



## MAGIC REALISM IN J. K. ROWLING'S *HARRY POTTER* NOVELS

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### ABSTRACT

Magic realism is the presentation or depiction of a fictional or mythical world with real characters, relating to the concepts of the real world with the magic world.

J. K. Rowling is a renowned British novelist who shot to fame after the publication of her series of *Harry Potter* novels. *Harry Potter* novels are based on the magical world of witches and wizards who belong to Britain. These witches and wizards have their own proper education system, a ministry and hospitals. Their class system was based on their heritage and purity of their blood which was assumed on the fact that whether they were progenies of wizards and witches or others who do not fall in these categories. In this way the magic world of *Harry Potter* has been related to the real world.

*Harry Potter* novels revolve around the protagonist Harry Potter; the school life of Harry with his two friends; their struggles against the prevailing odds and their ultimate victory over the antagonist, Lord Voldemort. These novels are seven in number, each novel narrating the events, achievements and debacle occurring in that year in the life of Harry and his friends. The story commences when Harry is just eleven years old and culminates in the seventeenth year of his life, which obviously goes on after that beyond the novels. Eight movies based on these novels have also been produced and each has attained great success at the Box Office which shows its popularity and influence on popular culture.

The human aspect of the novels comes from the fact that Rowling has elaborated through her characters the human emotions and ethics that are inherent in humankind. By choosing her protagonists as children she successfully shows the innocence of heart. The children brave through adversities and fight the evil Lord Voldemort. Rowling has portrayed in her novels, the concept of good versus evil. No matter how powerful the evil is, it can and will always be defeated by the good. All these concepts of Rowling, the ethics, the good versus evil and the human follies and fancies are dexterously illustrated by her without being didactic and this is what has made her novels popular and interesting not only among the young but also amongst adults.

Keywords: Magic Realism, *Harry Potter*, Ethics, Popular Culture.

### Magic Realism

Wikipedia defines Magical realism as, "magic realism, or marvelous realism is a style of fiction that paints a realistic view of the modern world while also adding magical elements. It is sometimes called fabulism, in reference to the conventions of fables, myths, and allegory. "Magical realism", perhaps the most common term, often refers to fiction and literature in particular, with magic or the supernatural presented in an otherwise real-world or mundane setting."

Merriam-Webster defines Magic Realism as,

1: painting in a meticulously realistic style of imaginary or fantastic scenes or images.

2: a literary genre or style associated especially with Latin America that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction.

Characteristics of Magic Realism:

1. Fantastical Elements – Magic Realism presents fantastical elements in realistic ways. It shows fables, tales, and myths in a way which are relevant to social norms and at the same time mystical. Some traits are given to the characters, such as telepathy and apparition, which helps to bring about the magic or fantastic elements.
2. Real-world Settings – With the help of the technique of magic realism, the author sets the fantasy world in the backdrop of the real world. The author does not create a new magical world but reveal it as a part of the real world. The supernatural blends with the natural or the familiar world.
3. Plenitude – A plethora, or extraordinary abundance of detail and incidents which leads up to the climax of the story. Extraordinary, strange and marvelous incidents take place in abundance.
4. Hybridity – The plot lines characteristically employ hybrid planes of reality in opposites such as Western and indigenous.
5. Heightened Awareness of Mystery – The works of magic realism are to be read at an

intensified level. The reader must let go of the conventional sense of time and space and the corrected-ness of the real world. The writer must also heighten his senses to the point where he can experience all levels of extreme reality, and also of mystery.

6. Political Critique – In magic realism, the story or the plot contains the criticism of the society and social conditions, more importantly the elite class. This mode is primarily about the socially and economically marginalized and the plot is from their point of view.

Examples:

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Anna Marie McLemore's *Wild Beauty*, feminist writer Angela Carter's *Night at the Circus*, and magic realism royalty Isabel Allende's *Eva Luna*, etc.

### J. K. Rowling

Joanne Rowling was born on 31st July 1965. She studied at Exeter University and after her degree, she moved to London and worked in a series of jobs. Rowling conceived the idea of *Harry Potter* in 1990 while sitting on a delayed train from Manchester to London King's Cross. Over the next five years, she began to map out all seven books of the series. She wrote mostly in longhand and gradually built up a mass of notes, many of which were scribbled on odd scraps of paper. In Edinburgh, she trained as a teacher and began teaching in the city's schools. She sent the first three chapters of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to a number of publication houses but only to face rejection from almost all of them except one. The book was first published by Bloomsbury Children's Books in June 1997, under the name J.K. Rowling in which "K" stands for Kathleen, her paternal grandmother's name. Her first novel was published in the US by Scholastic under a different title, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, in 1998. This was followed by six more novels, and each of them met with a record-breaking success.

In 2001, the film adaptation of the first book was released by Warner Bros which was followed by eight more instalments based on the other six books. The concluding novel was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* which was published in June 2007. Concluding film of the series was "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2" which released in 2011.

Rowling has also written two small companion volumes, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages*. In December 2008, a third companion volume, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* was published. In 2012, Rowling's digital company Pottermore was launched.

In 2012, Rowling published her first novel for adults, *The Casual Vacancy* (Little Brown), which has now been translated into 44 languages and was adapted for TV by the BBC in 2015. Rowling also writes crime novels, featuring private detective Cormoran Strike.

In 2016, Rowling collaborated with playwright Jack Thorne and director John Tiffany on an original new story for the stage: *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child Parts One and Two*. Also in 2016, Rowling made her screenwriting debut with the film "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them"; a prequel to the Harry Potter series.

### Harry Potter

The Harry Potter novels are brainchild of J. K. Rowling. She started writing the novels on papers and went to around twelve publishers before Bloomsbury, which is a publication house in London, asked her to send the first part because they found it intriguing. The series first came into being with the publication of the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* on 26 June 1997. Rowling subsequently published six more parts to the series; all of these novels were published by Bloomsbury in the United Kingdom and Scholastic Inc. is their United States' counterpart.

The novels are famous worldwide and as of February 2018, the books have sold more than 500 million copies worldwide, making them the best-selling book series in history, and have been translated into eighty languages.

The seven novels were made into eight films adapting the same name as the novels. The first movie was released in 2001 and the last part of the series released in 2011. For ten years the film attracted a huge audience of every age group and became an influential phenomenon. The movies were all produced by Warner Brothers. The movies got many accolades and has the high rating of 96% on Rotten Tomatoes, the most trusted movie review site on the internet.

Apart from being adapted into movies, the popularity of the novels can be seen as they have been adapted into videogames, audio books, spin-offs (*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*) and stage adaptations (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*). There is also an official website by J. K. Rowling, Pottermore, where every Harry Potter fan can make their account, they are sorted into a house, given a wand, can explore Hogwarts and places near it, and the latest addition to this Harry Potter experience is that people enrolled can even find out their Patronus. All these help in promoting the *Harry Potter* fandom after so many years of the novel's release. Apart from all this there have been theme parks at Universal Studios in Hollywood, and various websites which sell Harry Potter merchandise. All of this adds to the popularity of the novels.

### Character List

The novels chronologically are:

**Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone:** This was the first of the series and was published on 26 June 1997. The title *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was changed to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for the United States' readers, it was published there in 1998. The movie directed by Chris Columbus was released in 2001. The title of the movie was *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Story revolves around the first year of Harry and his friends at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He comes to know that he belongs to wizarding community and he also gains knowledge about his background. Here he has his first encounter with Lord Voldemort and defeats him.

**Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets:** This was the second part that was published in United Kingdom on 2 July 1998 and in United States on 2 June 1999. The movie directed by Chris Columbus was released in 2002. Story in this novel is about second year of Harry and his friends at Hogwarts. Here Harry encounters the fragment of past of Voldemort and again defeats him.

**Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban:** This was the third part that was published in the United Kingdom on 8 July 1999 and in the United States on 8 September 1999. The movie directed by Alfonso Cuarón was released in 2004. The story in this novel involves the third year of Harry and his friends at Hogwarts. This is the only novel where Harry is not confronted with Voldemort. In this novel the readers are introduced with characters related to Harry's parents, their friends.

**Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire:** The fourth part was published simultaneously in the United Kingdom and the United States on 8 July 2000. The movie directed by Mike Newell was released in 2005. The story is about the fourth year of Harry and his friends at Hogwarts, here there is a tournament held at Hogwarts and two other schools come there to participate. Here Voldemort is resurrected and a fight ensues between Harry and Voldemort during which Harry escapes narrowly.

**Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix:** It was published on 21 June 2003 both in the United Kingdom and in the United States. The movie directed by David Yates hit the theaters world wide in 2007. Story is about the fifth year of Harry and his friends at Hogwarts. Here Harry forms a group named as the Order of the Phoenix to prepare other students for a fight with Voldemort when the time comes. Harry has a fight with Voldemort at the Ministry of Magic and after that fight the world starts believing Harry that Voldemort has returned.

**Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince:** Sixth instalment of the series was published on 16 July 2005 in the United Kingdom and United States. The movie directed by David Yates was released in 2009. Story is darker than the previous novels. Here Harry and Dumbledore go on an expedition to find Horcrux

and the readers are told about Horcruxes which are one of the main turning point of the novel.

**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows:** The last and final instalment of the original series was published on 21 July 2007. The film directed by David Yates was made into two parts:

- "The Deathly Hallows – Part 1" released in 2010
- "The Deathly Hallows – Part 2" released in 2011

The last and the concluding novel here is the grand one where the story concludes with Harry defeating Voldemort. Here Voldemort and his followers attack Hogwarts and there ensues a fight between all the people of the wizarding world and finally Harry kills off Voldemort.

Each of the novels tell about one year in the life of Harry Potter and his friends which ultimately leads up to the killing of Lord Voldemort, the evil wizard, by Harry. Story

#### Elements of Magic Realism in *Harry Potter*

The *Harry Potter* novels, and even movies, are all set in the magical world which is parallel to the real world. Magic realism is the technique in which the writer sets the character in a fantastical world of mystery and *Harry Potter* novels are an apt example of this technique.

Following points will make the remark clear:

1. Fantastical Elements – The story of Harry Potter is infested with fantastical elements and characters as present in fables and myths. Characters like that of Werewolf (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*) and Centaurs (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) represent such characters presented by Rowling. Apart from these, there are techniques used by characters which help them to penetrate into the mind of others and read and control it. Professor Snape teaches Harry Potter the technique of Occlumency (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Ch. 24), which is the act of preventing someone from entering one's mind; the technique of

entering one's mind, called Legilimency (*Order of the Phoenix*, Ch. 24).

2. Real-World Settings – Story of Harry Potter spans from 1991 to 98 in London. The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry, in which Harry studies is set in Scotland. The wizarding world parallels to the muggle (non-wizarding) world. The magical world has a proper education system where the students are enrolled at the age of eleven and they receive seven years of education. The witches and wizards have their Ministry of Magic, which governs and regulates the acts of the witches and wizards in the magical world; their own Judicial System and prison in Azkaban. When required, the Minister of Magic takes help of their counterpart from non-magical world, as can be seen in first chapter of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.
3. Plenitude – The entire series of Harry Potter from beginning to the end abounds with bizarre incidences and happenings. Apart from use of magic and spells in abundance, disappearance of glass from the aquarium of Boa Constrictor (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Ch. 2); the incident of Flying Car and the Whomping Willow (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Ch. 5); appearance of ghosts in the entire series; the different modes of transportation; Lord Voldemort dividing his soul into seven Horcruxes (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Ch. 23) and many more such incidences help it to qualify this attribute.
4. Hybridity – Places such as Diagon Alley (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Ch. 5), Number 12, Grimmauld Place (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Ch. 4) and Ministry of Magic (*Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, Ch. 7) are present in London but hidden from Muggles by magic. The Daily Prophet, the daily newspaper of British Wizarding community is parallel to

the new papers in the contemporary Britain.

5. Heightened Awareness of Mystery - The characters move back and forth in time with the help of Time-Turner (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Ch. 21); the characters access the past memory of another person by being present in their past (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Ch. 30).
6. Political Critique – The Witches and Wizards have their class system based on the purity of their blood: Pure Bloods, Half Bloods and Mud Bloods or Muggles. There are also house-elves treated as slaves by Pure Bloods; oppression of the Muggle-borns; discriminatory treatment of the orphan Harry Potter and Voldemort by the society because of them being Wizard which was considered a taboo.

### Conclusion

*Harry Potter* novels have been replete with Magic Realism. The genre was started by Salman Rushdie but Rowling has flourished the genre and made the novel series the best example of Magic Realism in the English literature. The important points which make a novel or novel series a piece of Magic Realism is included in *Harry Potter* novels. The mystery, hybridity, fantastical elements, and many more are abundantly present to make it a novel of Magic Realism. Therefore, it can be asserted that Rowling's art of imagination transcends the reality of human perspectives of daily life.

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