



# A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON FANTASY AND MAGICAL REALISM FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

The approach of magic and the supernatural in both magical realism and fantasy literature is generally positive. The way each one uses those supernatural components, though varies slightly. This study contends that the primary distinction in how these genres uses supernatural aspects is that, unlike magical realism, where the supernatural is conceivable in the modern world, the supernatural in these genres is not. Fantasy fiction places the supernatural in wholly made-up worlds with no allusion to our world, where it is accepted as a banal aspect of reality. It is asserted that how the supernatural is depicted in those particular ways depends quite a bit on the setting of the stories, both geographically and historically. The distinction between magical realism and fantasy fiction is carefully investigated while outlining the common patterns of setting selection using examples from well-known works in both genres. In addition to exploring the causes of this disparity in how the supernatural is handled, this study considers the origins and future of these genres, influence comes from being made. As a result, it also examines the underlying cultural and socioeconomic factors as well as the various stages of capitalism in the nations and societies from which these two fiction genres primarily emerge that drive writers to use the supernatural in their works in these particular ways.

## KEYWORDS

Fantasy, Magical realism, Supernatural, Modern world.

Magical Realism and Fantasy fiction are significant as genres that approach supernatural without giving it negative connotations, as it is seen from a cursory look at the history of the supernatural in the western fictional universe. The apparent correlation between the advent of capitalism and more specifically, industrial capitalism and the “decline of magic” as Keith Thomas puts it, seems to be one of this history’s most intriguing aspects. In this book Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in popular Beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth Century England, Thomas

examines popular beliefs in magic and the supernatural in England from 1500 to 1700. He contends that in early modern England, the belief in the supernatural is mainstream rather than marginal. He also contends that the growth of Protestantism and scientific advancements, which provided logical explanations for formerly supernatural happenings, led to a shift in the dominant way of thinking.

One other factor supporting the “decline of magic” in modern England might be added: the rise of capitalism. Shakespeare’s play’s included, gradually comes to an end with the rise of capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This dry spell is then furthered by the Enlightenment period in the eighteenth century. The use of the supernatural in western literary tradition, which began with ancient myths legends and epics persisted in various genres (not excluding Shakespeare’s plays), gradually comes to an end with the Enlightenment period. By the end of the eighteenth century, the supernatural is once more a common and recognised phenomenon, but it is not in the same shape. Then the emerging literary form known as “the novel” would become famous for its realism, which is so full of details that it has journalistic aspects.

## FANTASY FICTION

A concept of the supernatural unrelated to a version to the unknown is presented by the widely read fantasy literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, fantasy fiction didn’t begin to gain critical acclaim and become recognised as a literary genre until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his introduction to the A to Z of Fantasy literature, Brain stablefort notes that “the idea of fantasy as a literary genre is so modern. Prior to 1969, the term “fantasy” is typically only used to describe a variety of children’s fiction, with the connotation being that adults should keep their fantasies in the place as other childish things (Stablefort. 2009: xxxvii).

Around the middle of the twentieth century, three of the most prestigious for fantasy fiction are established: the Hugo, Nebula and World fantasy Awards, which have been given out since 1953, 1966 and 1975 respectively. This confirms that fantasy fiction is beginning to be respected and accepted as a literary genre in its own. Fantasy books like J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of Ringstrilogy* and C.S.Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which expose readers to new worlds filled with wizards, spells, giants, ghosts and magical animals, have become very popular. Additionally, these “new word” really is new. These stories are not set in the real world or in the present. Lewis’s *Pevensie children* leave this world and travel to Narnia, where magic and mythological creatures are common, which Tolkien built *Middle-earth* with its many races, languages and laws. Beginning with Tolkien and Lewis, most Anglo- American fantasy authors like Terry Goodking, Ursula K. Le Guin, Philip Pullman, George R.R.Martin, and others have chosen to set their magical places outside of our globe, typically at a period resembling the middle ages. One of the most significant characteristics that characterises the fantasy literary genre, according to Tolkien, is the choice to build what he refuses to as a “Secondary World which your mind can enter” (Tolkien, 1964:36).

In a similar vein Lin Carter discusses the need for setting to be created in order for magic to be conceivable after arguing that the essence of fantasy stories can be summed up in the word “magic”: In the real world in which we live, magic does not work. A fantasy is a story set in a milieu that includes magic as an integral part of the natural world. Since we have yet to find a place among the laws of physics for magic powers, such tales imply-in fact such tales require the construction of an inverted milieu. To compose a fantasy, an author must construct a literary universe in which magic works. (Carter, 1973: 7). The major distinction between fantasy fiction and magical realism, according to this research, it is the need felt by the author to create fictional worlds where magic and the supernatural might become common place. This insistence on inventing a distinct universe and era where magic can exist makes the underlying idea that magic and supernatural existences have no place in modern reality, not even in a fictitious representation of it, obvious.

## MAGICAL REALISM

The lack of an effort to keep magic and/or the supernatural apart from the real world that we live in distinguishes magical realism from fantasy literature. Magical realism does not try to construct a different setting- a place and time for magic to occur. The literary genre of magical realism brings the fantastical and the magical into our everyday reality and it initially appeared in Latin America in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the works

of Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende. Simply by not highlighting it as anything out of the usual, magical realist books normalise the paranormal. The character also didn't feel the need to cover up anything that seems out of the norm to a sensible observer. Therefore, there is no requirement for a different planet with new laws in order for remarkable occurrences to occur. It already occurs in our current world and time, according to magical realism. It will be required to examine Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the most well-known example of magical realism, in order to better understand how this approach to the supernatural functions in magical realist literature. The story is set in the Colombia City of Macondo and over the course of a century and six generations of the Buendia family, the reader experience Macondo's history as well as that of its inhabitant, from the time it is found as small town until it become a large metropolitan area. Therefore, it may be claimed that Macondo is a mirror that reflects the history of Latin America, particularly Colombia. The fact that Macondo experiences strange events makes this book one of the best example of magical realism. For instance, the town suffers from a widespread insomnia epidemic, it doesn't stop raining for year, yellow flowers fall from the sky to commemorate the founding patriarch of Macondo's passing and Remedios the Beauty ascends the sky while doing laundry. But nobody in Macondo seems to be aware of these remarkable occurrences. In the narrative, no one seems to pause and consider these odd occurrences; these events are never recognized as supernatural or unusual. Although supernatural events occur frequently in both the *Lord of the Rings* and *One Hundred Year of Solitude* and are both implausible from a logical standpoint- the reader is frequently more likely to accept that they might in *One Hundred Year of Solitude*.

## MAGICAL REALISM VS FANTASY FICTION

The origin and ongoing production of these two genres can be linked to the fundamental difference between magical realism and fantasy fiction's treatment of setting, a difference that has a significant impact. It would probably not be a leap to say that while magical realism has its roots in Latin America as well as the postcolonial and developing nations, fantasy fiction in its contemporary narrative form- often in the form of novels- emerges primarily from the Western world. As a result, an examination of these two literary subgenres and how they differ from one another reveals the unique cultural and social traits of the societies they originate from.

The varied stages of capitalism existing in the nations and communities from which these two literary genres primarily emerge are the premise for explaining these differences, according to this essay. It is possible to demonstrate how these various stages of economic production produce various belief systems and perceptions of the supernatural and influence the way writers creates their imaginary world and regulate the extraordinary elements in those worlds by contrasting the fantasy novels that emerge from the most advanced capitalist countries in the Anglo-American tradition and the magical realist novels from the postcolonial and developing world around the world. Hsitian Jacques when Stephen Alexis talks about the characteristics of magical realism, he specifically links them to the economic system used by the nation or society (in this case, Haiti) that creates magical realist literature. In his comparison of the more developed modern civilizations to "the under-developed populations of the world," Alexis highlights the efforts of industrial capitalism, which he believes is the primary cause of the under achievement of the modernized capitalist countries. He asserts that Modern life with its stern rates of production, with its concentration of great masses of men into industries armies, caught up in the frenzy of Taylorism, with its inadequate leisure, and its context of mechanized life, hampers and slows down the production of legends and a living folk lore (Alexis, 1995: 194)

According to Alexis, it is more likely that magical realism tales will be written in developing or poor countries because these people have not yet been affected by capitalism and its unnatural ways of life. Few authors agree with Alexis' emphasis on the economic method of production as a defining characteristic of magical realism, on the other hand. This focus on the economic mode of production and how it is portrayed in literature, in my opinion, is a fascinating way to learn about how both magical realism and fantasy fiction use supernatural elements in various ways. What Alexis observes may be more clearly seen in the customary approach taken by authors of magical realism and fantasy fiction to the temporal aspects of the setting in their works. This is due to the fact that the setting a writer picker for their novel also affects the economic mode of production that is available within that time period.



To be able to formulate this difference between fantasy and magical realism more clearly, it might be necessary to examine the renowned examples of these two genres and how the economic mode of production is represented in these novels. First, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* can be examined more in detail as Tolkien influence a generation of writers that came after him with his *Middle-earth*. Tolkien's *Middle earth* overflowing with magical objects, people with extraordinary powers and supernatural occurrences is a different world with its own races, physical rules and even a different ontology. Middle-earth is nothing like out world and everything that happens in this narrative is within the rules of its own setting although it to ours. It may be required to look at well-known works from these two genres and how they depict the economic mode of production in order to better define the distinction between fantasy and magical realism. Since Tolkien's *Middle-earth* impacted a generation of writers who came after him, *The Lord of the Rings* may be more thoroughly explored. A unique universe with its own races, natural laws and even a different ontology, Tolkien's *Middle-earth* is filled with magical items, people with unusual abilities, and supernatural happenings. *Middle-earth* is very different from out world and although though it contrasts out reality, everything that occurs in this story occurs according to the rules of its own planet. It is supported by characteristics of the era in Tolkien's invented world that "the landscape of fantasy, with its dungeons and magicians, its dragons and hand to hand combat, is an essential mediaeval one, or better yet and more comprehensively, a pre-modern one" (Jameson, 2002: 274).

The only time mass production and mechanization are used is when Saruman the Wizard begin to raise an army of orcs to serve him and Sauron, the Dark Lord. As he destroys the environment around him, particularly an extremely old forest, he produces thousands of grotesques, vicious monsters that are more animalistic than human. The ancient tree shepherd Treebeard, who can walk and talk and who ultimately protects his forest from Saruman's destructive influence, says that Saruman "has a mind and wheels" (Tolkien, 2004: 616). So, it makes sense that the novel's one and only instance of mass production be purely wicked. It goes without saying that placing his magical realm in what appears to be a pre-capitalist setting was the only way Tolkien could do it. Technology development is dependent on scientific research, which finally runs counter to the remarkable nature of this world. This conflict is what *The Lord of the Rings* and the majority of other fantasy books lack. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is another well read example of fantasy literature that researcher wish to mention.

Rowling places the plot in our modern world; thus, magic does exist in this world. However, there are strict restrictions keeping the magical world secret from the non-magical one. This differs from the practice of many fantasy novels, which is to create a new imagined universe in order for the magic to be conceivable. Rowling even gave the non-magical portion of this world a name: "muggle." The magic universe is as tightly governed by laws as ours, if not more so. Researcher believe a good illustration of this is the Ministry of Magic. The Minister of Magic serve as the top authority figure, and politics and diplomacy play a significant role in this magical universe. As the series progresses, *The Ministry of Magic* is particularly infiltrated in the fifth novel, *Harry Potter and the order of the Phoenix*, and is used as Dark Lord Voldemort's primary method of keeping tabs on the wizarding world.

The magical world may be tiresome, despite the impression it gives to muggle readers that it is full of excitement. For instances, there are witches and wizards who are locked in boring dead-end profession in the Ministry of magic. On such individual is Mr. Weasley, father of Ron, who admires contemporary muggle society and is speechless in the presence of modern marvels like television, automobiles and aero planes. It is evident in this regard that what Rowling conjures is essentially a magical parallel reality in which the laws still apply but are different. In light of this, it is conceivable to draw the conclusion that the occurrence of magic and the supernatural are not on conflict. In actuality, Rowling's fantastical universe is the magically hidden counterpart to out own. The International Confederation of Wizards only issued "The International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy" in 1692, deciding that the magical world should not be practiced in front of muggles (Rowling, 2007: 318). This serves as a frequent reminder to readers that the two worlds are not always distinct. Clearly, this alludes to the 1692 and 1693 salem Witchcraft Trials. But it is also clear that after the seventeenth century, with the unchecked spread of capitalism and scientific advancements, it would not be able to establish a cosmos in which magic and the paranormal coexisted with the reality of a sophisticated capitalist society.

In other words, without this worldwide secrecy restriction, Rowling not be able to place her books in our physical and temporal universe. In order to explain how the magic of *Middle-earth* and Hogwarts constitutes a different plane from magical realist novels like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), researcher want to take these two examples of fantasy literature. *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series and move back towards magical realism. *Midnight's Children*, one of the most well-known works of magical realism, incorporates many elements from Gabriel Garca Marquez and Isabel Allende, as well as other Latin America magical realist authors. Rushdie follows their lead and sets his tale in the modern era, complete with capitalism and imperialism, but there is still room for magic, prophecies and people endowed with superhuman abilities. Saleem and his family's story is entwined with the political and historical events of first India, then Pakistan and then Bangladesh as these countries come into existence because he was born at the exact moment India gains independence from Britain.

Recording the history of Saleem's family also entails documenting India's passage from colonialism to independence and the subsequent rage of internal and external challenges. In reality, Rushdie himself claims that *Midnight's Children* is regarded as "pretty realistic, almost a history book" due to the volume of historical information it includes on recent events on the Indian subcontinent. (Introduction, *Midnight's Children*, xiii) Indian readers referred to it as a "history book."

Additionally, he notes that Western readers typically view the book as fantasy whereas Indian readers more likely to place a higher priority on the historical and political aspects of the book. The fact that there is such a wide range in how readers from various areas of the world described a work of fiction also provides us a clear picture of how the supernatural aspects and the likelihood that they are real are interpreted by various readers from various regions of the world. Similar to *one Hundred years of solitude*, the supernatural in *midnight's children* is random, in predictable and familiar in its disorder rather than followings set laws and guidelines.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible to infer that the treatment of the setting in these make-believe worlds, in terms of both time and geography, differs from that of magical fiction and fantasy fiction. Magical realist authors normally establish their stories in our own modern world and time in contrast to fantasy fiction writers who frequently place their stories in worlds and times that are distinct from our own sometimes in premodern settings. When the origins of these many genres are taken into account, it is possible to draw comparisons between the settings chosen by these authors and the degree of economic and capitalist development in their home nations. It can be argued that the fact that these particular authors are moulded by the socioeconomic systems they are from or write about is the key factors behind the disparate ways in which the supernatural and magical are utilised in these two distinct genres. And these socioeconomic characteristics are ultimately influenced by the mode of production employed by a nation, or by how far along capitalism is there. This study makes the case that developing and unevenly developed societies. Where there are multiple modes of production rather than just one, are more likely to produce literary works like magical realism, which bridges the gap between the fantastical and the real, the conventional and the contemporary, the old and the new, and the novel and storytelling. In a similar line, fantasy literature and the rigorous way in which it separates the supernatural from our world of reason might be considered as a by product of a highly capitalist culture.

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