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RAMA KUNDU

RUSHDIE'S STORY OF 'THE SEA OF STORIES': THE TEXT AS AN ECHOING SPACE

*'Nothing comes from nothing, ... no story comes from
nowhere; new stories are born from old – it is the new
combinations that make them new.'*

'Any story worth its salt can handle a little shaking up!'
Rushdie (*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*)

Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), his first post-fatwa novel and generally known as his 'most humorous and accessible' work, authenticates the validity of the claim made in the epigraphs, by presenting such a site where literary and cultural heritages from across the globe come to intersect with and interflow into each other. 'Interflow' should be the better expression in the context since it is the story of a 'Sea of Stories' where currents and cross-currents, fluid streams and floating things are the highlights.

In this context it is useful to remember Rushdie's essay, "Influence"; the author defines 'influence' in terms of the image of an ocean:

'Influence'. The word itself suggests something fluid, something 'flowing in'. This feels right, if only because I have always envisaged the world of imagination not so much as a continent as an ocean. Afloat and terrifyingly free upon these boundless seas, the writer attempts, with his bare hands, the magical task of metamorphosis. Like the figure in the fairy-tale who must spin straw into gold, the writer must find the trick of weaving the waters together until they become land: until, all of a sudden, there is solidity where once there was only flow, shape where there was formlessness; there is ground beneath his feet. (And if he fails, of course, he drowns...). The young writer, perhaps uncertain, perhaps ambitious, probably both at once, casts around for help; and sees, within the flow of the ocean, certain sinuous thicknesses, like ropes, the work of earlier weavers, of sorcerers who swam this way before him. Yes, he can use these 'in-flowings', he can grasp them and wind his own work around them. He knows, now, that he will survive. Eagerly, he begins." (Rushdie, "Influence", *Steps...* 69–70)

Rushdie's concept of 'influence' thus seems to take us right into the heart of the aesthetics of intertextuality as a creative process, generated and sustained by cross-cultural interflow;¹ and the author cites his own novel as an illustration of the process: "In my own novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a young boy actually travels to the ocean of imagination, which is described to him by his guide" (*Steps...70*). The critic Rushdie then quotes at length from the author Rushdie; and the cited passage, for which the author has an apparent fondness, sums up in fascinating visual imagery the creative process of intertextuality itself.

He looked into the water and saw that it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity; and Iff explained that these were the streams of Story, that each coloured strand represented and contained a single tale. Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here, the Ocean of the *Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library in the universe*. And because the stories were held here in the fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories; so that ... the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive. (*Haroun 72*; emphasis added) ²

The passage indeed contains the crux of the novel; because as *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* unfolds we realize it is basically a story about the poetics and aesthetics of intertextuality, of creativity, and the vital role of inspired imagination that connects a text with text/s during the process of creation. Reality and fiction – reality of the fictional – fictionality of the real, and vice versa – interchangeability of the fictional and the real, as also the textuality of a text – these are the issues that have kept the author preoccupied all along.

The bare story-outline, however, would lead one to expect just another children's fantasy, although the core of this fantasy has been made clear from the very start: it is a tentative probing into the basic mystery behind the art of story-telling. Rashid Khalifa, a renowned story-teller, suddenly finds himself unable to spin out stories in the aftermath of his wife's disappearance with a clerk who despises stories as useless untruth. Rashid's son Haroun, while accompanying his father on a trip to 'Dull Lake' (corresponding to the beautiful Dal lake of Kashmir in India), and taking one night's shelter in a houseboat called *Arabian Nights Plus One*, sets out on a mission to retrieve his father's lost power of story-telling, and eventually encounters a series of fantastic adventures in course of which Haroun happens to fight on behalf of the vociferous sunshiny 'Gup' people against the voiceless darkness-ridden 'Chup' people, play the saviour to the 'Ocean of Stories' which was about to be 'killed' by the 'Cultmaster' of darkness and silence, and incidentally rescue a captive princess named Batcheat. As reward the

Gup king gifts him 'happy ending'. Thus on 'waking up' he finds his father restored to his gift of gab, his mother restored to home, and his nameless 'sad city' recovering its name.

Apparently a typical wish-fulfillment story for a child, *Haroun...* has been spun along the paradigmatic curve – dream-adventure-victory- reward – and thus presents replication of an archetypal frame. But it is more than that. In *Haroun...* Rushdie crosses and re-crosses spatial, textual, cultural, and generic frontiers with perfect ease and playfulness to produce a self-conscious self-reflexive intertextual artifact. The novel reflects an artist's colourful imagination, enriched as it is by a global heritage of cultures, which envisions the process of literary creation as a creative recycling of older texts. Indeed, at one level the novel can be considered in the light of a sustained discourse (albeit a mirthful one, and held together by means of delightful fantasy) on the theory and praxis of intertextuality. There are many occasions when the discourse appears to have been foregrounded directly.

For example, as Rashid, the professional story-teller, parts his lips in a plump red smile and pops out "some brand-new saga, complete with sorcery, love-interest, princesses, wicked uncles, fat aunts, mustachioed gangsters in yellow check-pants, fantastic locations, cowards, heroes, fights, and half a dozen catchy, hummable tunes", his son Haroun reasons to himself, "Everything comes from somewhere... so these stories can't simply come out of thin air...?" (17) But whenever he asks his father the latter only makes some strange drinking noises, like '*glug, glug, glug*'. On Haroun's insistence Rashid says in the way of explanation that his stories come "From the great Story Sea.... I drink the warm Story Waters and then I feel full of steam" (17).

In the houseboat on Dull lake the Water Genie Iff, the little blue-bearded creature, discloses his identity as 'Supplier of Story Water from the Great Story Sea' (57); Haroun's head spins at the revelation 'that the Great Story Sea wasn't *only a story*' (57), that it was a reality.

Again, Iff's reply to Haroun's defiant retort, 'Even if you do turn off your Story Water, my father will still be able to tell stories.' (58), directly relates literary inspiration to intertextual interconnection and stresses its vital relevance in creativity. " 'Anybody can tell stories', Iff replied. 'Liars, and cheats, and crook, for example [evocation of Plato and his ancient charge of falsehood against authors!]. But for stories with that Extra Ingredient, ah, for those, even the best storytellers need the Story Waters' " (58).

In this connection Iff, uses the analogy of fuel to describe the function of this interconnection. 'Storytelling needs fuel, just like a car, and if you don't have the Water, you just run out of Steam'(58).

Haroun, the son of Rashid, and thereby the inheritor to a story-teller, wants to reach and probe this source of stories. As Haroun nears 'Kahani', the 'second Moon', – it being a postmodern geography, a second moon is no anachronism– astride his machine bird, he has a glimpse of the surface. It appears to be " a sparkling and seemingly infinite expanse of water... It shone with colour

everywhere, colours in a brilliant riot, colours such as Haroun could never have imagined. And it was evidently a warm ocean; Haroun could see steam rising off it, steam that glowed in the sunlight. He caught his breath” (68). The image suggests not only the wild, chimerical, lively, vibrant beauty of this world of texts; it seeks to capture the element of fluidity – as well as the intoxicating-exhilarating spell– in the textual heritage operating behind an act of creativity as suggested by the drinking imagery. Thus stories are to be ‘drunk’ (71), like ‘wishwater’ from ‘a bottle’ of many-faceted crystal with a little golden cap (70), on drinking of which a golden glow appears all around and inside the drinker, “and everything was very, very still, as if the entire cosmos were waiting upon his commands” (70). This is followed by Rushdie’s favourite passage:

it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents,... etc.
[already cited]

As the trio – Haroun, accompanied by Iff, the water-genie, and Butt, the machine hoopoe – rush in great speed towards the Gup city, with the hoopoe zooming along like a speedboat and thereby spraying Story Streams in every direction, Haroun is apprehensive; he asks,

‘Doesn’t it muddle up the stories?... All this turbulence. It must mix things up dreadfully.’
‘No problem!’ cried Butt the Hoopoe. ‘Any story worth its salt can handle a little shaking up!’ (79)

Does Rushdie thus justify his own act of mixing, of giving a thorough shaking to existing story streams by applying fantasy as his means to explore and capture the mystery of the creative process?

The Floating Gardener, whose name is Mali, [Bengali expression for gardener] explains his job in response to Haroun’s query: “Maintenance... Untwisting twisted Story Streams. Also unlooping same. Weeding. In short Gardening” (83). And Butt the Hoopoe “helpfully” explains, “Think of the Ocean as a head of hair... Imagine it’s as full of Story Streams as a thick mane is full of soft, flowing strands. The longer and thicker a head of hair, the knottier and more tangled it gets. Floating Gardeners, you can say, are like the hairdressers of the Sea of Stories. Brush, clean, wash, condition. So now you know” (83).

Thus while describing the boy’s voyage, the author is also in a way introducing the reader playfully to the nuances of intertextual creativity.

The Plentimaw Fishes, which are called by Iff ‘hunger artists’,³ represent one way of creative absorption of existing texts; Iff explains the denomination: “Because when they 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, Thiefflet; no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old – it is the new combinations that make them new. So you see, our artistic Plentimaw Fishes really create new stories in their digestive systems' (86). The 'fishy' fantasy thus offers an oblique description/explanation of the operation of intertextual processes.

The very notion – highlighted by Iff – that a 'disconnecting tool' can be stolen by a 'thiefflet', but a story cannot be stolen, and that it is only re-born with every fresh intake/borrowing is significant as it leads to the basic issue of intertextuality; whereas the suggestion about the 'Source of the Old Tales' in the Southern zone (86) takes us back to the domain of the history of global cultural intertexts.⁴

It is a beautiful, imaginative vision of the 'Source' that we glimpse through Haroun's eyes. Haroun, while escaping from the Dark Ship of Khattam-Shud, falls through the waters of the Ocean for a long time,

... and then, wonder of wonders, he caught sight of the Source itself.
The Source of Stories was a hole or chasm or crater in the sea-bed, and through that hole, as Haroun watched, the glowing flow of pure, unpolluted stories came bubbling up from the very heart of Kahani. There were so many Streams of Story, of so many different colours, all pouring out of the Source at once, that it looked like a huge underwater fountain of shining white light. (167)

However, even this wonderful heritage can be rendered vulnerable due to the indifference of the common people on the one hand and positive hostility from the forces of authoritarianism on the other, who are bent on 'preventing literature'⁵ in the fashion apprehended by Orwell more than half-a-century ago. Thus Haroun soon finds the sea was being polluted. When they subsequently arrive near the coastline of Chup, "in these coastal waters the Ocean of the Streams of Story was in the filthiest state" with the result that "the poisons had had the effect of muting the colours of the Story Streams, dulling them all down towards grayness; and it was in the colours that the best parts of the stories in those Streams were encoded: their vividness, lightness and vivacity. So the loss of colour was a terrible kind of damage." (122). The oceans in these parts had also lost the warmth, – "that soft, subtle steam that could fill a person with fantastic dreams"(122).

When Haroun and his friends are caught in the 'Web of Night' and drawn towards the black hole of Khattam-Shud, the Ocean around looks bleak and "as cold as death"(146). Iff weeps inconsolably as he realises, "It's our own fault... 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. We lost touch with our beginnings, with our roots, our Wellspring, our Source. Boring, we said, not in de-

mand, surplus to requirements. And now, look, just look! No colour, no life, no nothing. Spoilt!’ ” (146).

Perhaps it is only rational that it is precisely this ‘Source’ area which the Chup-walas (literally meaning people who censor speech, allegorically suggesting Ayatollah Khomeini) have planned to plug, as the Culmaster explains to the terrified boy: “As long as that Source remains unplugged, fresh, unpoisoned, renewing Story Waters will pour upwards into the Ocean, and our work will only be half-done. But when it’s plugged! Ah, then the Ocean will lose its power to resist my anti-stories, and the end will come very soon” (162). While Haroun attains the stature of the ‘hero’ by salvaging the ‘Stories’ from the polluters, the enemies, the story of his adventure becomes in the hand of a postmodern writer a metatext on intertextuality.

* * *

Apart from probing, poetically and by means of fantasy, into the aesthetics/poetics of intertextuality, the book has also been delightfully, openly, hilariously and profusely allusive, referential, and mosaical, as it uninhibitedly and jovially conflates genres while using intertextual echoes, resonances, fusions from and between all sorts of sources, the vast spectrum of cultural heritages across space and time. It may be noted in this connection how, with bubbling mirth, the narrator draws comparison between the art of story-telling and the act of juggling.

Haroun often thought of his father as a juggler, because his stories were really lots of different tales juggled together. (16)

Again, the actual juggling performance of Blabbermouth, the page in the Gup palace, on the palace roof reminds Haroun “of the greatest performances given by his father, Rashid Khalifa, ... ‘I always thought storytelling was like juggling,’ he finally found the voice to say. ‘You keep a lot of different tales in the air, and juggle them up and down, and if you’re good you don’t drop any. So maybe juggling is a kind of storytelling, too’ ” (110).

The supposedly trivializing comparison between storytelling and juggling gains significance in the theoretical context of the discourse which involves the idea of story-telling as a balancing act towards harmonizing the varied heritages that an author has got to handle. (It may also be considered a tentative experimentation of the author to find a written equivalent to the form of popular oral narration prevalent in India through ages, which, as a matter of course, goes on intermixing tales and genres.⁶) At one point Rushdie himself, for instance, takes an abrupt short-cut from the fairy-tale/folk-tale/romance pattern to modern cartoon strips paradigm as Haroun, owing to the pollution of the story stream, fails to achieve “as specified” (74) in the Romance tradition, and instead of heroically storming into the ‘Tower’ to rescue the princess, becomes a spider desperately crawling up the stone walls in the fashion of the popular cartoon film hero— ‘Spiderman’ (in the late 1980s), while at the same time reminding the reader of Kafka’s famous story, ‘Metamorphosis’, (‘Kakafka’ 129). The narrator takes care to point out furthermore: “and because the princess in this particular story had recently

had a haircut and therefore had no long tresses to let down (unlike the heroine of Princess Rescue Story G/1001/RIM/777/M (w)I, better known as 'Rapunzel'); Haroun as the hero is, therefore, required to climb up the outside wall of the tower by clinging to the cracks between the stones with his "bare hands and feet" (73), which are eventually chopped off by the princess with the help of a kitchen knife. Rushdie would thus juggle at ease between ancient and postmodern texts.

However, what strikes the reader most is the unceasing music of endless echoes; the text of Rushdie's novel seems to be an echoing space quivering with tremors from countless other texts. The very title of the book, for instance, is resonant with evocative associations – of one historic person and two legendary books: Haroun-al-Rashid, the legendary Khalifa of the Arabian tales, and two legendary reservoirs of stories – the ancient Indian story series *Kathâ Sarit Sâgar*, or the Sea of Stories, and the *Arabian Nights*. In the very first page of the book we are told about Rashid Khalifa, who is "*the* storyteller" (15; emphasis added). Haroun is the only child of the storyteller. Thus together they evoke Haroun-al-Rashid, a fabulous character as well as a historical figure (Caliph of Bagdad : 786–809 A.D.), who is here split up between the father and the son.

Again, "fabulous winged creatures *out of legends*" (64; emphasis added) flap their miniature wings on the palm of the Water Genie, as Haroun is given the option to choose among them for his vehicle to the Gup City.

Subsequently, on drinking the 'Story Water' from the golden cup Haroun acquires an imaginative vision, but it is not exactly as it should be, because of the pollution which has already started. "He was, so to speak, looking out through the eyes of *the* young hero of *the* story" (73; emphasis added). Who is this 'young hero', and of what 'story'? Apparently it is the paradigmatic hero of the paradigmatic tale of romance and adventure, which the author evokes with simultaneous nostalgia and irony. Haroun 'finds' himself on a landscape which looks like a gigantic chessboard. Every black square on the board has a monster, obviously unreal/surreal grotesque figures whom we meet in fantasies and children's tales – including "two-tongued snakes and lions with three rows of teeth, and four-headed dogs and five-headed demon kings and so on" (73). Haroun is 'the young hero', or rather he has the 'eyes' of the "young hero of the story"[which story? Is it again the paradigmatic story of all archetypal tales of child-heroes?]. At the same time he is also the detached watcher/voyeur, – "It was like being in the passenger seat of an automobile"(73). It is, furthermore, a surrealistic combination of the real and fantasy worlds. So Haroun just 'watches' from his passenger seat of an automobile the hero, that is, he himself, dispatching one monster after another and advancing up the chessboard towards "the white stone tower at the end." We should not miss the article; it is "*the*" stone tower, not "a". That means we know this tower (though it has been transformed from its original verticality in the ancient/medieval tales to the horizontality of the chessboard, i.e. cartographic imagination of later times); it is already firmly placed – as much as 'the young hero' – in the textual world of fantasy. It is, therefore, unmistak-

ably recognizable and familiar down to its details. This is the tower[of ivory or whatever] we have met so often in stories, poems, legends, myths, medieval romance as well as in postmodern children's tale [Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1979), for example,] and real life [including the infamous Tower of London or the observatory tower of Jeremy Bentham's '*Panopticon*' prison of the imperial era.⁷]. The tower thus corresponds to, and hails from, that textual world of epic/romance/ history. "At the top of the tower was (what else but) a single window, out of which there gazed (who else but) a captive princess" (73). By inserting the parenthetic clauses Rushdie is openly and gleefully evoking the conglomeration of associations crowding up behind the immediate context of the specific story, while Haroun is transferred from the real world to the textual world, where he is expected to perform his textbook role. Here Rushdie is simultaneously bubbling with mirth, and plumbing profound depths of the process of imagination, which operates along trans-textual, trans-cultural, trans-spatial and trans-chronological axes. "What Haroun was experiencing, though he didn't know it, was Princess Rescue Story Number S/1001/ZHT/420/41 (r) xi".

Evocative echoes continue to crowd into the narration and the referentiality of the deceptively simple texture of the narration becomes obvious to any perceptive reader. In fact the effect, the fun and the charm of the book depend much on the reader's ability to recognize these echoes. The echoes are often very simple and refer to quite well-known items, thereby stirring up a range of familiar associations. For example, the houseboat in which Rashid and Haroun are put up is "called *Arabian Nights Plus One*" (50), and their escort boasts, "Even in all the Arabian Nights you will never have a night like this." (51) Even the details of this boat correspond to evocative images in the most well-known tales of the world. "Each of its windows had been cut out in the shape of a fabulous bird, fish or beast: the Roc of Sinbad the Sailor (*Arabian Nights!*), the Whale That Swallowed Men (Leviathan! Moby Dick!), a Fire-Breathing Dragon (Is it the one Jason met! The dragon is also a common enemy to be confronted by all East/South-East Asian fairy tale heroes.), and so on.

The canonical texts which have been appropriated by Bolo, the Prince of Gupland, are all children's tales excepting *Romeo and Juliet*. The sources are too well-known to escape the reader and hence the fun of the appropriation. While hurrying for the Throne Room Haroun observes that the regulation rectangular tunic of the Page, accompanying him, carries a text called 'Bolo and the Golden Fleece'. Eventually he notices the tunics of many other Pages of the Royal Guard carrying 'half-familiar stories' (99). These are the tales of 'Bolo and the Wonderful Lamp', 'Bolo and the Forty Thieves', 'Bolo the Sailor', 'Bolo and Juliet', 'Bolo in Wonderland' (99). Apparently Bolo has appropriated stories from as varied sources as the Greco-Roman tales, the Arabian tales, tales from Shakespeare, and even from Lewis Carroll.

While a landscape looking "like a giant chessboard" (72) evokes Alice's wonderland, the pair of Plentimaw fishes are called Bagha and Goopy. This is a reference to the immensely delightful pair of boys from a film for children by Satyajit

Ray,⁸ which was again an adaptation of his illustrious grandfather's story. Upendrakishore Roychowdhury was the grand pioneer in the genre of children's literature in 19th century Bengal; he himself acted somewhat like the 'Floating Gardener' of Rushdie's novel by salvaging a lot of lost folk tales/oral tales of Bengal which were already down and out at the advent of an imperial education, curriculum and culture in his contemporary Bengal.

'Pleasure-domes' (83) is an obvious echo of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, while the idea of the 'Library' (88) army⁹ carries the subtle hint at Umberto Eco's *The name of the Rose*. The stopped clocks, along with Haroun's fixation about eleven minutes carries echo of Dickens's *Great Expectations* – the clocks at Mrs Havisham's house, all stopped to arrest the traumatizing moment. Significantly at the end when happiness is restored Haroun also gets a new clock as his birthday gift, fully operational, giving the right time (211).

The intricate labyrinthine palace – as Blabbermouth admits: 'It's a *complicated* palace and we're a little lost' (107) – would automatically remind a reader of Borges.¹⁰

By pursuing, fighting and eventually thwarting the enemies' evil design on the 'Source of Story Streams' Haroun emerges as a figure in whom so many 'monomythic' heroes [*à la* Joseph Campbell¹¹] from the ancient legends as well as our contemporary mythologies – the *Star War* trilogy, *The Matrix*, the Harry Potter series, etc – get conflated. Haroun may be seen as re-enacting the 'monomyth' part by part from the moment he flies out from houseboat in quest of his father's lost power of storytelling till his return home. Like the typical monomythic hero, Haroun accepts a challenge, fights, and returns home with the reward. He not only restores the endangered 'Sea', while incidentally rescuing the 'captive princess' as well, but also, on waking up and coming back home they land amidst a cheerful crowd who have been restored to happiness; happily dancing on the flooded streets under heavy rains, the reason being as the policeman, floating off, tells them brightly, "We remembered the city's name. ... Kahani... Isn't it a beautiful name for a city? It means 'story', you know." (209).

The anonymity of Haroun's city which is "so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name" (15) has, again, obvious allusions to Michael Ende's famous book *Un-endlich Geschichte* (Neverending Story 1979), – a book which has been evoked by Rushdie at a deeper level of suggestion as well; Ende's book projects a realm called 'Fantastica' which is in the imminent danger of being swallowed up by an advancing flood of 'nothingness', and is saved at the eleventh hour by the mortal boy hero, Bastian, who can endow a new name to the 'Childlike Empress' of the realm, living in the 'ivory tower'. The parallels between the ventures and targets of Haroun and Bastian are apparent.

Rushdie shows by his very referential style here that you cannot speak without being allusive, that a text is necessarily an echoing space. Among the many other almost countless echoes, big and small, and invariably enjoyable, are: the *Panchatantra* tales of bird and peacock, bird and turtle behind Haroun's changing his

turtle for his father's peacock (54); the little fellow who has come to 'disconnect' Rashid's 'Story tap' is himself a creature from the nursery rhyme world who can sport a full set of whiskers of the palest, most delicate shade of sky blue (55); also 'blue-beard' (55) is a sly pun referring to 'blue bird' [*l' la Maeterlinck*¹²]; and the little man discloses his identity as 'I am the Water Genie, Iff'. The Arabian Nights abound with 'Genies' of all sorts, including Water genies. Thus the little man has a big genealogy.

On the other hand the wonderful mute 'Shadow-Warrior', fiercely engaged in fighting with his own shadow, hails from the age-old tradition of ancient Indian dramaturgy. Only Rashid can get at the meaning of the Shadow-warrior's repeated words: "Murder. Spock Obi New Year", and exclaims: 'He's been trying to introduce himself! *Mudra. Speak Abhinaya*. That's what he's been saying. "Abhinaya" is the name of the most ancient Gesture Language of all, which it just so happens I know' (130). This has direct allusion to ancient Indian or Sanskrit dramaturgy (f la Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra* (2nd Century A.D.). As Mudra begins to 'speak' Haroun notices that "the Language of Gesture involved more than just the hands. The position of the feet was important, too, and eye movements as well. In addition, Mudra possessed a phenomenal degree of control over each and every muscle in his green-painted face. He could make bits of his face twitch and ripple in the most remarkable way; and this, too, was a part of his 'speaking', his Abhinaya." (131). The Shadow Warrior's martial dance can also be related to Sukumar Ray's absurdist Bengali poem, "*Châyabâj*" describing a man wrestling with shadows .

The dark ship (148), which is terrifying yet unsubstantial and necessarily belongs to the ambivalent domain of myths, can be traced as far back as the ark of Noah, and at the same time to the host of voyage literature across centuries from the *Odyssey* to Jules Verne's submarine. The Dark Ship is further darkened by the accumulated shadows of the many many pirate ships crowding into the voyage literature and history of four imperial centuries.

Whereas the Walrus (58), (90), (199) and the mega chessboard carry echoes from *Alice...*, the Eggheads (58) of P2C2E evoke *Gulliver's...* The first sounds the silent 'shadow warrior' can manage to utter through his gurgling and coughing are meant to be mischievous twists on the author's part targeting two canonized story-tellers of Russia and Germany: " 'Gogogol,' he gurgled. 'Kafkafka,' he coughed." (129).

The passage introducing the shores of Chup ["On those twilit shores, no birds sang. No wind blew. No voice spoke. Feet falling on shingle made no sound, as if the pebbles were coated in some unknown muffling material. The air smelt stale and stenchy. Thorn-bushes clustered around white-barked, leafless trees, trees like fallow ghosts" (122)] can be compared to so many passages (where a lost prince would arrive at a dead land) in the *Grandma's Bag* or *Grandpa's Bag* of Bengal.¹³ At the same time, it is also the dead land, the cactus land, where only "the many shadows seemed ... alive" (122). They even combat with each other, evoking 'the ignorant armies clashing' in the dark night of Arnold's "Dover Beach".

Again, no reader could possibly fail to catch the echo of Coleridge's famous line 'Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink' behind 'Water, water everywhere, nor any trace of land' (68). The ancient mariner, it may be noted, has emerged as an archetype of the storyteller who can hold the listener spellbound by means of his stories. The mariner is also the paradigmatic English voyager of his times (as presented by Defoe, Swift, Ballantyne, Stevenson, *et al*) who would set sail from Bristol, go down towards the South Seas, get lost, and then come back, albeit a changed man, to tell his stories. Thus the evocation of Coleridge's canonical poem – albeit in the oblique and muted manner – is in tune with the voyage of Haroun, while enriching the orchestra of echoes that produces the wonderful harmony of the text.

Even Haroun's choice of the 'Hoopoe' from the "fabulous winged creatures out of legends" (64) flapping miniature wings on the Water Genie's palm is made to resonate with textual echoes; the Genie is pleased with Haroun's choice, because, "in the old stories the Hoopoe is the bird that leads all other birds through many dangerous places to their ultimate goal" (64). In his essay, "Step across this Line" Rushdie mentions "a hoopoe" who is the "messenger" of "the great bird-god, the Simurgh"; the hoopoe is sent by Simurgh to summon all the birds "to his legendary home far away atop the circular mountain of Qâf, which girdled the earth." (Rushdie: *Steps...* 408).

In addition to all these fine nuances the narration is thickly interspersed with intertextual references to all sorts of children's reading, both traditional and modern: from fairy tales across the globe to the *Alice* books, Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (209), Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1979), from Grimm's fairy-tales to *Arabian Nights*, from princess rescue stories, chivalry romance to contemporary science fiction, from adventure and voyage tales to today's comic strips on the TV screen and even hints of adult literature (Gogol, Kafka, Zola).¹⁴

Like his favorite storyteller Italo Calvino Rushdie has kept "one authorial foot in narrative antiquity" while resting the other "in the high-tech narrative present" (Barth). Thus echoes drawn from a vast spectrum of sources are not necessarily always celebrative/evocative but can also be ironic/subversive departures from the original; for example, after drinking from the golden cup of Iff "What Haroun was experiencing, though he didn't know it, was Princess Rescue Story Number S/1001/ZHT/420/41 (r) xi" (73); innovatively fantastic yet pleasantly parodying scholarly studies of folklores in the typical computer programming format.

"The princess in this particular story" too – quite appropriately – "had recently had a haircut and therefore had no long tresses to let down (unlike the heroine of Princess Rescue Story G/1001/RIM/777/M(w)I, better known as 'Rapunzel')" (73) – thus jovially underscoring the points of fusion and fission between the specific new tale and the countless old tales flowing into it.

Other texts of machine and technology-oriented literature and lexicon, – language of the *Matrix*, Spielberg, Cyber-era – peep through the texture as the narrator makes fun of the computer language/terminologies – by stripping the terms

of the mystery that is lent to them by sophisticated scientific assumptions and postures. “P2C2E” thus stands for “Process too Complicated to Explain”. The Gup City “laboratory technicians” in white coats – “the Eggheads of P2C2E House, the Geniuses who operated the Machines Too Complicated To Describe (or M2C2Ds)” (90), which made possible the P2C2E or Processes Too Complicated to Explain – are but delightfully appropriate cogs in the wheels of this mock-science fiction world.

The reader is invited to have quick shifts to and from the romance world of the Captive Princess Rapuznel – the story of the beautiful princess with long golden hair, who is captured by a witch but ultimately gets freedom and happiness with a good prince – to the science fiction zone of machines and robots, albeit very lively and interesting ones. The machine bird, again, becomes intertextually intertwined with the ‘winged horses’, ‘flying turtles’, and all such fictional creatures of children’s tales as well as of legends and myths, with whom we have been familiar through ages all over the world.

On the eve of the war with the Chupwalas Prince Bolo too rides a “mechanical flying horse” (115), while General Kitab, “mounted on a winged mechanical horse very like Bolo’s, was flitting from Barge-Bird to Barge-Bird...” (119). Haroun’s voyage on the back of a bird-like machine, – the idea of flying on the back of a bird or some flying object – has, again, a long tradition behind it. Folktales, fairytales across cultures make abundant use of it.¹⁵ Even the imaginary creatures mentioned by Iff (in p. 63) are all flying creatures, – “winged horse, flying turtle, airborne whale, space serpent, aeromouse... or Imaginary Flying Organism” (63) – though they may have been made of impossible hybrids which can be produced only in the crucible of one’s imagination, an imagination which is simultaneously vitalized by science and enriched by layers and layers of memories from folktales across the world.

In order to lead the reader to the fantasy world the author layers popular science fiction devices upon familiar fairytale paradigms. The use of the expansion/compression device, for example, so common in science fiction, also harks back to Carroll’s *Alice...*. Whereas Khatam – Shud grows and grows until he is one hundred and one feet tall, and then “with a little laugh” shrinks back to his earlier “clerkish form” (156), the tiny hoopoe, thrown by Iff into the Dull lake grows “large, as large as a double bed.” (65). The author, however, takes care to throw hints that these are not exactly mythical or even organic creatures; rather they are creatures of the Disney Land era, and are operated/operating according to advanced technological processes like the ‘P2C2E’.

* * *

It is interesting to note how the range of varied motifs underlying this apparently simple story, again, send back their tentacles to a wide spectrum of popular well-known and not-so-well-known sources. To cite a few: frontier-crossing, transformation motif, Ithaca or coming home, and the quest motif, which is common to children’s books – from Charles Kingsley’s *Water-Babies* to Carroll’s *Alice* tales

– as well as an archetypal motif, provides the narrative frame.

The voyaging-questing hero, with a long line of such heroes crowding up behind the figure, also stands for a special emblem in Rushdie's vision; as the author writes, "In all quests the voyager is confronted by terrifying guardians of territory, an ogre here, a dragon there. So far and no further, the guardian commands. But the voyager must refuse the other's definition of the boundary, must transgress against the limits of what fear prescribes. He steps across that line. The defeat of the ogre is an opening in the self, an increase in what it is possible for the voyager to be. ... The idea of overcoming, of breaking down the boundaries that hold us in and surpass the limits of our own natures, is central to all the stories of the quest. The Grail is a chimera. The quest for the Grail is the Grail" (Rushdie, "Steps..." 409–410). Thus in a way, Haroun's quest and voyage is also a story of stepping across line[s]. Furthermore, Haroun is not only a questing hero, but also the popular boy hero in the world's legends.¹⁶ Haroun's voyage thus intertextually embraces and reworks a range of archetypal themes and motifs.

The 'space' and historicity of the book are also richly evocative of textual resonances. In the simulated 'wonderland' of the story Haroun travels through ancient and postmodern spaces. The imaginative space of the story – with its surrealistic land and watery zones, the two Moons, the mutually exclusive spheres of light and darkness, weird 'twilight strips', etc. – is resonant with echoes from classic fantasies like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Alice...* or *Wizard of Oz* as also from postmodernist wonderworlds like Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1979), Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), or the wonderfully lawless spaces of Calvino's *Cosmicomics* or Borges's 'dream-contaminated' reality, his 'City of the Immortals'. No wonder that Haroun should want a little help with the "geography" (79), since it is a strange geography with strange directions, latitudes, longitudes, axes, poles, etc., reflecting the boundless course of imagination as it roams freely.

Alongside this fantastic geography there is also a grotesque historical text of our times which is clearly audible through this charming fantasy, a text that still hangs like an invisible Damocles on the author's head; it is the sword of censorship or *fatwa* which is no laughing matter for its target. As Nadine Gordimer observes, "Censorship is never over for those who have experienced it. It is a brand on the imagination that affects the individual who has suffered it, forever." (Cited by Chandran: 1). Haroun...coming out of the aftermath of the trauma and compulsive exile that followed in the wake of Khomeini's death-verdict [issued on 14 February 1989] on the author of *The Satanic Verses*, illustrates the point. Rushdie refuses to remain permanently scarred and therefore chooses to laugh it down in metaphors in the Borgesian way.¹⁷ It is the story of the triumph of the writer over forces of silence.¹⁸ This courageous act of daring on the author's part, thereby, registers the historicity of the story as well.

Rushdie claims, "By using what is old, and adding to it some new thing of our own, we make what is new. In *The Satanic Verses* I tried to answer the question, how does newness enter the world? Influence, the flowing of the old into the new, is one part of the answer." (*Step Across this Line*. Vintage, 2003, p. 73)

The spell of silence following the aftermath of *The Satanic Verses* was eventually broken by the author's tale to an 'ideal reader', i.e., his own son. Rushdie's [or Rashid's] Haroun also emerges to be a reader of many other texts to which and through which he can relate and make meaning of his experience, while the author reaches out – through Haroun – to embrace the great literary/cultural heritages without which creativity snaps, gets 'disconnected' from the 'sources', since Rushdie too, much like Roland Barthes, would hold that writers did not 'invent' but offered a new mix of old stories. On arriving at the 'Deep North of Kahani' Haroun is fascinated by the colourful lively ocean: "Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of Stories, and ... all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here" (72).¹⁹

As Rushdie uninhibitedly indulges in and enjoys the game of sending the echoes in so many different directions with obvious pleasure, he also invites the reader (without whose participation intertextuality loses its meaning) to share his delight by recognizing the allusions or suggestions. The enormous range of echoes helps to place the story in a wide spectrum and carry a vast world of evocations, suggestions, meanings, imagination, vision, through a rich intertextual orchestra that reaches out across cultures, lands and ages.

Rushdie has addressed and celebrated the 'infinite interconnectedness of things' (*à la* Barthes) by means of a mildly ironic and delightful recycling of stock images, traditional narrative devices, and countless echoes of what Umberto Eco would call 'the already said'. Indeed, how could an author create new stories unless s/he subscribed to the Ocean of Stories, 'the already said'?

Rushdie concludes the essay, "Influence" with two claims: "I have sought to portray a little of the cultural cross-pollination without which literature becomes parochial and marginal"; and "... of influence and creative simulation there can really be no end." (*Step... 76*). *Haroun...* can be seen as an adequate illustration of the vision put into practice.

Notes

¹ The term 'intertextuality' is used here with its multiple connotations, including generic, archeological, creative and textural interconnection of literary texts operating at the various levels of transposition, interference, dialogue and interdependence. As Buchbinder observes: "Because authors are readers also of 'texts' of many different kinds by other 'authors', the working of the principle of intertextuality in any given text becomes complicated and subtle. Intertextual reference extends not only through the diachronic dimension of meaning, but also through the synchronic. Thus the author becomes a channel for cultural preoccupations and concerns. In a way the culture writes the literary text by means of the author" (Buchbinder 46).

² One is reminded here of Umberto Eco's famous passage:

Until then I had thought each book spoke of the things, human or divine, that lie outside books. Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed ... the place

of a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors. (Eco. 286; emphasis added).

3 In Bengal a group of artists emerged in the 1970s, who called themselves “hungries”, called for uninhibited representation of psycho-sexual urge; their leader Moloy Banerjee had even been arrested and kept confined for a brief period on charge of obscenity.

4 Walter Cohen claims in his essay “*Don Quixote* and the Intercontinental Novel” “the origins of the European novel are to be located outside Europe” while “paddling upstream briefly in search of sources... of the ocean of fiction”(Para 2); Cohen also argues, “European fiction of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries apparently continues this multicontinental perspective. Behn’s *Oroonoko*, Defoe’s *Captain Singleton* and *Robinson Crusoe*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, Johnson’s *Rasselas*, and Voltaire’s *Candide* all crucially depend on the non-European world for their plot, outlook, or both” (Para 23).

Jenaro Talens observes: “a literary discourse establishes horizontal (syntagmatic) relationships with the global discourse of literature in its own language and ... other languages; and vertical (paradigmatic) relationships with the ensemble of discourses – political, religious, economic (that is to say cultural) – composing a culture spatially and temporally determined.” (“Writing Against Simulacrum”. *Postmodern Literary Theory*[Ed. Niall Lucy]. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. p. 337]

5 Orwell, George. “The Prevention of Literature” (1946). Included in *Collected Essays*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1961.

6 Rushdie speaks, 14 years after writing *Haroun...*, on “the question of oral storytelling. I remember in Kerala listening to a very popular oral storyteller in front of a very very big crowd. And the thing struck me about how he was telling the stories. He was breaking all the rules which we are taught about how to hold the audience’s interest. These are the rules best expressed by the caterpillar in *Alice in Wonderland*, when he advises Alice to start at the beginning, go on till you reach the end and then stop. But the old storyteller does not do this. He goes in great loops and circles. He will introduce a story which may have some mythological origin, but then he will introduce a local political story, or a personal family anecdote, he will sing a song, or he will tell a rude joke, and there’s an endless process of digression and self-interruption. And it feels like a kind of *narrative juggling act*... At first it seems almost random. But then you remember that this is a really ancient form, and, I thought to myself, supposing it is actually evolved into this, because this is the best way to hold the people’s attention... this kind of juggling form... this is the opposite of what we’re taught. What would be the written-down equivalent of that? I thought there must be some kind of a literary version of that gymnastic act. And doing it in a way that people find ... pleasurable and fun and enjoyable, that people get in on it and have fun with it. And that gave me a clue of where to go...”(Rushdie 2004; emphasis added.)

7 Foucault’s famous re-contextualisation of Bentham’s concept of ‘panopticon’ in his essay “Discipline and Punish” (1975).

8 Satyajit Ray’s film *Gupi Gâin Bâghâ Bâin* (Gupi the singer and Bagha the drummer) [1969], an adaptation of the story by the same title from his grandfather Upendrakishore’s collection of the folk tales of Bengal.

9 The ‘Library’ as army has been indeed elaborately worked out. “The Guppee Army – or ‘Library’ – had completed the process of ‘Pagination and Collation’ – that is to say, arranging itself in an orderly fashion” (115); and the General of the army is called “Kitab”(meaning book).

10 Borges, J.L., “The Immortals”; *Labyrinths*. London: Penguin, 1987, p. 139.

11 Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1948) uses the concept of the ‘monomyth’ [Note – “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a victory is won: the hero

- comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomyth>) to describe the common pattern of the mythological ‘hero’s journey’ involving the three stages of Departure, Initiation and Return; the pattern, ancient as it is, is to be found in many of our contemporary Mythologies.
- 12 Maurice Maeterlinck (1862 – 1949), Belgian Symbolist poet, playwright, and essayist, who was awarded in 1911 the Nobel Prize for Literature; closely associated with the French literary movement called symbolism, which used symbols to represent ideas and emotions. Maeterlinck’s most famous and popular play is *L’Oiseau bleu /The Blue Bird* (1908), an allegorical fantasy conceived as a play for children, it portrays a search for happiness in the world.
- 13 The two titles refers to the two wonderful 19th century collections by Dakhsinaranjan MitraMajumdar of traditional oral tales of Bengal which were used to be told by grandmas and grandpas to the kids at the day’s end.
- 14 Blubbermouth’s taunting remark to haroun –“You think a place has to be miserable and dull as ditchwater before you believe it’s real” (114) – is an overt dig at the Zolaesque naturalism.
- 15 “One day Merlin changes the boy [Arthur] into a bird and ... they fly over the countryside...” (Rushdie : *Steps*... 411)
- 16 The teenage prince riding a *pakshiraj* (winged horse) and taking on demons in Indian fairy tales; David-Goliath myth of child-hero successfully taking on a monster/ oppressor; Lord Krishna in Hindu mythology taking on demons-ogres /human villains; Gupi Bagha, playfully defeating the forces of evil in Satyajit Ray’s film.
- 17 J.L.Borges: “Censorship is the mother of metaphor.” (Cited Chandran: 1)
- 18 Madelena Gonzalez’s recent book, *Fiction after the Fatwa: Salman Rushdie and the Charm of Catastrophe* (2004), which examines Rushdie’s achievement since the fatwa, argues that Rushdie’s constant questioning of the fictional form together with the unique language he uses to articulate it have opened up new opportunities and further possibilities for writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.
- 19 As Italo Calvino, Rushdie’s favorite author, would say, “Literature is one of a society’s instruments of social awareness... an essential instrument, because its origins are connected with the origins of various types of knowledge, various forms of critical thought” (Calvino 97).

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