

THE THERAPEUTIC NOVEL: RUSHDIE'S *HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES* AND *LUKA AND THE FIRE OF LIFE*¹

Laura MĂCINEANU²

C.D.Loga National College, Caransebeș
Speculum Center for the Study of the Imaginary

E-mail: laura_macineanu@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This paper aims to examine the therapeutic valences of two of Salman Rushdie's most celebrated works belonging to magical realism: Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990) and Luka and the Fire of Life (2010). We can detect here three levels of research. The first can be found in the fabric of each of the two novels. One of the main themes, which pervades the entire plot, is that of storytelling as a way of enchanting and re-enchanting the world, of saving it from destruction and bringing it back to life. The writer demonstrates repeatedly how stories and knowledge of stories have the power of bringing joy into people's hearts, even saving their lives as some magical medicine or a miraculous solution to a grievous problem in the real world can only be found in the parallel fantastic reality. A second level of understanding discussed in this paper is that of the novels themselves having therapeutic value for their readers. The healing power of reading

¹ Article History: Received: 16.09.2024. Revised: 08.10.2024. Accepted: 16.10.2024. Published: 15.11.2024. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-NC 4.0.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) Citation: MĂCINEANU, L. (2024). THE THERAPEUTIC NOVEL: RUSHDIE'S *HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES* AND *LUKA AND THE FIRE OF LIFE*. *Incursiuni în imaginar* 15. *Magical Realism in Literature*. Vol. 15. Nr. 1., pp. 257-276. <https://doi.org/10.29302/InImag.2024.15.1.10>

No funding was received either for the research presented in the article or for the creation of the article.

²<https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57202420228>

cannot be overlooked and to peruse these two books in particular is sheer delight. It is also argued here that in an age when stress is a commonplace term, reading may provide us with the necessary means in order for us to create an alternate, more accommodating, reality to help us cope. Last but not least, the act of writing the books is, in itself, a therapeutic endeavor on the part of the author, as Rushdie himself confessed in an interview: "I often feel I don't need therapists, I don't need psychiatrists, because I do it myself every day of my life" (TOI Books, 2021). We can conclude, therefore, that the two novels are perfect illustrations of how narratives constitute an effective form of therapy for the storytellers' audience (be they characters or readers) and for storytellers themselves.

Keywords: healing; narrating; problem-solving; storytelling; therapeutic.

1. Introduction

The two novels the celebrated writer Salman Rushdie has dedicated to his sons, Zafar and Milan Luka, certainly belong to magical realism. Written twenty years apart, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990, henceforth referred to as *Haroun*) and *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010, henceforth referred to as *Luka*) are full of magical happenings and fantastic characters, but they are also deeply anchored in reality. In fact, numerous parallels are drawn by the author between events in the two books and the real life, the society we live in. Whether we are thinking about literature, politics, family matters, social problems or environmental issues, every angle of research will demonstrate in a more than satisfactory manner that Rushdie's imaginary world is connected to our day-to-day life. What is more, the author provides us with an effective, yet entertaining manner of solving various problems both the fictional and the real world are struggling with. Storytelling, using the power of the

spoken and of the written word, is presented as a formidable tool which can protect, lift the spirits of people, teach and demonstrate, impart knowledge and, ultimately, cure and restore. While witnessing the heroes and heroines' endeavours, readers do not only manage to create a more accommodating reality to escape to, but they may also identify ways of successfully dealing with their daily tribulations. Writing has proved to be a therapeutic enterprise for the novelist himself. Engaging in the creative effort of penning secondary realities has a cathartic effect, helping the author gain a better understanding of himself. Writing is also a manifestation of the author's deep need to speak freely and to express his thoughts with no fear of censorship. It can, therefore, be argued that narrating has therapeutic value not only for the characters in the stories, but also for the readers and, ultimately, for the author himself. These are the three directions of research I have followed in the writing of the present paper.

2. The healing power of storytelling in the two novels

Haroun is obviously centred on the theme of storytelling, its power of bringing imagination to life, of healing the human soul, making a harsh life more bearable and even offering viable examples and tools in order for the ordinary person to save themselves, the community and the entire world. The quest undertaken by Haroun in order to help his father, the renowned storyteller Rashid Khalifa, ends in a successful restoration of not only Rashid's ability to tell a story, but of his beautiful family and the town he lives in. Stories are therapeutic; there is no question about that. But so, as *Luka* proves, are videogames. The immersion in the parallel reality provided by gaming offers Luka, Rashid's second son, the abilities and knowledge he can then use to save his father's

life and, in addition, the magical realm his father has conceived. All these make for a delightful read, as it is difficult not to be enraptured by the amazing display of imaginative techniques the writer employs in order to captivate his readers. Like C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Rushdie uses a vast array of fantastic creatures, mythical figures, themes and motifs, leaving his audience bedazzled, providing what can certainly be referred to as art therapy, an escape from the dullness of reality, a pleasant way of getting rid of their troubles and, why not, even finding solutions for some of them. This experience is cathartic not only for the audience, but primarily for the writer. The sheer joy of writing leaps up from each page where stories and myths of various origins are combined into a new tale, plays upon words abound and the text almost begs to be read out loud to better enjoy the wonderful alliterations and humorous names of so many original and reinterpreted characters.

Everything begins in the world of imagination, Rushdie states in many interviews, and can then be transferred into the real world. What the writer refers to is, probably, the art through which an author, a storyteller, gives shape to his/her ideas by using words, turning up phrases that will enchant readers and listeners. But this transfer process takes place in a more concrete manner in the world of fantasy Rushdie has created. Here we have a magical medicine, the *Fire of Life*, which can heal the slumbering storyteller, if only Luka knew how to bring it into the real world. Here we also have the *Source of all Stories*, the *Ocean of the Streams of Story* on the moon Kahani which, once saved from destruction by Haroun and company, can recommence to supply ideas to storytellers in the real world. Both Luka and Haroun believe these things to be mere figments of their father's imagination. But they come to realise, during their fantastic journeys, that everything a storyteller creates

exists in a parallel world and can actually be transferred into the real world, preserving its fantastic attributes. Therefore, the healing powers of the *Fire of Life* can save the life of a real, living person just as the enchanted streams of water on Kahani can help any storyteller on Earth become a creator of magical fairytales meant to charm and heal in their turn.

The thread of story in *Haroun* and *Luka* is roughly the same. Both books tell the story of a young son finding himself in the position of saving his father. Haroun has to deal with his mother running away, deserting them, and his father losing the *Gift of Gab*, his uncanny ability to tell stories. Alternatively, it is his father's conscious presence that Luka is missing, as Rashid Khalifa falls into a deep slumber and is in danger of fading away for good. A trauma in any child's life, that of losing a parent, is avoidable, according to both books, only by allowing stories to be told, by granting the freedom of speech and imagination.

The Khalifas are the only happy family in the city at the beginning of *Haroun*, thanks to his father's imaginative stories and his positive outlook. "Haroun grew up in a home in which, instead of misery and frowns, he had his father's laughter and his mother's sweet voice raised in a song" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 2). However, Rashid can only maintain this optimism as long as he has his power of captivating audiences and the sweet-voiced Soraya by his side. Everything starts to go amiss in Haroun's family the moment his mother begins to doubt the actual function storytelling has in the real world. It is not by accident that she runs away with a Mr. Sengupta, a rigid, unimaginative, "sticky-thin and whiny-voiced and mingy" clerk (Rushdie, 2013, p. 6), who dismisses Rashid's stories as useless. It is a sign that she has ceased to believe. Her song, symbolising life, happiness, femininity, dies the moment she begins to see the world through this

character's perspective. One after another, Haroun and then his father lose faith, too, and that is when the supply of fresh stories is cut short. Storytelling can be healing, but one has to believe in the power of imagination in order to make this happen. The obsessive question "*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*" (Rushdie, 2013, p.7, 9, 15) causes a chain of events that leads to the storyteller's inability to narrate, and in turn to the loss of magic and happiness not only inside their small family, but in the entire world. Order is restored as the son finds a way of travelling to the world of imagination, saving it from destruction. Consequently, the family is reunited and the magical source of stories is again available, enabling Rashid to capture his audience again.

Stories will not only help preserve the integrity of the family or save the life of its members. They will actually heal the community, lift up their spirits. Rashid Khalifa (first name an anagram of Rushdie, but also a reference to the legendary Caliph Harun al-Rashid) is a world- renowned storyteller, also known as the *Shah of Blah* or the *Ocean of Notions*. His seemingly inexhaustible supply of stories is all that keeps the sad town in which he lives alive. For the dwellers of "a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name", Rashid's stories are the only source of happiness.

He would climb up on to some little makeshift stage in a dead-end alley packed with raggedy children and toothless old-timers, all squatting in the dust; and once he got going even the city's many wandering cows would stop and cocked their ears, and monkeys would jabber approvingly from rooftops and the parrots in the trees would imitate his voice.
(Rushdie, 2013, p. 3)

While he may often use his gift for the benefit of the poor people of the city, Rashid is, in fact, a professional storyteller. Storytelling is a way of earning a living for the entire family –like Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights*, a collection to which Rushdie’s book makes numerous hints, Rashid actually tells stories to stay alive. His stories are considered useful by the politicians in the area, who, when election time approached, invited him to speak at their rallies. They “lined up outside his door with their shiny faces and fake smiles and bags of hard cash”, so that “Rashid could pick and choose” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 7). Like in our too familiar world, “the politicians” were not a much liked or a very trustworthy breed, but securing Rashid’s collaboration meant attracting the public, and therefore more votes. The storyteller’s grasp on his audience resided not only in the beauty of his tales, but also in his blatantly admitting that they are just that: mere tales.

As Rashid regains his *Gift of Gab* and his confidence, having the magical water supply restored, he uses his talent to turn the inhabitants of the Valley of K against the corrupt candidates, by telling them precisely the story in *Haroun*. The narrative provides the crowd with the example of how the magical world on Kahani was ridden of the influence of the villainous leader, through the conjugated efforts of both nations living on Earth’s second moon. Consequently, the politicians in the Valley are driven away by the people gathered at the rally, who were now “free to choose leaders they actually liked” (Rushdie, 2013, p.194).

Another problem affecting both the real world and its imaginary double, Kahani, is pollution. The factories in Haroun’s town manufacture sadness, which seems to be in great demand. Sadness is even exported and the world “never seemed to get enough of it” (Rushdie, 2013, p.1). We can draw a parallel here between the never-ending source

of sadness and the never-ending source of stories, which is the *Ocean of the Streams of Stories*. Paradoxically, the world requires more and more of the sadness produced by the smoke-pouring factories in the city, while *The Ocean of the Streams of Stories* on the moon Kahani is intentionally polluted with anti-stories by Khattam-Shud. A correspondent to the sadness factories that blur the whole city under the smoke they produce is Khattam-Shud's huge shadow ship, in fact a factory ship, producing the antithesis of every story ever told. From this ship, the tyrant's trusty followers are also attempting to plug the Wellspring, the Source of Stories. Once this attempt is stopped both worlds are delivered from sadness. Even the town that has forgotten its name remembers it. As it is many times mentioned in the two books, to name a thing is to call it into being. Solving the problem of story supply has helped the world find its identity; the people are reminded that their city was called *Kahani (Story)*, just like the Earth's second moon from where all stories originate. "The intention to plug the sea source of stories is an attempt to destroy the imagination as such, together with the power of transformation represented by the sea", as Ludmila Volna argues in her article *Salman Rushdie's Sea World: Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (2019, p.10).

The second book presents the now happy, reunited family, having one additional member, a second son, Luka. The main issue here is Rashid's falling into a deep sleep after being cursed. What can save the family, again, is taking another trip into the parallel reality. Luka is the one who will journey through the *World of Magic* this time, in search of the *Fire of Life*. The only thing that the boy can rely on, besides his ability of playing videogames, is the knowledge he possesses on the world his father has created. Like his elder brother, Haroun, Luka realises that the new reality he has stumbled in is a mapping of the various stories Rashid has told them over the years. Thus,

the information they gathered from their father's creations on the *World of Magic* and its inhabitants help both boys survive their quests and come home with the prize. Luka's prize is the magical medicine that will bring his father back to life, making the family whole again.

This novel brings upfront Luka as creator of new imaginary worlds, a talent he seems to have inherited from his father. He has "a strong interest in, and aptitude for, other realities" (Rushdie, 2013, p.13). An exquisite actor, he created memorable and completely believable characters in the school plays. When he drew and painted scenes from his father's stories, they "came to wonderful, phantasmagoric richly coloured life" (Rushdie, 2013, p.13). As Rashid's stories, these performances have a powerful cathartic effect on the audience or those who viewed his art.

Luka also possesses the power of the spoken word - he is capable of uttering a curse so powerful, that it physically affects the person it is directed to, Captain Aag, director of the Great Rings of Fire circus, or the three Aalim, masters of Time, bringing ruin upon them.

All of a sudden Luka became angry [...] When Grandmaster Flame was right in front of him, Luka shouted out at the top of his voice, 'May your animals stop obeying your commands and your rings of fire eat up your stupid tent.'

Now it so happened that the moment Luka shouted out in anger was one of those rare instants when by some inexplicable accident all the noises of the universe fall silent at the same time [...] and his words expanded until they filled the sky, and perhaps even found their way the invisible home of the Fates [...] Then the world started making its usual racket again [...] But Luka's words were still out there in the air, doing their secret business. (Rushdie, 2013, p.4-5)

Here we have an unexpected result: an utterance which should be, by definition, evil, but which practically destroys the villains of the story. So, we are dealing with a kind of healing as a result of this act, as the circus is burnt to the ground and the mistreated animals are freed or the entire magical world is freed from the tyranny of the Time Lords. However, his curse against Aag backfires, as in turn, Aag (aka the Titan of Rage) attacks Rashid and almost succeeds in annihilating him and the entire magical reality.

In *Luka* the parallel reality is available by means of videogames. “Fortunately for Luka, he lived in an age in which an almost infinite number of parallel realities had begun to be sold as toys” (Rushdie, 2013, p.14). This is another type of narrative, one to which Rushdie and Rashid got acquainted by playing with their respective younger sons. Again, Soraya, voicing popular opinion, does not agree with this. These are only “useless skills” (Rushdie, 2013, p.16), which will not help the boy cope in the real world. As in the previous book she is proven wrong. It is exactly these skills that are of paramount importance in order to survive in the world of gaming, where Luka has to travel in order to save his father.

Luka feels at home in the world of video games, for which he often “leaves” his own world. By playing the game, by being creative and using the rules of the games to his own advantage, Luka manages not only to destroy Nobodaddy, his father’s phantomatic alter ego, but to save the magical world, which was in danger of being destroyed together with all its mythological creatures and fantastic beings. He does this with the help of the knowledge he possessed on his father’s magical world. It seems that this universe was magically transformed into a giant and complex video game. However, the game is “Never just a game. It’s a matter of life and death” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 235), as Nobodaddy says and Luka will soon discover.

Similarly, to Luka's amazement, the *Fire of Life* proves to be more than just a story.

'Just a story?' echoed *Nobodaddy* in what sounded like genuine horror. 'Only a tale? [...] You of all boys should know that Man is the Storytelling Animal, and that in his stories are his identity, his meaning and his life-blood [...] Man alone burns with books' (Rushdie, 2013, p. 40)

It is in these words, uttered by *Nobodaddy*, that Rushdie expresses his creed, his belief in the healing power of the story and reiterates the importance of the author as storyteller in today's pragmatic society.

3. Reading the novel as a therapeutic act

It can be said that "people read to be transported, to feel wonder, to understand themselves" (Waugh, 2015, p. 41). We are absorbed in a world which is made up and yet feels so much like the real world, where we get to meet with characters that become as familiar as our acquaintances, visit places that we seem to know better than places in our own past and experience with various states and emotions, all done in complete awareness of the safety of the environment we are immersed in. Reading the novel is, in itself, a therapeutic act, which for Patricia Waugh in her *The Novel as Therapy: Ministrations of Voice in an Age of Risk* is a reminder of the "talking cure" (2015, p. 49). Hearing the voice of the author via the voices of the characters, mingling with our own inner voice can help us just as talking to a therapist would, assisting us in making sense of our own thoughts, feelings and perspectives. Eventually, "we arrive at ourselves expanded through an encounter with the new and strange." The therapeutic value of reading the novel resides in the fact that it "allows

us to order our minds more completely by taking us closer to the edge of disorder” (Waugh, 2015, p. 37).

Waugh also brings into discussion the idea of “risk society”, closely connected to and caused by the “disorienting complexity of an increasingly globalised and uncertain world” (Waugh, 2015, p. 46). In an age where feeling stressed out has become commonplace, reading fiction might endow us with the necessary tools and knowledge in order to be able to survive the mayhem. Even if the world is not exactly as we would like it to be, we could create, through writing and reading, our own world to help us cope. We can easily draw numerous parallels between our own society with its multiple threatening factors, be they economic, political, environmental, spiritual or of any other nature, and the fictional world. Seeing that the author, through his characters, has found ways of going around and even solving these problems makes us hopeful about resolving the issues in our own world.

Let us take, for example, the questionable quality of the political leaders in *Alifbay* and the way they use Rashid Kalifa’s popularity in their attempt to win the elections. Ironically, nobody believed the “politicos” who claimed that everything they said was true, but everyone had faith in Rashid, because “he always admitted that everything he told them was completely untrue and made up out of his own head” (Rushdie, 2013, p.7). Eventually, Rashid manages, by telling precisely the story in the book, to turn the people of the Valley of K against these dreadful fellows.

As previously stated, there are environmental issues reflected in the story and there is every reason to believe that even these serious issues both the real and the fantastic worlds are struggling with can be solved if people are resourceful enough. The polluted and sorrowful city of Kahani is cleansed at the end of *Haroun* by the cheerful

rain which has everybody in the streets dancing. The *Ocean of the Streams of Story* is depolluted through Haroun's inventiveness and determination, and all the stories in it return to their original plot and restart feeding ideas to storytellers in the real world.

Addiction and depression are two of the "diseases" modern society is struggling with. Similarly, the inhabitants of Kahani are addicted to the sadness being "actually manufactured, packaged and sent all over the world" (Rushdie, 2013, p.1) from the factories situated in the north of the city. The world is healed through Haroun's endeavours, only to fall prey to a different type of addiction. At the beginning of *Luka*, the people are no longer depressed as the factories have stopped producing black smoke and sadness. Self-deception seems to be the new drug on the market.

Things had changed in Kahani, and sadness was no longer the city's principal export [...] People wanted to feel good even when there wasn't that much to feel good about, and so the sadness factories had been shut down and turned into Obliviums, giant malls where everyone went to dance, shop, pretend and forget. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 44)

However gloomy the situation appears to be at the beginning of each book, the ending finds the heroes of the story happily dancing and singing in the rain or on the roof of their house, under the sparkling stars – a sign that the world has regained its balance.

On a spiritual level, there is the problem of death. Nobodaddy firmly announces Luka that he is his father's death, and this character keeps growing stronger and more solid looking, as Rashid becomes thinner by the day. Nobodaddy seems to be the image of the Grim Reaper.

“Somebody has to die [...] Once someone like me has been summoned’, said Nobodaddy, ‘someone alive must pay for that summons with a life. I’m sorry, but that’s the rule’ (Rushdie, 2013, p. 52). How does one deal with the moment they watch a loved person’s death in the eye? Death seems to be as implacable as ever. However, through cleverness and daring, Luka manages to help his father evade this untimely death.

The economic problems affecting the Indian society are mirrored in *Haroun*, where social stratification is reflected in the dwellings belonging to the inhabitants of Kahani. Only the super-rich live in skyscrapers.

The poor lived in tumbledown shacks made of old cardboard boxes and plastic sheeting, and these shacks were glued together by despair. And then there were the super-poor, who had no homes at all. They slept on pavements and in the doorways of shops, and had to pay rent to local gangsters for doing even that. (Rushdie, 2013, p. 5)

Still, the novel ends with all the people in town fooling around and laughing merrily in the streets, although nothing has actually changed; “the sadness factories are still in production [...] and almost everybody is still poor” (Rushdie, 2013, p. 195). Poverty no longer seems to stand in the way of happiness and joy.

It is no wonder echoes from the Indian world have found their way in the two novels. The author’s formative years were in India, and Rushdie remembers his father telling him stories from the Indian heritage. Stories are still given great importance in Indian culture, as Ludmila Volna shows in “*Salman Rushdie’s Sea World: Haroun and the Sea of Stories*”, being “both an organizing and a pedagogic tool for reality and life at an unconscious level” (Volna, 2019, p. 3). The importance of stories and, by

extension, of the storyteller in Indian culture was thus embedded in Rushdie's conscience from an early age. Proof of this is part of an interview with Rushdie integrated on unnumbered pages in between the two novels, in the 2013 Vintage Books edition of *Haroun and Luka*.

[...] stories are the lifeblood of a society. When we are born they are almost the first things we ask for. Families have family stories, communities have stories about themselves and so do countries. We are storytelling animals and stories are part of our nature. That makes them powerful, but it also means we need to protect our right to tell them, and hear them, in any way we choose. (Rushdie, 2013)

4. The therapeutic value of writing

In an interview taken during the *Times Literature Festival* Rushdie talked about the therapeutic value of writing:

Writing serious literature is... you have to go very, very deep inside yourself in order to find the book [...] you can achieve a kind of clarity if you have examined yourself well enough ...I often feel I don't need therapists, I don't need psychiatrists, because I do that every day of my life. (TOI Books, 2021)

It may not be an accident that *Haroun* (1990) was written not long after *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The author may have felt the need for some lighter material in the aftermath of the events caused by the publication of the latter. However, there are serious matters discussed here, such as the freedom of speech. "Just as Rushdie was silenced by the *fatwa*, the father, Rashid Khalifa, figuratively loses his voice" (Guldager, 2012, p. 2). Khattam-Shud's trying to poison and then destroy all

stories and bring the whole world to complete silence also reminds of the attempts made by a totalitarian regime to limit Rushdie's freedom of speech. "The world is for Controlling [...] and inside every single story [...] there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all" (Rushdie, 2013, p. 147). Similarly, the three Aalim, supreme beings and Weavers of Time in *Luka*, keep the entire magical world under control and show no regard for the fate of any of the beings living there. The *Fire of Life* can save the life of the storyteller, whose tales would, in turn, save the magical world from oblivion. Nevertheless, the Aalim would not permit the *Fire* to be taken to the real world. "Return what you have stolen and perhaps we will spare your lives [...] It is of no consequence to us whether this World lives or dies [...] Compassion is not our affair." (Rushdie, 2013, p. 240). Eventually, the tyrants' dominion is brought to an end by the child heroes and their helpers, who know the value of imagination, freedom and compassion.

I would mention here Rushdie's last work, his memoir, *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder* (2024), recently translated into Romanian by Dana Crăciun as *Cuțitul. Reflecții în urma unei tentative de asasinat*. In it he writes about his life following the attack, his thoughts, the way his loved ones and especially his wife, poet and novelist Rachel Eliza Griffiths, supported him and his feelings about his attacker, Hadi Matar. It is also an appeal to defending the freedom of speech. "Art is not a luxury. It stands at the essence of our humanity, and it asks for no special protection except the right to exist" (Rushdie, 2024, as cited in McDonagh, 2024). It is likely that writing this book has given Rushdie a sense of closure after the traumatic event on August 12, 2022. And it has certainly contributed to the psychological healing of the author. Video recordings being made during the writing process will be used in the production of a documentary

on the same traumatic event and Rushdie's process of learning to get over it. Eventually, writing about what one has gone through seems to have a therapeutic effect as well.

I understand that I had to write the book you're reading now before I could move onto anything else. To write would be my way of owning what had happened, taking charge of it, making it mine, refusing to be a mere victim. I would answer violence with art. (Rushdie, 2024, as cited in McDonagh, 2024)

Though not belonging to the same genre, the two novels discussed in this paper, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*, are without doubt wonderful examples of Rushdie's art of spinning a tale. In an interview, Salman Rushdie argues that true stories do not always tell the whole truth. He adds that "stories don't have to be true" and that "by including elements of the fantastic or elements of fable or mythological elements or fairy tale or just pure make believe, you can actually start getting at the truth in a different way. It's another door into the truth" (Big Think, 2015). We can connect this to the question that has become an obsession for Haroun, "*What's the use of stories that aren't even true?*" or to Luka's amazed remark, "*But that's just a story*". The world Haroun and Luka live in is transformed by the power of storytelling and, once the connection to the story source is rebuilt and the storyteller is cured, the entire universe is healed and it regains its brightness.

5. Conclusion

Both novels contain several examples that Rushdie gives in order to illustrate a belief that he shares with many other storytellers, and that is the fact that

storytelling has therapeutic powers. The main characters, their families, their community, in fact the entire environment are saved from depression, oppression, destruction, oblivion and even annihilation through narrating stories, knowledge of stories or belief in the power of stories, of the written and spoken word. Stories are a repository of wisdom, a source of learning about abilities and tools one can use, solutions one can employ to solve problematic situations; they are a never-ending spring of joy, excitement and optimism. This paper has demonstrated the fact that the two stories were conceived by Rushdie not only as a means of entertaining an audience, but also as a way of healing the world and its inhabitants. By this we are referring to both the world between the covers of the books and our own reality. As discussed above, not only do readers find refuge and consolation inside the pages of the books, but, like so many characters, they are provided with solutions for their everyday issues and are given the confidence that such challenges can be overcome. Last but not least, it is the writer himself who achieves psychological healing, as creative writing involves thorough self-analysis and it is also a way of exercising freedom of speech.

References:

Ali, N., & Ramli, A.M. (2019). The Real in the Magic: A Study of Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990). *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities*, 26(2), 125–141. <https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2019.26.2.6>.

BBC News India. (2023, July 13). 'It's the books that matter, not the knives': Salman Rushdie [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYl9Abo85a4>.

Big Think. (2015, October 3). *Salman Rushdie on Magical Realism: True Stories Don't Tell the Whole Truth* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZtdhLndVYg>.

Bowers, M.A. (2004). *Magic(al) Realism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Emory University. (2012, March 21). *Salman Rushdie on Writing as a Process of Discovery* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEvuTQArUA>.

Guldager, M. (2012). *Magical Realism and Hybridity: Salman Rushdie's Haroun and the Sea of Stories & Luka and the Fire of Life*. University of Copenhagen. Retrieved June 23, 2024, from https://www.academia.edu/29393274/Magical_Realism_and_Hybridity_Salman_Rushdies_Haroun_and_the_Sea_of_Stories_and_Luka_and_the_Fire_of_Life.

McDonagh, M. (2024, April 19). Knife by Salman Rushdie review: only a novelist could write like this about being stabbed. *The Standard*. Retrieved June 12, 2024, from <https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/books/knife-salman-rushdie-stabbed-book-review-eliza-b1151726.html>.

Rushdie, S. (2013). *Haroun and Luka*. London: Random House.

TOI Books. (2021, September 4). *Times Litfest 2021: Writing is like a therapy for Salman Rushdie!* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1038877343591990>.

Volna, L. (2019). Salman Rushdie's Sea World: Haroun and the Sea of Stories. *Angles* [Online], 9. <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.843>.

Waugh, P. (2015). The novel as therapy: Ministrations of voice in an age of risk. *Journal of the British Academy*, 3, 35–68. DOI 10.5871/jba/003.035.

~~~~~  
**Laura MĂCINEANU** is researcher with a keen interest in fantastic literature. She is a PhD graduate in the Philology Domain, from the Doctoral School of Humanities, West University, Timișoara, Romania. Her PhD thesis consists in a comparative study of J.R.R. Tolkien's, C.S. Lewis's and J.K. Rowling's epic fantasies, published in 2018 as *Dilemmas and Confrontations in Epic Fantasy Tolkien, Lewis, Rowling*. Her publications also include articles, such as *Feminine Hypostases in Epic Fantasy: Tolkien, Lewis, Rowling* (2016), *Masculine and Feminine Insights into the Fantastic World of Elves: J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and Muriel Barbery's "The Life of Elves"* (2017), *Impressive Women in the Latest Productions Set in J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World* (2018), *Consciously Rejecting the Magic – The Cases of Susan Pevensie and Petunia Dursley*(2019), or *Women Figures in George MacDonald's and J.R.R. Tolkien's Fantasy Writings*(2020) in *Gender Studies*. Other research interests are myths and fairytales, fantasy literature and their appeal to the present-day reader.