²

A recognition of the central importance of Kashmir to the text—as I will argue in this essay—helps to ground the fantasy in a socially-committed vision and deliver Rushdie from the charge that his text advocates an uncritically universalist and free-floating doctrine of the freedom of speech in opposition to the overblown and violent reaction that *The*

Satanic Verses called forth from various quarters.³ In arguing this case I shall be turning to Rushdie's critical writings on Kashmir. The significance of Kashmir to Rushdie's entire fictional *oeuvre* is a huge subject, and my essay intends to focus on a single novella, *Haroun*, which, as I will show, has not been properly recognized in this regard. Such a recognition will help to provide *Haroun* a more significant place in Rushdie's canon, a place that has been denied largely on account of its trivialization as a children's tale in the fabular mode. It also enables us to read Rushdie across period and genre categories, extending the critique of disciplinary boundaries and hierarchies that Rushdie has found limiting in relation to his own work.⁴ Finally, I will argue that the text deconstructs normative distinctions between fantasy and reality, posing "real" issues of politics and governance in fairy-tale form.

It is worth remembering that Rushdie's novella emerges after a particularly painful period of his life, and that his brand of comic humour had already matured in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie barely conceals a strain of satirical energy that emerges consistently in his other critical and creative work right until his most recent novels, *Fury* (2002), and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), and which has often brought him into collision with state authorities and powerful opponents. In an essay on the film of *The Wizard of Oz* Rushdie says he had set out to write a tale that was "of interest to adults as well as children" and that it was *Oz* that helped him "find the right voice for *Haroun*" (*Step Across this Line*, 10). In the same essay, he dwells on "behind the scene tales" that show sadly how "a film that has made so many audiences so happy was not a happy film to make" and that its song "Over the Rainbow" ought to be "the anthem of all the world's migrants" on account of the "anguished longings" it betrays in Judy Garland's famous rendering of it (25). It is thus the undercurrent of the grey and unhappy world of Kansas that sets off the work's brightness and happiness for the reader. My task in this essay will be to locate a correspondingly antithetical undercurrent in *Haroun*, a strain that commentators seem not have located in any sustained textual way beyond the acknowledgement of Rushdie's personal circumstances at the time of composition. In doing so I will posit a turn by Rushdie to Romantic-period literature for intertextual guidance in this respect

and will trace a link between *Haroun* and two Romantic texts which clarify this relation, namely Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan: a Vision in Dream," and Thomas De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach, or the Glory of Motion" celebrating the victories of the Napoleonic Wars. Both these texts and *Haroun* are framed by "dream" narratives, and I take the artistic imagination to be a major concern of all three texts.

Haroun's status as a fairy-tale in the mould of the *Arabian Nights* and the Indian collection of fairy tales known as the *Katha Sarit Sagara*, which translates as "the sea of stories"—whence the subtitle is drawn, alerts us to the Orientalist associations of these fables first popularized for the western world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵ These tales in the various versions and so-called translations that circulated in the Romantic period held out the promise of a rich and fantastic imaginative world untrammelled by what were often seen as rigid European codes of moral stricture or rationality. Both Coleridge and De Quincey—the Romantic opium-eaters who have been linked with precisely this kind of Orientalist imagination—have been subjected to numerous critiques of their writings deriving from Said's impetus to postcolonial studies.⁶ Both writers recounted the early impact on their childhood sensibilities of their readings of the *Arabian Nights*, Coleridge attributing his own poetic nature partly to that influence, and the later De Quincey, though apparently contemptuous of Oriental literature, relating in his *Autobiographic Sketches* the suggestive potential of the story of Aladdin as representative of what he later called the "dark sublime" in terms of his own aesthetic consciousness (19: 73).

The attraction shown by Rushdie to the fairy tale⁷ brings us to a paradox with regard to its generic nature evident in its revivalist phase during the Romantic period. While the oral fairy tale in its (imaginary and irrecoverable) pristine state may be taken as an artless and spontaneous effusion of poetic sensibility, the literary versions which recorded, translated, mediated, and, we may say, re-created them were assuredly a complex and often tangibly ideologically motivated phenomenon shaped by the Romantic antiquarians and redactors of the genre. Similarly it is evident that while *Haroun* works well as an adventure fantasy in which the goodies (or the Guppees) led by Haroun and his friends overcome the

baddies (or the chupwallas, the enemies of fantasy who seek to poison the sea of stories at its source), there is figuratively much more to the text than this by way of the recondite literary allusions and complexities.

The whole issue regarding the allegorical reading of literature has perhaps been vitiated by the Romantics, and in particular Coleridge, who theorized a strict separation between allegory and symbol by which the former was dismissed in the terms of his criticisms of materialist philosophies as “an abstraction from the objects of our senses,” whereas the latter was exalted as “the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal” (*Lay Sermons* 30). It may be seen how Aravamudan’s criticism of Rushdie’s supposedly Manichean allegory, quoted earlier, repeats unconsciously the theoretical terms of Coleridge’s Romantic ideology,⁸ reading Rushdie as the flat purveyor of one-to-one correspondences between the real, material world of his *fatwa* and the imaginary world of his fairy tale. While Rushdie’s personal slant is inevitably present in the work, its meaning I will propose is not exhausted by a literal dredging of its ideological content.

In an insightful though isolated notice of Kashmir’s significance for *Haroun* in the context of Satyajit Ray’s influence on the text, Meenakshi Mukherjee has commented with surprise that commentators have overlooked the fairly obvious geo-political resonances of the Valley of K with its Dull lake, its fields of gold and silver mountains, as a geographic location for *Haroun* (Mukherjee 177).⁹ Haroun’s father, Rashid, explains that the neutral alphabetical nomenclature of K had in times past derived from other more meaningful names, “Kache-Mer,” “the place that hides a Sea,” though now it was unofficially referred to as “Kosh-mar” which is glossed to mean “nightmare” (40). The Valley of K, to spell it out then, is transparently a displacement of Kashmir, a place in which Rushdie has declared a special interest for a long time, asserting himself to be “more than half Kashmiri myself” (*Step Across this Line* 305).¹⁰ Kashmir, which Rushdie describes in the same article as “one of the most beautiful places in the world...which the Mughal emperors thought of as Paradise on earth” (305), is the place where Rashid—his name an obvious anagram of Rushdie’s—hopes to recover his lost powers as a storyteller.

Kashmir is here evoked in the Orientalist stereotype of an earthly paradise,¹¹ an evident link with Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" which Rushdie alludes to in the opening couplet of the book's acrostic dedication to his son, Zafar:

Zembla, Zenda, Xanadu:
All our dream-worlds may come true. (11)

And later in the text, describing the land of K to Haroun, Rashid evokes at once an Orientalized fantasy world of creative inspiration, its landscape of "pleasure gardens built by the ancient Emperors...with fountains and terraces and pavilions" (25) evoking the corresponding landscape of Coleridge's poem, which too has been connected with Kashmir:¹²

In Xanadu did KUBLA KHAN
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where ALPH, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossom'd many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. (*Poetical Works* 1.1: 512–13)

With regard to the world of Oriental sensuality and luxury that the opening lines of Coleridge's poem evoke, commentators have pointed out a darker side to the landscape, the "Ancestral voices prophesying war" that threaten Kubla's miraculous pleasure-dome and landscape. Nigel Leask has drawn attention to the geo-political specificity of the landscape garden of the poem in relation to its Orientalism "in order to reconsider the worldliness of a canonical Romantic text" ("*Kubla Khan* and Orientalism" 18), opening up, I would suggest, a parallel between the texts that exposes a deconstructive potential which we may profitably explore in relation to *Haroun* as well.

Within the Oz-shaped logic of the story, the valley of K is paralleled quite evidently by that of Kahani, the earth's second moon: while Mr. Butt the mail-coach driver takes Haroun to the valley of K, his counterpart Butt the hoopoe bird carries him on an equally manic journey to Gup City on the moon Kahani. In Gup City we again encounter the same garden, carried over from the Romantic Orient, from Coleridge, from the Valley of K, and now transformed into the Guppee landscape. The Dull lake of K, a (dull) version of Kashmir's Dal lake, is now a "Lagoon, a beautiful expanse of multicoloured waters." Once more we encounter "a gigantic formal garden [which] came down in terraces right to the water's edge." This "Pleasure Garden" too self-consciously mirrors Coleridge's landscape by boasting "fountains and pleasure-domes and ancient spreading trees" (87–8).

Within the Oriental sublime of this garden however we encounter an oddly democratic intrusion. Whereas Kublai's palace is the sole architectural feature within the wild and expansive garden that he decrees (Coleridge follows his source, *Purchas's Pilgrimage*, quoted in his 1817 introduction to the poem, in depicting it thus), Rushdie introduces three important buildings in fairy-tale mode, "a trio of gigantic and elaborately iced cakes," the Palace of King Chattergy, the Parliament of Gup, also known as Chatterbox "because debates there could run on for weeks or months or even, occasionally, years," and the towering edifice of P2C2E House, the technological heart of Gup City (88). The text speaks back to and inverts the Orientalized politics of Coleridge's poem very explicitly by introducing a parliament building into the Great Khan's private gardens.

The despotic Orient of the Romantic period is now displaced by the bungling bureaucracy of modern and democratic India, represented by the technologically complex but administratively chaotic emblem of P2C2E House. The Orient is here presented as irrepressibly democratic, far indeed from inherently despotic as typical Romantic Orientalist representations made out, and perhaps glancing too at the chaotic resilience of modern Indian democracy, which many in 1947 at the point of India's independence doubted would survive. On the other hand, we should be cautious about regarding such parallels as a rigorous form of political al-

legory. It should also be noted that on the issue of Kashmir, the “real” counterpart of K, Rushdie has strongly criticized the failure of Indian democracy and diplomacy, as also the militarization and Islamicizing of Pakistan which have led to its attitude of regarding Kashmir in the light of a “holy war” (*Step Across this Line* 306). As Gup City prepares for war to save the Ocean of Stories and their abducted Princess, the caterwauling Batcheat, Rushdie’s text ingeniously fulfils the prophecies of Kubla Khan’s ancestral voices.

If the politics of Kashmir is selectively relocated in *Haroun*, as I have argued, it is worth considering its central action concerning the warfare between the Guppees and Chupwalas as an hypothetical resolution, albeit an obliquely realized one, of the standoff between India and Pakistan, and the unhappy positioning which this has left Kashmiris. R. S. Krishnan has noted that the apparently polarized nature of the warfare in *Haroun* is in fact broken down at times. A key figure in this gerymandering of boundaries between Gups and Chups is the Chupwala Shadow-Warrior Mudra—his name signifies a stylized gesture in Indian classical dance—who teaches Haroun that Gups and Chups might after all learn from each other:

the Shadow Warrior showed him that silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly); and that Action could be as noble as Words; and that creatures of darkness could be as lovely as the children of the light. “If Guppees and Chupwalas didn’t hate each other so,” he thought, “they might actually find each other pretty interesting. Opposites attract, as they say.” (125)

It is crucially Mudra’s presence at the head of the Gup army that makes it acceptable to the Chupwalas: “At the sight of Mudra, many Chupwalas threw in their lot with the Guppees” (185). The Guppee “victory” is thus acceptable to the Chupwalas because it implies not a foreign rule, but rather the installation of a suitable leader from among their own people.

In the climax involving the turning of the Moon Kahani too, Haroun’s defeat of Khattam Shud’s diabolical plans is finally effected by his con-

juring the sun to shine on the land of darkness, an action that causes the darkness and shadows to melt away and disappear. But rather than merely reversing the order of things, leaving the Guppees in darkness and the Chupwalas in light, Haroun restores a natural balance of day and night to fall on both lands, returning peace and happiness to both. Although the action of the battle suggests a Gup victory, Rushdie is careful to suggest that the peace achieved by this victory is not one-sided, but bilaterally acceptable: “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). Yet the mixing of Guppees and Chupwalas is not indiscriminate, as cultural codes of sexuality and gender temper the union: “Blabbermouth, her loose, flowing hair no longer concealed beneath velvet cap or halo-helmet, attracted the attention of several of the young lads of Chup City. But she stayed as close as she could to Mudra” (185). Rather than suggesting a victory of one nation over another, and the overwhelming of one culture by another, Rushdie suggests here a mutually-agreed peace based on political acceptance and a degree of cultural distancing. That this is at one level a fantasy solution is fully acknowledged by the text in that part of the decisive action takes place on the lunar Kahani (“Kahani” meaning “story” in Hindi). Kahani is a displacement of “K,” as well as (twice-removed) of Kashmir, but it is also a fantasy version of both.

At this point I would like to draw upon the second of the Romantic texts which I adduced in relation to *Haroun*, as a link that brings us yet closer to the themes of nationhood and empire that speak across the periodized divide between Romantic and postcolonial literatures. None of the commentators on *Haroun* I have come across so far seem to have noticed that Rushdie’s second chapter of *Haroun* entitled “The Mail-Coach” is in fact a fairly elaborate reworking of Thomas De Quincey’s celebrated essay of 1849, “The English Mail-Coach.” De Quincey’s retrospective celebration of the English mail-coach system as the means by which news of the great English military victories during the Napoleonic wars were “distributed over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials” (409) is at first glance a strongly imperialistic and therefore unusual text for a postcolonial writer like Rushdie to absorb into his

work. Rushdie's use of the outmoded mail-coach—a form of transport that had already been superseded by the railway by the time De Quincey wrote his essay—in *Haroun*, a text that has been seen as science-fictional in some respects, could be even more surprising unless it is explained in terms of Rushdie's fascination with De Quincey's text.¹³ In his essay De Quincey recounts his experiences as an Oxford undergraduate riding the crest of a wave of national sympathy and fervour on the mail-coaches of the day. It was the English mail-coaches, as De Quincey recalls, that distributed “over the face of the land, like the opening of apocalyptic vials, the heart-shaking news of Trafalgar, of Salamanca, of Vittoria, of Waterloo” (16: 409). They thus represented “a central intellect, that, in the midst of vast distances, of storms, of darkness, of night, overruled all obstacles into one steady co-operation in a national result” (16: 409).

The remembrance of the mail-coaches evokes in De Quincey an extraordinary paean to the glory days of English triumphalism:

Heads of every age crowd to the windows—young and old understand the language of our victorious symbols—and rolling volleys of sympathising cheers run along behind and before our course. The beggar, rearing himself against the wall, forgets his lameness—real or assumed—thinks not of his whining trade, but stands erect, with bold exulting smiles, as we pass him. The victory has healed him, and says—Be thou whole! Women and children, from garrets and cellars, look down or look up with loving eyes upon our gay ribbons and martial laurels—sometimes kiss their hands, sometimes hang out, as signals of affection, pocket handkerchiefs, aprons, dusters, anything that lies ready to their hands. (16: 425–26)

Gender, class, and age differences are blithely elided as the national symbol of glory, the English mail-coach, rolls by. The beggar's lameness is miraculously healed through a secularized, nationalized agency arrogating to itself supernatural powers such as those reflected by the traditional beliefs in Christ's miraculous powers and the laying of royal hands. The rationalist scepticism of the post-Kantian critic is passed over parenthetically as the real or assumed nature of the beggar's infir-

mity seems hardly to matter in the moment of victory.¹⁴ As he surveys the joyful scene De Quincey is ready to arrogate to himself these evident displays of national unity, reading the semiotics of “pocket handkerchiefs, aprons, dusters, anything” as personal “signals of affection” for himself, placing himself at the centre of what Benedict Anderson has rewardingly described as the “imagined community” of the nation.¹⁵ Britain’s imperial destiny is matched, in the strongly Evangelical terms of De Quincey’s own upbringing, by his own election as the apostle of such news.

Yet De Quincey’s imperialist fantasies in “The English Mail-Coach,” as his own texts indicate time and again, display, like *Haroun*, a more equivocal aspect to their apparent moral certitudes, as he contemplates the darker side of war, the fields of death and the despair of the bereaved survivors of war. The nightmare worlds of war and sudden death reveal a darker side to De Quincey’s mail-coach imperialist fantasies, a dream displacement, in Freudian terms, of his political anxieties. The inexorable speed of the mail-coach on its imperialist mission carries dangers for the ordinary people who cross its path, even if, as sometimes happens, the mail-coach is on the wrong side of the road. The supreme authority of its function decreed that the mail-coach had right of way at all times on the King’s highway, wrong-footing the rights of all others claimants in the nation. In the most memorable section of De Quincey’s essay, “A Vision of Sudden Death,” De Quincey is guiltily haunted by the despairing vision of a young woman in a carriage who is very nearly killed by a mail-coach travelling on the wrong side of the road, with De Quincey temporarily in command as the driver slept. The “real” experiences of mail-coach travel are succeeded in De Quincey’s imaginative world by the nightmare (“Kosh-mar”) experience of the visions that these travels evoke for him. The fourth dream section of “The English Mail-Coach” describes a dream of being taken in a “triumphal car” into a huge cathedral flanked on its insides by the graves of those killed in battles:

Thus, as we ran like torrents—thus, as we swept with bridal rapture over the Campo Santo of the cathedral graves—suddenly we became aware of a vast necropolis rising upon the

far-off horizon—a city of sepulchres, built within the saintly cathedral for the warrior dead that rested from their feuds on earth....Every sarcophagus showed many bas-reliefs—bas-reliefs of battles—bas-reliefs of battle-fields; of battles from forgotten ages—of battles from yesterday—of battle-fields that, long since, nature had healed and reconciled to herself with the sweet oblivion of flowers—of battle-fields that were yet angry and crimson with carnage. (16: 446–47)

De Quincey's triumphalist vision is transformed here into a huge memorial service for the dead. However, the corpses of the warrior dead in this nightmare form of memorialism are not decorously transformed into art, but cry out "angry and crimson" from the battlefields of carnage.

In Rushdie's text, however, these themes are played out in slapstick mode, though not without its darker edge. The national sympathies generated by the mail-coach in De Quincey's description are deliberately eschewed by Rushdie as the manic driver Mr. Butt ignores his state function of distributing the mail bags, ignoring the anger of the people left behind. As he drives through "village after village" Mr. Butt bypasses the waiting postmen with their ready mailbags, causing confusion and then fury as they realize the situation. Turning around, Haroun notices too that not only does Mr. Butt fail to collect the mailbags, but he also fails to deliver the bulging bags at the rear of the vehicle. The mail-coach's failure to collect or deliver mail, though it may be read as hilarious at an innocent level of fantasy, reflects the real situation in Kashmir in 1990 when post-offices were closed down for seven months and all communications from the valley were subjected to severe censorship by the Indian government¹⁶ (a grimly ironic subtext that is more explicitly handled in literary terms by Agha Shahid Ali in his fine collection of poems from 1991–95 entitled *A Country Without a Post-Office* which supplies one of the epigraphs for *Shalimar the Clown*). As they pass a hairpin bend at top speed, Mr. Butt sings out:

"Here, two weeks ago, occurred a major disaster. Bus plunged into gully, all persons killed. Sixty-seventy lives minimum. God! Too sad! If you desire I can stop for taking of photographs."

“Yes, stop, stop,” the passengers begged (anything to make him slow down), but Mr. Butt went ever faster instead. “Too late,” he yodelled gaily. “Already it is far behind. Requests must be more promptly made if I am to comply.” (37)

Rushdie’s description of the mail-coach ride evokes a blithe disregard of state prerogatives or national unity as the bus drivers play games to avoid taking on their passengers, and the passengers, united only in terror, are usually at loggerheads with each other. The gaily terrifying driver, Mr. Butt, is clearly Rushdie’s version of De Quincey’s mail-coachman in “The Vision of Sudden Death,” a man whom De Quincey nicknames “Cyclops *diphrelates*” (Cyclops the Charioteer) and who is described as:

The most masterly of mail-coachmen. He was the man in all Europe that could best have undertaken to drive six-in-hand full gallop over *Al Sirat*—that famous bridge of Mahomet across the bottomless gulf, backing himself against the Prophet and twenty such fellows. (19: 435)

De Quincey’s mocking invocation of the oriental sublime in the form of the bridge of *Al Sirat* is taken up by Rushdie in his account of Mr. Butt’s breakneck driving through the mountainous landscape of the Kashmir valley. In terms of Kashmir again, the lives lost in the “gully” (Rushdie puns on the Urdu word meaning a narrow street and the English sense of a channel or ravine in the earth’s surface caused by the flow of water) evoke the human losses entailed by state machinery running amok, the mail-coach here symbolizing the apparatus of national tyranny. The gullies of Kashmir, if one can only look into them, display the dark sublime of nationalist pride, its underbelly of imperial hubris. Yet, both Mr. Butt and the Cyclops are described as excellent drivers, their respective aberrations being a momentary departure from true form. Having passed through the “Tunnel of I” (approaching Kashmir through India?) Mr. Butt drives down into the valley itself “with extreme caution” (39).

The simultaneous alternation between the light-hearted fantasy of the fairy tale mode and the grim realities of national politics is of course not new in Rushdie’s work. The fantasy of Saleem Sinai’s magical birth

and powers in *Midnight's Children* is counteracted by the metronomic passage of time, the ticking of clocks, and the cracking up of his physical body. The linear passage of time, as Benedict Anderson has argued in *Imagined Communities*, may be taken as the hallmark of temporal consciousness in the national imagination. On the other hand, the imagined communities of theocratic imagination often believe—as in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions—in a divine temporality that comprehends past, present, and future in a simultaneous moment available eternally to God. In his essay “In God We Trust” Rushdie acknowledges the influence of Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, suggesting that writers “if they are any good” want to have it “both ways—to be both linear and Godlike, to express the truths of simultaneity and those of linearity” (*Imaginary Homelands* 382).

The temporal motif is signalled early in *Haroun* with Rashid’s smashing of the clock at “11 o’clock exactly” (21), the moment his wife runs away. He then breaks every other clock in the house, including Haroun’s. From this point onwards in the novella, Haroun is unable to concentrate on anything for more than 11 minutes. Miss Oneeta, the neighbour’s wife, makes the connection explicit:

“Eleven o’clock when his mother exited,” she declared. “Now comes this problem of eleven minutes....the young master is stuck fast on his eleven number and cannot get to twelve.”
(24)

The fantasy action of the novella is thus set outside of normal time, whereas its basis in material reality—like that of the national consciousness adduced in the references to Kashmiri politics—indicates the passage of normal (chronological) time. Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” with its abrupt temporal and spatial alterations is notoriously prefaced by his admission that the visionary experience it represented followed his consumption of an “anodyne” (his contemporaries would have guessed easily what it was) which later scholarship has identified from his manuscript of the poem as “two grains of Opium” (*Poetical Works* 1.1: 511), the material, chemical catalyst of his dream-vision. The final stanza of the poem recounting the vision of the damsel with a dulcimer is often

read as a celebration of the Romantic imagination, the ability of the poet to “build that dome in air.” And yet, viewed more closely, the poet’s artistic lament is clearly that he has not achieved that goal; his ability to recreate fantasy is limited, predicated on the conditional, “could”: “Could I revive within me ...” (*Poetical Works* 1.1: 514).

In the celebrated section of De Quincey’s “Vision of Sudden Death” in *The English Mail-Coach* we encounter again suspensions and resurrections of temporal perception which are comparable to Coleridge and Rushdie. The section prepares us for sudden shifts in perception by describing the “hour” and the “atmosphere” as being conducive to “that Sabbatic vision” by which we may “ascend with easy steps from the sorrow-stricken fields of earth, upwards to the sandals of God” (16: 438). To De Quincey atop the English mail-coach it is evident that to “all human calculation, there is but a minute and a half” between the young couple in the frail gig before him and “eternity” (16: 440). As the near-collision of the mail-coach with the gig provides the visionary catalyst required for De Quincey’s already prepared mind, the realities of coach travel in England in a precisely located bygone era give way to nightmare visions of death and resurrection.¹⁷ In a reverse shift from fantasy to normal time, Haroun’s return to the city of Kahani in Alifbay at the very end of Rushdie’s novella provides a resumption of normal time, marked by the new clock by his bedside: “Yes,” he nodded to himself, “time is definitely on the move again around these parts” (211).

The denouement of the tale brings its own resolution of national will in the valley of K. The reconciliation of Gup and Chup—representing peace between the garrulously secular democracy of India and the gracefully silent Islamic autocracy of Pakistan—allows that the valley of K finally gets to choose its own leaders. This is what, as Rushdie has pointed out, the Kashmiris have always wanted:

India has badly mishandled the Kashmir case from the beginning...in spite of UN resolutions supporting the largely Muslim population’s right to a plebiscite, India’s leaders have always rejected the idea. (*Step Across This Line*, 306–7)

The work ends with the return of Rashid's storytelling prowess. But the outcome that his political paymaster, Snooty Buttoo, expects is overturned as the people understand Rashid's story, which in self-referential fashion is that of Haroun's adventure itself, and that of Rushdie himself, doubling as autobiographical and political allegory. Buttoo is booted out and a free election takes place, restoring peace and happiness to the land of K. This is of course where Rushdie's allegory, if narrowly conceived, breaks down, as we recall the plight of Kashmir, by no means resolved despite some peace moves in recent times between Pakistan and India. The state of Kashmiri politics intersects with Rushdie's own situation as a writer in 1990 placing his own censorship and anger at the *fatwa* in the wider arena of the silencing of Kashmir at that time. Rushdie's tale is at one level a light-hearted fable written for children, though I hope to have shown that its ideological underpinnings, drawn from Romantic sources, are far from unspecific or transcendentalized in tendency. A recognition of Rushdie's Romantic forebears helps to deliver the text from a dichotomized and unfruitful debate about the author's ideological positioning and places the text instead in a significant dialogue with Romantic as well as contemporary texts and contexts. Understanding the political dimensions of the work through its association with the intertexts of Romantic literature and of Kashmir exposes a sharp and dangerous interior to its façade of joyous fantasy.

Rushdie's text speaks back to his Romantic predecessors drawing on their ambiguities and answering their preconceptions in a way that may be recognized as "postcolonial." Yet, Rushdie's politics seems to cut two ways at once: while he conceives the nation in a way that critiques Romantic Orientalist ideology, he manages at the same time to critique the postcolonial nation states of India and Pakistan, themselves guilty of imperialist attitudes to Kashmir. Rushdie's many-layered politics can be seen to draw on the tensions and ambiguities in Coleridge's and De Quincey's famously unstable and revisionist texts. While the exotic aspects of Coleridge's *Orient* are familiarized and democratized in the Gup-city version of *Haroun*, the national and imperial fantasy of De Quincey's imagined community united by the "heart-shaking news" of the Napoleonic wars is transformed by Rushdie into the authoritarian

and divisive reality of travel and communication on the Indian counterpart of the English mail-coach. As in the film of *Oz*, the surface fabular mode of *Haroun* conceals a specific and material set of references, literary and political, collapsing the binary opposites of “realism” and “fantasy” in generic terms. Rushdie’s assimilation of Romantic influence does not result in an etherialized disjunction from the world of politics—such as Jerome McGann has criticized in Romanticism’s ideology—but, rather, initiates an intimate dialogue between its literature and the material realities of our contemporary world. My reading has not sought an exhaustive study of Romantic influences in Rushdie’s text; rather I hope to have opened up the text to its evocative and profoundly *critical* interplay between what we may recognize as a romanticized notion of the Orient and the postcolonial arena of the nation. This exchange between Romanticism and postcolonialism does not, however, merely posit a middle ground or compromise position on the part of Rushdie, but rather exposes another hybridized area which lies in the fertile intermediate spaces of our disciplinary categories.

Notes

- 1 Notably, Teverson recovers an allusion to the Sufi mystic, Farid ud-Din Attar’s medieval work, *The Conference of Birds*, to give the text an utopian reading; Mukherjee traces the influence of the Bengali film director Satyajit Ray’s film for children, *Goopy Gayen and Bagha Bayen*, to read the work as deliberate wish-fulfillment fantasy appropriate to children’s literature; and Krishnan points out that *Haroun* constantly deconstructs the discourse of romance even while delivering a conventionally happy ending to the story. Each of these critics responds to variously complicating factors in the text by way of allusions or narrative modes.
- 2 An earlier version of this paper was delivered at a conference entitled “Postcolonial Romanticisms” at Leeds University in July 2005, and was first submitted for publication in the same month to *ARIEL*, before the publication of *Shalimar the Clown* in September 2005. The publication of *Shalimar* only confirms the importance of Kashmir to Rushdie’s *oeuvre*, post-*Satanic Verses*, as his own predicament as an international writer often disowned by eastern and western commentators becomes synecdochic with the politics of conflict in Kashmir.
- 3 For a documentary selection of responses to *The Satanic Verses*, see Appignanesi and Maitland’s collection entitled *The Rushdie File* (1990).
- 4 Rushdie’s critique of disciplinary categories in literary studies is evident in the essay “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist” in *Imaginary Homelands*.

Complaining of the ghettoization that the term “commonwealth literature” had introduced to the study of English literature, Rushdie suggests that “if *all* English literatures could be studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world, and we could see that Eng. Lit. has never been in better shape, because the world language now also possesses a world literature, which is proliferating in every conceivable direction” (70).

- 5 Antoine Galland’s 1704–17 French translation of the *Arabian Nights* was the most popular of the Orientalist works of the time and was translated and pirated in numerous English editions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The *Hētōpādēs of Vēśhmōō-Sārmā* including some of the stories of the *Katha Sarit Sagara* was translated into English by Charles Wilkins in 1787.
- 6 For example, Leask’s chapter “Murdering one’s double; Thomas De Quincey and Coleridge. Autobiography, Opium and Empire in ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater’ and ‘Biographia Literaria’” (170–228) in his book *British Romantic Writers and the East* usefully connects the two writers in this context.
- 7 A rewarding earlier study which explores Rushdie’s adaptation of the fairy-tale genre is Batty’s “The Art of Suspense: Rushdie’s 1001 (Mid-)Nights.” Hence *Haroun* returns to a generic mode that holds considerable significance for Rushdie’s narrative art.
- 8 I use the phrase “Romantic ideology” in the sense made familiar to students of Romanticism by McGann’s influential work of the same title, implying “an uncritical absorption in Romanticism’s own self-representation” (1), a charge which McGann levelled not only at Romantics like Coleridge, but also at the academy’s acceptance of those terms of representation. The willingness of several critics to read the *Haroun* almost entirely at the level of fantasy on account of its generic predilections as a fairy tale in the Romantic mode, and thus to overlook its darker side, may be seen as a modern instance of this kind of ideology at work.
- 9 As Mukherjee points out: “It is curious that Aaron Ali, in his erudite paper on the significance of names in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, dwells on the semantic implications of ‘Kache-mer’ and ‘Kosh-mar,’ without mentioning that they play upon the name of a well-known place name on the real map of the Indian sub-continent” (177). Duprix, for example, finds *Haroun* to be lacking in apparent relevance to the history of India and Pakistan: “Unlike Rushdie’s best-known novels, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* has no apparent direct relevance to Indian and Pakistani history...” (343).
- 10 Rushdie’s article was originally published as “Kashmir, the Imperiled Paradise” in the *New York Times*, 3 June 1999, and has been republished in *Step Across this Line*.
- 11 It is worth pointing out that Kashmir and the Himalayan regions of north-east India became, from the accounts of European travellers from the eighteenth century onwards, a byword during the Romantic period for the earthly paradise:

an association that is reflected in several Romantic-period texts such as Robert Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), Sydney Owenson's *The Missionary* (1811), Percy Shelley's *Alastor* (1815), and Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) among others. As Owenson puts it in *The Missionary*, "to wander through the lovely and magnificent valley of Cashmire, was but to loiter amidst the enjoyments of Eden" (197). While Rushdie may not have read all of these Romantic texts, he consistently draws on their associations to evoke a paradisaical landscape with a real political dimension, or vice-versa, a contemporary geo-political site with magical associations, in all his writings on Kashmir.

- 12 The landscape of Coleridge's poem is probably best described as a composite landscape derived from his vast orientalist reading. As Livingstone Lowes showed in his seminal study of the sources of "Kubla Khan," *The Road to Xanadu*, two of the principal sources from which its landscape was drawn were the descriptions of Kashmir from Thomas Maurice's *History of Hindostan*, 2 vols. (1795–1798) and Major James Rennell's *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* (1793) (Lowes 347–50). Rushdie may or may not have been aware of these Kashmiri associations, but clearly responds to the Orientalist fantasy of a paradisaical land which Coleridge's poem represents.
- 13 For a useful social history of the English mail coach, see Vale, *The Mail-Coach Men*. Haroun's indebtedness to science-fiction romances is noted by Merivale (200).
- 14 De Quincey was one of the foremost of Kantian critics and mediators of his generation in England. See my chapter on his mediation of German literature and of Kant in particular in *Revisionary Gleam* (Roberts 153–95).
- 15 I refer in particular to Anderson's chapter on "Cultural Roots" which analyses Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), Lizardi's *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816), and Kartodidromo's *Semarang Hitam* (1924), three fictional texts which exemplify what Anderson shows to be "that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (36).
- 16 On 8 May, 1990, Christopher Thomas reported in *The Times*: "India has gained the upper hand in the beleaguered Kashmir Valley after an aggressive two-month security operation by thousands of troops, police and paramilitary forces. The valley is now a fortress. Factories schools, universities, banks and post-offices are mostly closed....The government has closed the valley's three local newspapers....Censorship has been imposed without any official announcement." I quote *The Times* report as indicative of the kind of information that Rushdie might have had access to. *Haroun* was published on 27 September, 1990, and Rushdie would surely have been following news on Kashmir during its composition and in the months leading up to publication.
- 17 As with Rushdie, De Quincey's *oeuvre* is full of abrupt temporal movements between visionary and mundane worlds. In his *Suspiria de Profundis*, he displays a full sense of Anderson's insightful disjunction between theocratic and secular-

national perspectives on time. As the “Dark Interpreter” of his dreams informs him: “All is finite in the present; and even that finite is infinite in its velocity of flight towards death. But in God there is nothing finite; but in God there is nothing transitory; but in God there can be nothing that tends to death. Therefore, it follows—that for God there can be no present. The future is the present of God; and to the future it is that he sacrifices the human present” (15:187).

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