

Paper Abstract

The Many Uses of Stories that Aren't Even True: Construction of a Postmodern
Postcolonial Discourse in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

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Much ado has been made over whether or not to hyphenate post-colonial and what that hyphenation signifies. As Elleke Boehmer notes, the hyphen in post-colonial signifies societies that were once but are no longer colonies whereas absent the hyphen the term signifies a critique of colonialism preferably written by a colonial subject (341). When writing about Salman Rushdie, the hyphen is, at least chronologically, appropriate as Rushdie was born in 1947—the year of Indian independence, the recognition of Pakistan as a separate country, and hence the year when post becomes a literal prefix. Whether or not Rushdie's 1990 children's novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is both post-colonial, being written long after the British relinquished control of their former colonies, and postcolonial in the sense that it expresses contra-colonialism is debatable as there are many ways of reading *Haroun* and many ways of conceiving counter-colonialism. For instance, many have read *Haroun* as an allegory of the importance of freedom of speech, a reading that highlights how *Haroun* reproduces an ideology the Occident prides itself on and has historically used to conceal its power, thus envisioning the book as post-colonial but perhaps not postcolonial. Another such related reading is of *Haroun* as a thinly veiled autobiographical allegory of Rushdie's own survival after being

condemned to death by a fatwa placed on him by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Such a reading can be nothing but post-colonial, as the ousting of the Shah by Khomeini was the ousting of the neo-colonial government of Iran. However, this reading is problematic from postcolonial lenses that envision the issue in terms of binary opposites, as it places the novel and Rushdie firmly on the side of the Occident, as Khomeini and Islam are constructed as the evils that legitimate the West's continued presence in the Middle East.

On the other hand, not all postcolonialism is conceived of in such binary terms. To be sure, some, including Derek Walcott and Rushdie himself, define postcolonial literature as a struggle to construct or reclaim a post-colonial identity from the shards of a decimated pre-colonial past amalgamated with elements from the colonizing culture and the colonized experience. *In this paper I will argue that it is in this sense that we can read Rushdie's tale as participating in an essentially post-modernist postcolonial theory since it allegorically represents the processes by which truth is 1) always a product of discourse linked to the maintenance of or desire for power (of the oppressor or the oppressed, respectively) and 2) without origin(ality) but, rather, a pastiche of discourses. Yet, significantly, Rushdie's story also functions 3) to deconstruct the binaries upon which colonialism operates and 4) imagines a kind of discourse that could resist co-optation by oppressive forces.*