

Magic Realism

Magic Realism is a very modern genre of writing that combines elements of the inexplicable, the improbable and the 'magical' with everyday life. Unlike Harry Potter, which is set in a world where magic really does exist, Magic Realist novels are set in the real world where magic does not really exist yet bizarre and unusual things still happen. The idea is basically that the beauty and eccentricity of life cannot simply be explained away in terms of the logical and rational.

'To be born again,' sang Gibreel Farishat tumbling from the heavens, 'first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji! To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly. Tat-taa! Taka-thun! How to ever smile again, if first you won't cry? How to win the darling's love, mister, without a sigh? Baba, if you want to get born again ...' Just before dawn one winter's morning, New Year's Day or thereabouts, two real, full-grown, living men fell from a great height, twenty nine thousand and two feet, towards the English Channel, without benefit of parachutes or wings, out of a clear sky.

Comment [K1]: Typically, magic realism bluntly introduces improbable things straight into a story. Why is this man tumbling from the heavens? The bizarre nature of this tumbling is emphasised by the fact that the character is singing

'I tell you, you must die, I tell you, I tell you,' and thusly and so beneath a moon of alabaster until a loud cry crossed the night, 'To the devil with your tunes,' the words hanging crystalline in the iced white night, 'in the movies you only mimed to playback singers, so spare me these infernal noises now.'

Comment [K2]: Here the realistic and the patently unusual are juxtaposed. One key element of magic realism is the straight forward factual tone in which 'magical' events are narrated – this increase their realism

Comment [K3]: The calm continuity of the singing contrasts with the strangeness of the situation

Gibreel, the tuneless soloist, had been cavorting in moonlight as he sang his impromptu gazal, swimming in air, butterfly-stroke, breast-stroke, bunching himself into a ball, spreadeagling himself against the almost-infinity of the almost-dawn, adopting heraldic postures, rampant, couchant, pitting levity against gravity. Now he rolled happily towards the sardonic voice. 'Ohe, Salad baba, it's you, too good. What-ho, old Chumch.' At which the other a fastidious shadow falling headfirst in a grey suit with all the jacket buttons done up, arms by his sides, taking for granted the improbability of the bowler hat on his head, pulled a nickname-hater's face. 'Hey, Spoono,' Gibreel yelled, eliciting a second inverted wince, 'Proper London, bhai! Here we come! Those bastards down there won't know what hit them. Meteor or lightning or vengeance of God. Out of thin air, baby. Dharraaaammm! Wham, na? What an entrance, yarr. I swear: splat.'

Comment [K4]: Again a bizarre juxtaposition of the normal everyday activity of swimming with the abnormal activity of falling from the sky. The sharpness of the contrast, in this case, introduces an element of humour

Comment [K5]: Humour is intensified by the serious and calm manner in which this man is plummeting, presumably, to his death

Comment [K6]: The fact that these two manage to have an argument and that 'Spoonos' can find time to be annoyed about being called by his nickname despite the life threatening situation helps to remove the event of falling from the sky from the real world as we would not react like this in real life. Screaming, perhaps, would be more appropriate

Out of thin air: a big bang followed by falling stars. A universal beginning, a miniature echo of the birth of time ... the jumbo jet Bostan, Flight A1-420, blew apart without any warning.

Comment [K7]: The gentle humour is emphasised by 'inverted wince'

Comment [K8]: Although a realistic explanation of the event is given – it does nothing to undermine the bizarreness of the manner of the falling. Notice also how the allusion to the 'Big Bang' invests the aircraft explosion with greater than normal significance

Taken from 'The Satanic Verses' by Salman Rushdie