



## Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist and Alice Sebold's The Lovely Bones

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**Abstract :** *Magic realism in literature is defined as the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, bizarre and skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the elements of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable. In magic realism texts the frame or surface of the work may be conventionally realistic, but*

*contrasting elements—such as supernatural myth, dream fantasy invade the realism and change the whole basis of the art.*

*The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels—levitation, flight, telepathy, telekinesis— are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often phantasmagorical political realities of the twentieth century. These texts often contain authorial reticence which incorporates the deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world. The narrator does not provide explanations about the accuracy of events described by characters in the text. Instead, the narrator is indifferent; and proceeds with “logical precision” as if nothing extraordinary took place. A glimpse of these can easily be seen in the novels studied under this project namely: Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist, and Alice Sebold's The Lovely Bones.*

**Keywords:** *Magic realism, Telepathy, Fragmentation, Ordinary magic, Alchemy, Omens.*

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## Introduction :

Magic realism is "... the combination of reality and fantasy and ..., it is the transformation of the real into the awesome and unreal, ... an art of surprises, one which creates a distorted concept of time and space, ... a literature directed to an intellectual minority; characterized by a cold cerebral aloofness, it does not cater to popular tastes, but rather to that of those sophisticated individuals instructed in aesthetic subtleties". (Carter, 3-4)

Magical realism manages to present a view of life that displays a sense of energy and vitality in a world that promises not only joy, but a fair share of misery as well. In effect, the reader is rewarded with a perspective on the world that still includes much that has elsewhere been lost. Where 'possible' is instantly transformed into probable as we are transported from the domain of the real to the magically real by the similarly uncharted devices of the artistic imagination.

Magic realism stems from the conflict between the two pictures of the world. It often facilitates the fusion or coexistence of possible worlds, spaces or systems that could not be reconciled in any other mode of fiction. It occurs when a highly detailed realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe. The tone of such novel remains matter of fact despite strange manifestations, bizarre events and mysterious incidents. For Luis Leal, Magic Realism is "an attitude to reality" that leads to a more profound recognition of the world and allows to grasp the mystery that is hidden beyond reality. (Leal , 121)

According to Angel Flores Magic Realism writers possess - a preoccupation with style and an interest in transforming "the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal".

(Flores , 141)"Time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as a part of reality". (Flores, 116)

Magic(al) Realism is a contested term primarily because the majority of critics increase the confusion surrounding its history by basing their consideration of the term on one of its explanation rather than acknowledging the full complexity of its origin. (Bowers, 9)"Magic(al) Realist writing" has become associated with the modernist techniques of the disruption of linear narrative time and the questioning of the notion of history.

According to Edwin Williamson- "Magic Realism is a narrative style which consistently blurs the traditional realist distinction between fantasy and reality". (Hart, Ouyang, 5)

### **Features of magic realism**

- Elements of the magical and the mundane are interwoven seamlessly, making it impossible to determine where reality ends and the extraordinary begins.
- The story is set in an otherwise ordinary world, with familiar historical and/or cultural realities. The events of the story are not always explained by universal laws or familiar logic.
- The ordinary aspects of the story are what produce the greatest magic.
- Objects and settings within the story may take on lives of their own in a way that is ordinary to the characters in the story.
- Constructs of time do not follow typical Western conventions. For instance, stories may be told in spiraling shapes rather than in straight lines.

- The story, as it unfolds, gives the reader a sense of being inside a puzzle or maze.
- Contradictions, inconsistencies and ambiguities color the point of view, making you question what you understand about the world at large, as well as what happens inside the story.
- A metamorphosis takes place in the story. It's treated not as a miracle, but as an everyday event.
- The story bears the influences of oral tradition: fables, myths, tall tales, urban legends, a charmed storytelling narrator.
- The magical elements in the story may enhance a subversive message or personalized point of view. Often the point of view is revealed through voices, ideas, and places which exist outside the mainstream or majority perspective.
- Magic occurs without using devices typical to the fantasy genre unless the devices are employed in a context that makes them ordinary. Ghosts or angels may exist in a magical realist story, for instance, but not in a way that is surprising or unusual to the characters in the book.
- A lilac bush blooms out of season and is nourished by a man's corpse.
- An angel appears to an old man.
- A woman goes in search of a cat in which she can reincarnate herself.
- A woman's tears fill a ten-pound sack.
- A radio suddenly broadcasts the intimate conversations of strangers.
- A girl falls through a rabbit hole and ends up in a land of talking.

### ***Magic Realism in Midnight's Children***

The protagonist of the novel is Saleem Sinai , who is born at the precise moment of India's independence. Saleem is connected with thousand other 'midnight's children' – all born in the initial hour of India's independence.

Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem's biography is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirrors the course of modern India at its most impossible and glorious. In "Midnight's Children", magic realism has the function, to highlight the absurdity of the political scene in post-independence India. It exposes the complex nature of the relationship between the individual and their position in history. Jawaharlal Nehru sends Saleem a letter. The simile of the "newest bearer of that ancient face of India" (Rushdie, 122) becomes the reality. In his letter Nehru mentions 'mirror' which creates a magic of shifting references. Saleem's life 'mirrors' the life of India. Saleem is "handcuffed to history" (Rushdie, 420) and this is literally true since Saleem is strongly connected to the historical events of India and cannot break the bond. At the age of ten, he realizes that he has the ability of telepathy. He is able to communicate in his head with other children born in the same night. He finds out that all midnight's children have some supernatural ability. "Midnight's Children" is clearly Salman Rushdie's criticism against the government of Indira Gandhi. He describes the fantastical midnight's children's congress as an alternative to the Congress party. Writing a novel for Saleem is as responsible task as producing a chutney. To make the metaphor real, to literalize its meaning Salman Rushdie lets Saleem produce twenty-six pickle jars identified with labels that bear the names of all the chapters in the novel.

### ***The Alchemist***

The Alchemist is a magical fable about 'following your dreams'. It is a journey of an Andalusian shepherd boy named Santiago who travels from his homeland in Spain to the Egyptian desert in search of a treasure buried in the pyramids.

Along the way he meets a Gypsy woman, an old man who calls himself king and an alchemist, all of whom point Santiago in the direction of his quest. No one knew what the treasure was or if Santiago would be able to surmount the obstacles along the way. But what started out as a journey to find the worldly goods turns into a discovery of the treasure found within. The story of Santiago is an eternal testament to the transformational power of our dreams and the importance of listening to our hearts.

The Alchemist is an adventure story full of magic and wisdom. The story of Santiago emphasizes the transformational power of our dreams and the importance of listening to our hearts. Santiago converses with the natural elements: the desert, the wind, the sun, and finally the soul of the world and turns himself into the wind—all of which contradicts the laws of the universe. The Alchemist's ability to live up to two hundred years and to transform any piece of metal to gold is in itself magical. The magical devices such as dreams, omens, and magical stones add to the magical realist approach of the novel.

"...when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." (Coelho, 23)

This is the core of the novel's philosophy and a motive that echoes throughout this novel enhancing its magical realist approach.

### ***The Lovely Bones***

It is the death story of Susie Salmon narrated from her personal heaven after her brutal rape and murder at the hands of her middle aged neighbour Mr. Harvey.

Susie sees her family devastated by her death, isolated even from one another as they try to cope with their terrible loss alone. Over the years, her friends and siblings grow up, fall in love, do all the things she never had the chance to do herself. But all of it changes when life gives her a second chance to fulfil her most intense desire when momentarily she returns back amongst the living.

Alice Sebold's vision of death and afterlife in The Lovely Bones is moving and compelling incorporating the rudiments of magic realism. The story is told by the narrator from her afterlife. The picture of heaven which Sebold presents is miraculous and original smashing our perception of the unknown which she terms as transactional and imperfect. Susie's spirit hovers around her loved ones unwilling to let go. It reveals itself at various points in the novel.

The characters communicate with her spirit in their own way and their destiny seems to rely on Susie's intense wishes. The novel transcends reality when Susie's spirit falls back to Earth and she inhabits our world as a living being:

"That was the moment I fell to Earth." (Sebold, 295) , exchanging positions with her classmate Ruth whom she had passed by on her way to heaven and who has the ability to see the dead . The incursion of Susie from Heaven into Earth portends a betrayal of the established viewpoints. This event emphasises the power of will which could make the unattainable possible.

"I was a soul back on Earth – AWOL a little while from heaven, I had been given a gift." (Sebold, 298)

### Conclusion :

Thus, magic realism is a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the 'reliable' tone of objective realistic report. Designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach beyond the confines of realism and draw upon the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a strong contemporary social relevance. Magic realist novels and stories have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic merges with the unexpected and the inexplicable and in which elements of dreams, fairy story, or mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence. They have the capacity to enrich our idea of what is 'real' by incorporating all dimensions of the imagination, particularly as expressed in magic, myth and religion.

These elements are remarkably inculcated in the text under this research project where the structure is conventionally realistic but contrasting elements such as supernatural myth, dream fantasy invade realism and change the whole basis of art.

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