

Taking a closer read at haroun and the sea of stories essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



1. Identify & explain 5 symbols found in text.

Although Haroun and the sea of stories is a children's literature, symbols which overlap as archetypes are used to make this novel contain a deeper meaning and be just as enjoyable for adults.

Weather in this story symbolizes the current feeling or emotion of the characters. Dull, gloomy days often occurred when the character is depressed: " this sudden mist positively stank of sadness and gloom" (47).

This symbol is clearly evident when Haroun traveled to Moody land, " the sun would shine all night is there were enough joyful people around, and it would go on shining until the endless sunshine got on their nerves; then an irritable night would fall a night full of mutterings and discontent, in which the air felt too thick to breathe" (47).

The image of the sunset symbolizes a hope for a happy ending, where the sun sets seems to represent a paradise: "...a vista of the Valley of K with its golden fields and silver mountains...- a view spread out like a magic carpet," (34). When you see the sunset, " no man can be sad who looks upon that sight". (34)

The Ocean of the Streams of Story symbolizes the human brain, this is where the " streams" and " currents" of ideas flow and originate. We don't just use our brain to store data, but we create and execute new ideas by using this compiled information: " unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive" (72)

The story water that is contained in the Ocean symbolizes inspiration and our imagination. Everybody needs inspiration, “ for stories with that Extra Ingredient...even the best storytellers need the Story Waters.” (58), however if you’d like to make a great story, you would need to consume story water, or have a greater imagination.

The character Princess Batcheat’s name is the equivalent of “ chit chat” or talking, and in this novel, she symbolizes the freedom of speech. Rushdie shows this by having the Chups kidnap her, or taking away the freedom of “ chit-chat”. This is further shown when it was mentioned that the Cultmaster wanted to sew her lips together to stop her singing; again he shows how speech is prohibited.

2. Explain 3 references in the novel to specific political events or figures

As this novel is allegorical, Rushdie made indirect references to several historical events and figures. The purpose of Chattergy’s wall was not mentioned, however in history, walls are generally used to keep enemies out such as the Great Wall of China. Chattergy’s wall seemed to share characteristics as the Berlin Wall that was first built in Germany in 1961; it was used to separate East and West Germany. The first Berlin Wall was not very strong, and had to be rebuilt twice; Chattergy’s wall in Haroun was also easily damaged as Rashid reported: “ I came to Chattergy’s Wall, the Wall of Force; and sirs, it is in bad repair. There are any holes, and movement through it is easily achieved.” (102).

The story also referred to the past religious leader and dictator of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini. A fatwa was placed upon Rushdie's head because his book, *The Satanic Verses* was against Islam, the Prophet and the Koran. Rushdie felt as if his freedom of speech was being taken away, so he used the character Khattam Shud, the Cultmaster in Haroun to represent Ayatollah: " He is the Arch-Enemy of all Stories, even of Language itself. He is the Prince of Silence and the Foe of Speech" (79). Rushdie showed his opposition to the Ayatollah by using exaggerations as it would appeal to children more: " in the old days the Cultmaster, Khattam-Shud, preached hatred only towards stories and fancies and dreams: but now he has become more severe, and opposes Speech for any reason at all." (101).

Today in most countries, certain media elements such as nudity, violence, etc. are often censored for most of the time, good purposes. However in some countries that are run by a communist government, censorship can be at an extreme where information that may interfere with political issues is completely prohibited. An example is the June 9th, 1985 student demonstration at Tian An Men square in China. The government attempted to stop the media from exposing this event to the public; they also attempted to wipe out any written records of this afterwards. This is similar to how certain Chupwalas in Haroun stitched their mouths, or vowed to remain silent under the orders of Khattam Shud who tried to stop the relay of information in his " kingdom" so to speak.

3. Detail 3 instances in the text where the power of story is alluded to.

Explain

The power of story is often referred to in this novel. For example, on page 72, “ the stories were held here in 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...It was not dead but alive.” This means that there are many variations to one idea or one story. Old tales combined with imagination can be made into new pieces of work. “ no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old-it is the new combinations that make them new.”(86) There is an endless possibility and no limitations on what the story is about because new ones can always be made.

Whether it's the adventure or the escape from reality that stories provide, or that fact that it takes your mind away from tension, some people, and personally I believe that stories have the ability to relieve stress. The power of story is implied in Haroun: “ you can offer [Story Water] to a young fellow who's feeling blue, so that the magic of the story can restore his spirits.” (72) Rushdie mentions how stories can lift people's moods by maybe teaching morals or provide inspiration.

The Cultmaster said: “ inside ever single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all.”(161). The power of story is clearly evident here because even the powerful evil ruler of the Chupwalas cannot control the story-world simply because everyone's story-world is different and unique because everyone's imagination and perception varies. A story can have a thousand “ faces” as a result of who reads it.

5. Haroun can be viewed as biographical. Explain with 3 textual examples

Rushdie experienced writers' block after writing the novel *The Satanic Verses* which is similar to how Rashid lost his ability to tell stories at the beginning. Haroun's 11 minutes of concentration can also be compared to Rushdie's writers' block. Both Haroun and Rashid overcame this obstacle at the end; Rashid re-subscribed to story-water therefore his inspiration returned, while Haroun broke through the 11 minutes while he was trying to save the Ocean.

Rushdie had attempted to do promote and show the importance of freedom of speech in *The Satanic Verses* but was condemned for doing so. This novel was a second attempt to show readers, especially to young readers the importance of free speech, " what is the point of giving persons Freedom of Speech, if you then say they must not utilize same? And is not the Power of Speech the greatest Power of all? Then surely it must be exercise to the full?" (119).

In *Haroun*, Rushdie incorporated his persona in various characters. In Prince Bolo, Rushdie explained why he had to go into hiding by showing his need and desire to escape the fatwa that was threatening him, and then deal with the larger issue, censorship afterwards. When faced with the decision, Bolo first exclaims " To war, to war! For Batcheat, only Batcheat!" (105) and then later adds " Yes, yes...The Ocean also; naturally, ofcourse, very well" (105): his first thoughts are for himself and his own situation; he'd rather save his future first and then think about the Ocean, the larger issue.

6. Identify & explain 2 archetypes in the novel. Relate them either to the bible, mythology, or classical literature

An archetype is a model where other similar things are patterned or repeated. For example, in Aladdin, the genie acts as a guide that helps Aladdin make decisions; there are many other examples in fairy tales and mythology as well. Similarly, Iff the Water Genie, and Butt which takes on the appearance of Hoopoe, a bird acts as guides or “sidekicks” for Haroun; “in the old stories the Hoopoe is the bird that leads all other birds through many dangerous places to their ultimate goal” (64). The Water Genie often gives Haroun advice as well: “Hold your horses, cool down, don’t blow your top, keep your hair on...” (68) and “Wait on, patience is a virtue, where’s the fire?” these comments are said so that Haroun maintains his rationality and calmness.

Another archetypal character is the guilt ridden figure in search of forgiveness; in this case it is Haroun. He had said something to Rashid that he wishes he could take back. “My fault again, I started all this off, what’s the use of stories that aren’t even true. I asked that question and it broke my fathers heart. So it’s up to me to put things right. Something has to be done.” (27). However, since he cannot, he decides to take matters onto his own hands and search for his father’s inspiration. This guilt increases as events unfold, “if we crash now, if we’re smashed into bits or fried like potato chips in a burning wreck, it will be my fault this time, too.” (37), this caused Haroun to be even more determined to find the Walrus.

7. Haroun can be categorized as genre: Fantasy. Using 5 CONVENTIONS of fantasy, prove the validity of the aforementioned statement

The genre fantasy has distinct characteristics including, a quest, the use of magic or supernatural powers, a clear sense of good versus evil, common characters (i. e. Damsel in distress, the villain, the hero, the guide), and the evocation in another world. The quest in Haroun is the journey to seek the Walrus and return Rashid's inspiration for storytelling. The use of supernatural powers is evident in the characters Iff and Butt as well as others in the story. Iff was the Water Genie who delivers story-water using a "Process too complicated to explain", and Butt could communicate with others using his telekinetic powers. Good versus evil is shown as author uses contrasting descriptive language to illustrate the Gups and Chups: "The Land of Gup is bathed in Endless Sunshine, while over in Chip it's always the middle of the night" (80) other comparisons between the two lands include: warm vs. cold, talkative vs. silence, etc.

The meaning of common characters is that in a fantasy tale, there are often archetypes which follow a certain similar pattern. Most "typical" fantasies have a damsel in distress in which the hero, guided by their "sidekicks" generally tries to save from the villain. The suggestion of another world is also a sign that Haroun is a fantasy novel. Many things in this world seem rather hard-to-believe and impossible to be real, and it seems like it's more of a dream; however, it is supposed to be a world that matches ours so that it allows us to see our world more clearly. It is evident in Haroun because it is

actually Rushdie's sole purpose in writing the novel - to show people the right of free speech, and the many corruptions that exists within the society.

4. / 8. Explain 2 allusions found in the novel. Discuss how they added to the meaning of the story.

Censorship has been around for a very long time, and Rushdie has made this a recurrent theme in this novel. As mentioned, the Cultmaster represents the Ayatollah where he tries to kill him for writing *The Satanic Verses*. The novel also shows his frustration and anger in the character of Haroun, " So we're prisoners already...Some hero I turned out to be" (142). This seems to reflect a similar frustration as Rushdie seems to be such a small force in the large struggle against censorship.

An allusion is also made as he shows how silly he thinks battle or wars -not only in the story, but in real life as well, are by making fun of the uniforms that the Guppees and the Chapwalas are in. " Really, this is beginning to look like a war between buffoons,"(179). There are so many instances in history where neither sides of the battle know what they're truly fighting for; they are just taking orders from their leaders: " neither army will even be able to see properly during the fight" (180), Rushdie seems to imply that both armies are blindly fighting each other and it's almost like a joke to him as he makes many puns and witty remarks about this battle.

The author often refers to the stories of 1001 Arabian Nights. For example, some titles of the Pages' uniforms include titles from Arabian Nights - " Bolo and the wonderful Lamp", " Bolo and the Forty thieves" etc.

The Water Genie also seems to follow some ideas from Arabian Nights because genies often exist in those stories. The significance is here, 1001 means “infinity” in Arabic so when Haroun “looked into the water and saw that it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents...” (72) It shows that there are more than 1001 different currents meaning there are more than an infinite number of different stories in the Ocean simply because there is no limit to the creation of stories. New stories of different variations can always be made from old stories – this is the power of story.

The army of “Pages” can be compared to the “army” of cards under the control of Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland. Haroun returns from his adventure, and to his surprise it all happened in a dream. This is similar to Alice where she awakes at the end of the book and finds out that her adventures in wonderland have also taken place in a dream. This adds meaning to the story because Rushdie can create a magnificent make-belief world for the enjoyment of children, and explains to his son the reason for his departure; while at the same time blur certain political messages using allegories that add a deeper meaning of which are directed to older readers.