

# A Tryst with Magic Realism: Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix

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**Abstract**—JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels have become a rage since the time they were first published. They have gone from children's literature to becoming great literary novels. When we hear *Harry Potter*, the first thing that comes to our mind is the word 'Magic'. The *Harry Potter* novels belong to a genre of writing called 'Magic Realism'. This paper will be studying *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* in this respect. Though while reading this book we see a lot of features of a fantastical world such as the description of Hogwarts, the game of Quidditch, the supernatural beings to name a few, the idea that it belongs to a world of reality too will be explored in this paper. The main objective of this paper will be to analyse how *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* belongs to the genre of Magic Realism and not Fantasy or Surrealism. Using the theory of Magic Realism, an attempt has been made to study the instances where a close connection with reality can be seen in the magical world. The paper will focus on the infusion of magic into the city space of London, everyday objects and the underlying themes of human emotions and politics tie the two worlds together. The paper begins with an understanding of the term 'Magic Realism' and then delves into an analysis of the novel.

**Keywords:** Magic, Reality, Magic Realism, London, Politics, Human Emotions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* is a book by JK Rowling which tells us the story of a young wizard and his life. On a reading of *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix*, there are elements of fantasy in it but it belongs to the genre of Magic Realism. The main objective of this paper is to understand how *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* finds its place in the genre of magic realism and not under fantasy or surrealism. This is a novel which finds its place in the genre of Magic Realism because of the close connection JK Rowling has maintained with reality. The infusion of magic into the city space of London, everyday objects and the underlying themes of human emotions and politics tie the two worlds together. Magic Realism has its roots in culture, history and folklore because the earliest traces of it were found in paintings and not prose. The paintings of Giorgio Di Chico which dealt with the impossible and was called 'Metaphysical Art'. The concept of 'Ordinary can be Strange' was shown by

the art of Carlos Carra as well. It is a part of a broader spectrum called Imaginative Realism which includes other styles such as fantasy and surrealism as well [Wechsler 295-297]. This paper will use the theory of Magic Realism. The term was first coined by Franz Roh in 1925 [Thamarana 263]. He said that Magic Realism was related to Surrealism but there was a difference. Magic Realism dealt with the actual existence of those magical things in the world as opposed to Surrealism where there was a subconscious reality. This genre of writing has been made popular by many writers over the years like Gabriel Gracia Marquez, Miguel Angel Asturias, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee and many more. Magic Realism refers to a genre where there is a close connection between the magical and the real world. The foundation of these stories is derived from reality to make the ordinary extraordinary. Magic Realism is easier for readers to believe because of the element of reality it has.

## 2. ANALYSIS

"Perhaps it hadn't been a magical sound after all. Perhaps he was desperate for the tiniest sign of contact from the world to which he belonged that he was simply overreacting to perfectly ordinary noises" [Rowling 7]. Harry being a wizard belongs to his magical world and since there hasn't been any contact with his wizarding friends and family, he is desperate to go back. We see that JK Rowling makes the readers believe that there exists a magical world somewhere else but it is not a surreal place. The reality of London as described in the book is hard to miss. Using the setting in London to create a magical world within it is what is seen in this book. For instance if we look at the description of Grimmauld Place, the Headquarters for the Order of Phoenix and Sirius Black's ancestral home it becomes clear. "Harry thought, and no sooner had he reached the part about number twelve, Grimmauld Place, than a battered door emerged out of nowhere between numbers eleven and thirteen, followed swiftly by dirty walls and grimy windows. It was as though an extra house had inflated, pushing those on either side out of its way. Harry gaped at it. The stereo in number eleven thudded

on. Apparently the Muggles inside hadn't even felt anything" [Rowling 55]. Here the Black's house is located right in between two muggle houses in a London street. They move apart to reveal this magically hidden mansion and the muggles' do not realise anything. There is no supernatural world but just the magical in the ordinary has been depicted.

Speaking of magic being infused into daily objects, Rowling has played with the idea of communication. In the real world we have gadgets for the same like smartphones, the internet, televisions and so on. But in the magical world, the prime mode of communication is writing letters which are delivered by owls. She takes us back in time with letters and quills. Being set in London, she has used the notion of the fireplace as a mode of communication. "Harry whipped around, Sirius' untidy dark head was sitting in the fire again" [Rowling 341]. The fireplace which was present in British households for warming it is used as a secret mode of communication by Harry and Sirius.

There are five characteristics of Magic Realism : An element of magic is there, there is a fantasy world, the reader may be confused between two opposite events, there are multiple worlds and there is disruption of time, space and identity [Biswas 62-64]. *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* displays these characteristics in the instances as analysed in this paper. An element of magic is seen where magic is infused in multiple real life objects, there is a fantasy world which is the world of Hogwarts, often the reader is confused between magical events, two clear worlds exist: Muggle world and Wizarding world and there is a disruption of time, space and identity where we see new creatures like Centaurs, Squibs being written about and concepts prophecies in glass orbs being used. Looking at more British things, the map of London is a very popular piece of the city. The map of London shows the entire city with all its tube networks, landmarks and streets. Borrowing from this concept, in this book Harry makes use of the Marauder's Map. It is a map of Hogwarts but the magical element shines through when we see that this map shows the position of each and every person in the castle along with its structure. Normally a map is used for directions but in the magical world, the same map is used for tracing people inside Hogwarts.

"Kingsley Shacklebolt and Sturgis Podmore were examining the microwave and Hestia Jones was laughing at a potato peeler she had come across while rummaging in the drawers." [50]. Here we see that Rowling has established a difference between muggle and wizard houses. In this particular chapter, a group of wizards have come to Harry's muggle home to rescue him and they are extremely amused to see the cleanliness of the place. Things like a microwave and a potato peeler are unknown to them because they use magic for cooking as well. By using daily kitchen appliances which are found in every household, the element of reality comes through the text and enhances the magical realm as well.

Rowling has introduced certain characters which bear traits similar to people we find in the normal world. For instance she has written about a Squib: someone of magical birth but unable to perform magic due to some genetic defect. Squibs are looked down upon in the magical world because they are like an anomaly, something against basic nature. This seems similar to the plight of the transgenders and homosexuals in the human world where they are considered as the anomalies of genetic conditions. There is a lack of acceptance for them just as for Squibs in the world of magic. A lot of times writers want to talk about social and political issues which are prevalent in the society but can't do so openly without the fear of being banned and hence they make use of the notion of magic for the same [N. Ramesh Chandra 332-340]. Rowling has coined the term 'Metamorphmagus' [Rowling 48] which refers to a witch or a wizard who can change their physical appearance on will due to some kind of gene mutation. The concept of gene mutation has been explored earlier too in fantasy series like the X-Men but Rowling maintains the reality in this concept by keeping it limited to the change in physical appearance. There are some qualities that people inherit by birth and being a Metamorphmagus is just like one of them. The ability of characters to change identities is seen in another novel as well, 'Mistress of Spices' by Chitra Banerjee. She plays upon this magical aspect to enhance the mythical qualities of her protagonist [Sumathi 413-418]. In the same way JK Rowling has introduced her readers to mythical beings like Tonks who can change her appearance at will, thus bringing this sort of writing under the genre of magic realism.

Another aspect that is important here is the human emotions shown in this book. One would imagine that a book on magic would have nothing to do with real emotions but the whole series is driven by them. Love, courage, family ties, jealousy are some of the many themes in this book. In this book Harry, Ron and Hermione are adolescents so they go through a myriad of emotions. For instance being Dumbledore's favourite and the star student of Hogwarts, Harry expects to become the prefect in his fifth year but to his dismay it is Ron who gets the badge. At this stage Harry should be happy for his best friend but all he feels is jealous of Ron. Rowling has beautifully captured the confusion of this young age in instances like these. She has used the most intense and common human emotions and blended them into their magical world. The foundation of Hogwarts lies on the spirit of bravery and courage, friendship and love [Rowling 148-154]. The feeling of love has been looked at in this book. We see Harry and Cho falling for each other and Harry wants to take her out for a date on Valentine's Day. The celebration of Valentine's Day is a notion borrowed from the real world because people celebrate this day all over the world. The idea of a couple going on a date gives the impression of a coffee shop or desserts and the same has been described in the wizarding world. Harry and Cho go to a small teashop called

Madam Puddifoot's for their date and it perfectly describes their first date [Rowling 516-517].

Family bonds are also what this book lays stress upon. Sirius is Harry's godfather and this book highlights the bond of love between them. In a world where everyone is fighting a war, family is the only thing that remains constant. This idea is represented in the world of Hogwarts where Sirius tirelessly helps Harry throughout against his war with Voldemort. "Last year all the evidence was that someone inside Hogwarts was trying to kill you, Harry!" said Sirius impatiently. "This year we know that there's someone outside Hogwarts who'd like to kill us all, so I think learning to defend yourselves properly is a very good idea!" [Rowling 343]. We always look to our family for backing us up in things we do. Even though Harry doesn't have parents, the emotion of having a family has still been kept intact. It leaves the readers with a deep sense of empathy because of the reality in Harry's life.

Another thing humans believe in are premonitions which is a strong belief that something bad is going to happen. Harry experiences something like a premonition where he dreams that a snake has attacked Mr. Weasley and he is dying. The only difference between a real world premonition and Harry's dream is that his dream is real and Mr. Weasley has actually been bitten. Whereas in a premonition, something is going to happen in the future. But again we see that JK Rowling has borrowed an idea from reality and made it magical (Rowling 429-430). Humans are also believed to have the skill of mind reading. A lot of people claim that they can do so. Going by this concept, Occlumency is introduced. It is an obscure branch of magic which is the magical defence of the mind against external penetration [Rowling 479]. Occlumency is practiced in order to prevent external forces from reading it. In real life, there does not exist such a defence but in the magical realm there is a branch of magic devoted to this wholly. The two concepts of mind reading and Occlumency are borrowed from reality and magic respectively.

The world of wizards does not have just wizards and witches alone but also magical creatures. Some are entirely magical like a Hippogriff but some creatures are variations of the animals in the human world. One such example is that of a Centaur. A Centaur is a magical creature that has the torso of a man joined to the palomino body of a horse [Rowling 552]. It is easy to picture a Centaur in our heads because horses are a part of the real world and so are humans but Centaurs belong to the world of magic. We see the underlying theme of magic realism in these small observations. *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* has an underlying theme of politics to it. There is a Ministry of Magic just like there is a Parliament in the real world. The Ministry of Magic has some laws which govern their world. Dementors are the guards of Azkaban, the wizard prison. They are not allowed to go into the muggle world but they attack Harry and his cousin Dudley in the muggle streets. Here the two worlds of magic and reality clash making the

reader see that they both are interwoven and not apart from the other [Rowling 16-17].

The Ministry of Magic is refusing to believe Harry and Dumbledore in their statement that Voldemort is back for good. All through the book there are instances where the Ministry is trying to cover this news up and feed lies to the people. Politics is something which the world is a part of on a daily basis. The story in this book reminds us of our own politicians now who are always trying to cover up their shortcomings. The lack of transparency, the corruption at every level and the power play is something Rowling has borrowed heavily from the real world [Rowling 201]. On reading the parts about the Ministry's attitude and their reaction to the happenings in the magic world, the reader easily makes sense of the politics because of the reality in it. "Deep down, Fudge knows Dumbledore's much cleverer than he is, a much more powerful wizard, and in the early days of his Ministry he was forever asking Dumbledore for help and advice," said Lupin. "But it seems that he's become fond of power now, and much more confident. He loves being Minister of Magic" [Rowling 86-87].

Fudge, who is the Minister for Magic is hungry for power and he knows that if the news that Voldemort is back spreads around, he will have to give up his seat at the head. We see this time and again where the powerful leaders of the world have refused to think about the consequences of their actions in the wake of their thirst for power. In the real world we see discrimination everywhere based on class stratification. The same can be observed in the magical world as well interwoven with politics. The Fountain of Magical Brethren in the Ministry of Magic building at first glance shows wizards and humans living in peace but on a closer look it shows a hierarchy and symbolises how wizards are above non magic folk [Salem Press 55-56].

Another important element here is the role of media in politics. In the human world today, media is largely powerful because it's a medium of mass communication which can influence people. But there is hardly any media which maintains a neutral perspective while reporting something. The TV channels and newspapers are all bought by the political parties and they report biased news. Similarly in the magical world, the only form of mass communication is the newspaper called 'The Daily Prophet' which is what the entire wizarding community relies upon. But it's run by the Ministry itself which means that everything that is reported is ministry censored and approved. Rowling has taken concepts from everyday life like newspapers and induced the magical element into them, thereby making it magic realism [Rowling 87]. Modern day journalism looks for breakthrough stories all the time. Every news channel and newspaper wants to run the most exclusive pieces of news. Similarly Harry gives an exclusive interview to an infamous reporter of the magic world, Rita Skeeter for the newspaper 'The Quibbler' This is the only way his story will be heard. The striking similarity

between the role of journalism in both worlds becomes visible [Rowling 523]. In modern day we see a number of student unions and protestors who raise their voices against political injustice. Similarly we see that even in this book Harry leads a group which call themselves 'Dumbledore's Army' in response to the Ministry's interference with their syllabus. The world has witnessed countless secret organisations who rebel against the injustice. Rowling once again borrows this idea from reality and we witness the formation of this student group whom Harry teaches to defend themselves [Rowling 362-363].

Whenever a group of rebels arises, there is an attempt to shut them down in order to protect the sanctity of the government. People who are in a position of power do not want their name to be tarnished by being associated with these rebel groups. The same can be seen in Harry Potter as well. 'All Student Organisations, Societies, Teams, Groups, and Clubs are henceforth disbanded. An Organisation, Society, Team, Group, or Club is hereby defined as a regular meeting of three or more students'[Rowling 325]. The Ministry of Magic puts a ban on every kind of student organisation because they fear being overthrown by the students of Hogwarts. Placing this concept into the real world, the connection is evident because the political leaders of the world have shut down similar protest organisations as they fear being overthrown by the common people. At the surface the notion of power is very subtle in this book but on a closer look the hierarchy and political agenda behind every action becomes evident.

These novels have been used to actually study the theory of politics, identity, institutional behaviour and globalisation in a classroom environment. A discussion based approach was followed by the professor. Instances like Hermione being a Mudblood led to discussions about discriminations that people face in the world based on caste, creed and colour. The nuances of politics reached out to terrorism as well. We can see that Harry Potter could be used as a classroom text because its close ties to the real world. It is magical but the fact that it can be taken out of its magical world and applied in the real one throws light on the genre of Magic Realism [Deets 741-744]. *Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix* is a book which is an infusion of magic into reality. Time and again we come across instances in the book where ideas, concepts and theories have been borrowed from reality but portrayed in

their magical essence. Though there are some instances which are completely disconnected from reality such as the game of Quidditch which is played on broomsticks, we cannot negate the fact that the underlying theme of politics, the running of Hogwarts, the human emotions and family ties are close to reality. Though there are instances of fantasy or surrealism, at a deeper level it becomes clear that Hogwarts and the wizarding world is not something entirely alien. It is an extension of the real world, just with the element of magic induced in it. This paper is not trying to prove that Harry Potter and Order of the Phoenix belongs entirely to magic realism. It is only trying to understand the elements which govern the genre of magic realism. Also this paper has not looked into character analysis of any of the characters. It has not touched upon the relationships between different characters in the book as well. This paper only looks into the infusion of magic into reality which makes the readers believe in this magical world of Hogwarts.

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