

Intermingling of Fantasy and Reality in the Novels of Paulo Coelho

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Paulo Coelho

Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo_Coelho

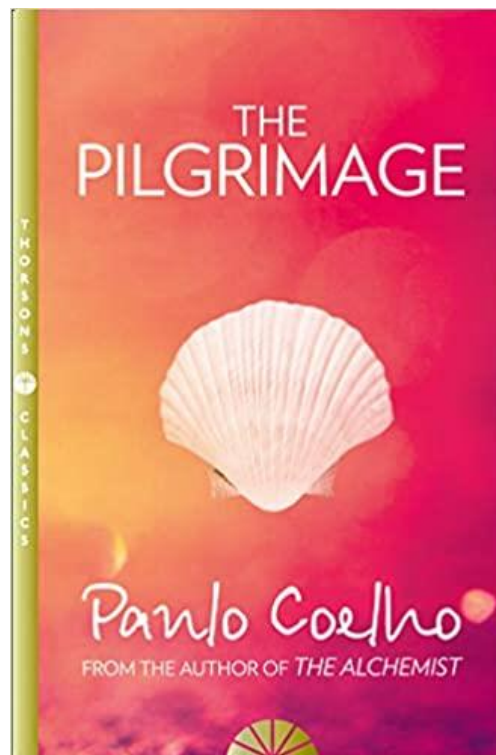
Abstract

Magical realism is often regarded as a regional trend, restricted to the Latin American writers who popularized it as a literary form. Magical realists Lois Parkinson, Zamora and Wendy B. Faris show magical realism to be an international movement with a wide ranging history and a significant influence among the literatures of the world. In Essays On Texts by writers as diverse as Toni Morrison, Gunter Grass, Salman Rushdie, Derek Welcott, Abe Kobo, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and many others, magical realism is examined as a worldwide phenomenon (*Magical Realism - Theory, History, Community* <http://www.uta.edu/English/wbfaris/MagicalRealism.html>). Magical realism takes the supernatural for granted and spends more of its space exploring the gamut of human reactions. Its most basic concern is the nature and limits of the knowable. The special feature of Paulo Coelho is his ornamented usage of magical realism which has only the slightest variation from mysticism. This paper aims at distinguishing magical realism which

is interwoven with mysticism. Among the novels of Paulo Coelho, magical realism features predominantly in three of his novels *The Pilgrimage*, *The Valkyries* and *Brida*.

Keywords: Paulo Coelho, *The Pilgrimage*, *The Valkyries*, *Brida*, magical realism features, magical realism as international movement.

Writers like Gabriel Garcia, Gunter Grass and John Fowles interweave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales.



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.in/Pilgrimage-Paulo-Coelho/dp/8172235399>

In Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage*, it is not the external or internal factors that chase the character. Instead the protagonist gets obsessed with certain thoughts or incidents on his own self in course of his spiritual quest. While in the road to Santiago, the protagonist is being taught about many things by his guide Petrus who is highly responsible for shaping the soul of the author – the protagonist to get his magical sword. Tolerance is one of the things that is being taught to him. When they enter the Roncesvalles village, Petrus walks in an exasperated slowness which is unbearable to the author. Losing patience, the author takes out his watch often. This sort of walking is to find pleasure in a speed that one is not used to. This enables the growth of a new person within him. So the author decides to take advantage of the situation. He tries to divert

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:4 April 2020

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himself by breathing deeply, putting himself in a strange state, he begins to perceive the things around him. He starts creating a story about the village – on its formation, about the pilgrims who have crossed it etc. At a stage, he senses a strong, mysterious and all-knowing presence in the village. He inhabits the plain with knights and battles. Thus the village appears as a historical monument. The author with his fantastic dream populates the deserted village.

Such unreal happenings furnish the novels of Toni Morrison that ease the perception of the readers. In the novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes about a young mother's struggle with reality and her past. Sethe has an inability to deal with her past history of slavery. She has been a victim for years of the white man's desires. She escapes from the world of slavery, yet she is still a prisoner of her repressed memories. Even though she has a good master, her life is not her own. Her fight for freedom comes at a high price, it costs her the life of her child and years of haunting memories. Toni Morrison uses magical realism to show that Sethe is held prisoner by forces of the past that make her face unresolved issues. Magical realism is commonly defined as a style of art or literature that depicts fantastic or mythological subjects in a realistic manner. *Beloved* as the agent of magical realism appears as an apparition, a symbol of Sethe's unresolved issues that she must face (*Beloved as the Agent of "Magical Realism"*) (<http://www.example.essays.com/view/paper/34182.html>). She uses magic, folk tales and the supernatural in her novels because that is the way the world was for her and for the black people she knows. In addition to the very shrewd, down-to-earth efficient way in which they did things and survived things, there was this other knowledge or perception always discredited but nevertheless there.

Selective magical details as well as reappearing fantastical themes weave themselves together with a realistic world to create a multitude of creative possibilities. One day Petrus takes the author to a monk, Father Jordi. Leaving Petrus, he takes the author to a small chapel which possesses a table, a book and a sword. Father Jordi sits on the table. He explains about the four routes. First one is the route of the Jacobean which is the Road of the Spades that will give him powers. Among the other three Roads, one is the Road to Jerusalem which is the Road of the Hearts that will endow him with the ability to do miracles. The other is the Road to Rome also known as the Road of the Clubs which will allow him to communicate with other worlds. The third one is a Secret Road. Placing the scallop shells on the table, Father Jordi begins to concentrate on it. Suddenly the shells start glowing. As the brightness grows, the author hears a mysterious voice emanating from Father Jordi. He utters the Biblical phrase "wherever your treasure is there will be your heart" (*The Pilgrimage* 43).

And wherever your heart is, there will be the cradle of the second coming of Christ; like these shells, the pilgrim is only an outer layer. When that layer, which is a stratum of life, is broken, life appears, and that life is comprised of agape. (43)

Dreams can also be brought under magical realism as they are stuffed with fantastical elements. Isabel Allende's opinion in this regard is that of a true humanist. She explains:

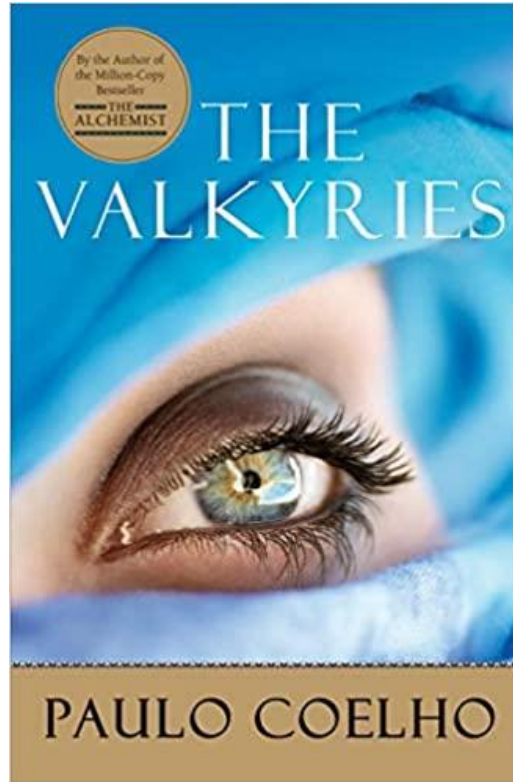
In Latin America, we value dreams, passions, obsessions, emotions and all that which is very important to our lives, has a place in literature – our sense of family, our sense of religion, of superstition too. That's magic realism – the emotions that everybody has, plus our reality. (*The House of the Spirits* <<http://www.exampleessays.com/viewpaper/34182.html>>)

Petrus teaches the author the Cruelty Exercise during their journey. The author is asked to focus at a point and the base of his neck is being pressed by Petrus. Then he starts talking about the Road of Power, about dreams which nourish one's soul, about the fight that is longed by one's heart. The author fixes his concentration on the cross which is erected on a church. Petrus, as he is speaking about the inter – relationship between dreams and fight, intensifies the pressure at the author's neck. When the pressure gets stronger, the cross appears to be a winged angel which disappears with a wink of the eyes. Petrus continues his talk on the first, second and the third symptoms of dreams in relation with fight. Again the tower of the church is transformed into an angel. But this time, the more the author widened his eyes, the stronger it remains. Petrus concludes his speech on the dead dream which leads a man to death. At that moment, the author really sees an angel which is also realized by Petrus. As soon as he stops talking, releasing his neck than the image of an angel remains for a few moments and it replaces the tower again. "The tower of the church kept changing; now it appeared to be an angel with its wings spread. The more I blinked the longer the figure remained" (*The Pilgrimage* 52).

Through this Cruelty Exercise, Petrus wishes to hold that though people have learned to accept the adventures and challenges that life provides, they deny it as extraordinary instances. "One should learn how to fight a good fight" (52).

Mysticism is a work towards spiritual fulfilment which is obvious to the intelligence beyond ordinary understanding. Similarly, talking about magical realism, the Mexican critic Luis Leal says, "If you can explain it, then it's not magical realism" (*Magical Realism-Theory, History, Community* (<http://www.Uta.edu/English/wbfaris/MagicalRealism.html>)). Thus mysticism and magical realism travel on the same plane with only a thin line segregating one from the other. The dog episode in *The Pilgrimage* has already been mentioned as an instance for spiritual quest. But the same instance infused with fantastical elements can also be referred to as realism embodied with magic. Dog is a concrete animal which barks at a stranger, but the dog here instigates the author to defeat his personal demon by infuriating him. Thus the animal seems to have some magical powers.

In short, *The Pilgrimage* is a fascinating parable that explores the need to find one's own path. Towards the end, we discover that the extraordinary is always found in the ordinary and simple ways of everyday people. In this novel, Paulo Coelho has employed magical realism through real characters possessing supernatural powers.



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Valkyries-Paulo-Coelho/dp/0062513346>

Magical realism mingles realistic portrayals of ordinary events and myth, creating a rich, frequently disquieting world that is at once familiar and dream like. *The Valkyries* is a story that is more biographical than fictional. It is a magical tale about forgiving our past and believing in our future. It is an adventurous journey undertaken by the author and his wife to meet his guardian angel. On their long treacherous journey, they meet the Valkyries and Valhalla. They are eight in number and the eldest one is called as Valhalla. Their countenance and their behaviours are entirely unreal. In magical realism, the ordinary is combined with fantasy in a way that invites reader to accept both, in trying to make sense of the text. It becomes difficult to distinguish between reality and fantasy in this style since neither is valued more in the presentation of events (*Magical Realism 'a glance'* (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/html>)). Gentleness, sympathy and tenderness are the features present ultimately in women whereas the Valkyries are averse to this. They are rough women in black leather riding their powerful motorcycles. They are all ordinary human beings possessing profound mystical powers who symbolize both inebriation of courage and rest for the warrior, the adventure of love in battle.

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With a roar, the Valkyries swept into the gas station [...]. The women, on their powerful motorcycle, spun one way and then the other, dangerously close to one another, their machines shimmering in the hot air, their gloved hands toying skillfully with danger. The Valkyries dismounted, shaking the desert, from their bodies. They pounded the dust from their black leathers and removed the colourful bandanas that they wore over their faces like bandits to keep the desert out of their lungs. (*The Valkyries* 192)

Magical realism is characterized by paradoxical events which are never fully explained by the author and these events are often accepted as perfectly normal and in fact usual by the characters or figures in the world of the artwork. For example, a ghost may manifest in a novel about magical realism and while the presence of the ghost might seem difficult for readers to accept, the characters seem to have no difficulty with the ghost's existence and actions. Often, very terrible things happen in magical realism. Acts of sadism, torture and murder may be committed by various characters and people often struggle with intensely brutal, sad or frustrating situation. The resolution of such situations may be imperfect, reflecting the reality of the world and readers and viewers are often disquieted and even disturbed after delving into this genre (*What is Magical Realism* (<http://www.wisegeek.com/whatisMagicalRealism.html>)). Similar is the transformation that takes place between Coelho and Rotha in *The Valkyries* during the ritual. In order to perform the accept forgiveness ritual, Valhalla takes them to death valley with other Valkyries. In the ritual, Coelho is accompanied by the youngest of the Valkyries – Rotha. At night, in the Golden Canyon, everyone including Rotha gathers at a tall rock named the sacred theatre for the ritual. Coelho is transformed into a warrior who battles with Rotha. Attaining victory, he punishes Rotha who is transformed into a prisoner. During this transformation, Coelho attacks Rotha vehemently with the belt of Valhalla to know from her the secret of meeting his angel. As far as Rotha is concerned, she pleads for mercy.

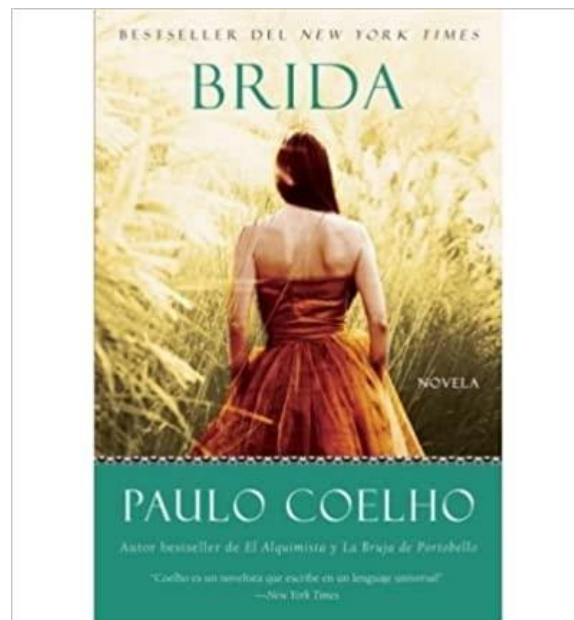
In his mind, Paulo created the walls of the castle [...]. He seized the girl violently. She fell awkwardly, cutting her chin and it bled. Paulo knelt at her side. In his hand, he clutched Valhalla's belt and it seemed to have an energy of its own. It frightened him, and for a few moments he left the imaginary walks of the castle and returned to the ravine. (170-71)

Perhaps these transformations are theoretically acceptable but practically unimaginable. Yet through the narrative technique of magical realism, Coelho makes the unreal happenings real.

Sometimes the sublime seems to have a definition of being inhuman, an image that cannot be named. The magical realism has the definition of being magical and unreal. Storytellers need the sublime so the stories may have the “sublime is the inhuman attitude”. Opinions of some are that there are no difference between the magical realism and the sublime. It seems that both are magical and that they may be somewhat inhuman (*A Magically, Realistic Author- Gabriel Garcia Marquez*). This opinion is strongly supported by Coelho in his novel *The Valkyries* where sublimity seems to be magical. In the climax of the novel while the protagonist makes a bet in order to meet his angel, his angel appears before him like a streak of light on the horizon. The voice that commands him to write some verses and the emerging of a golden arm from within the ground to imply something to him are to some extent beyond human perception though it has mystical traces.

“Look at the ground”, the voice insisted. He looked down at the area he had just swept clear. And that was when the golden arm as brilliant as the sun appeared and began to write in the sand. ‘This is my name’, the voice said. The fearful dizziness continued. His heart was beating even faster. (*The Valkyries* 227)

Thus, magical realism picturised by Coelho in *The Valkyries* opens new vistas to the readers through delightful imagery.



Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/Brida-09-Coelho-Paulo-Paperback/dp/B005C8P8XY/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=Brida&qid=1586845304&s=books&sr=1-2

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Like most of his books, Paulo Coelho sprinkles the novel *Brida* with supernatural spin allowing love, mysticism and the search for answer to blend and co-exist in the same story. Brida is a young Irish girl who sets out to discover her purpose. Finding herself leaning towards magic and mysticism, she hopes to know the secrets of life. This story is a mixture of magic, enlightenment, reincarnation, self-purpose and the quest for love. Brida's search for spirituality and her soulmate leads her to a forest dwelling wizard named Magus who becomes her teacher. He teaches the Tradition of the Sun that is an initiation for her search. According to him, "magic is a bridge that allows one to walk from the visible world into the invisible world" (*Brida* 16).

In her private life, she has a boyfriend and she is sure he is the one that is made for her. But life takes her on a journey where reality and love put on different costumes. Magus introduces her to a woman named Wicca who takes Brida as her pupil and manages to see to it that with careful instructions, she too can be a witch.

Magical realism moves us to a strange world and somehow our rational mind is able to let go allowing us to just go with the flow. All rational thought gets temporarily suspended. (*Your Opinion on the Narrative Structure*)
(<http://www.inthenews.w.uk/news/Brida.html>)

Wicca, the witch teaches her the Tradition of the Moon. In this pursuit, Wicca teaches Brida to learn from her surroundings. She is transported to a strange world as she is obsessed with the tarot cards. Wicca makes it possible by conversing with Brida on trivial things like her complaint about plumbers, caretakers and pensioners over phone. Finding no other way from listening to Wicca, Brida patiently listens to her teacher's unwanted talks, then and there giving a mumbled "yes" to her questions. As said by Wicca, "there are many things in magic which are not and will never be explained. God decided to do certain things in a certain way and why he did this is a secrete known only to Him" (37). All of a sudden, things start taking a different form "as if someone is entering a dream" (53). No longer the voice of Wicca is heard, the tarot cards begin to show fantastic scenes.

Men with bronzed, oiled bodies, wearing only thongs and some sporting masks like the giant heads of fish. Clouds raced across the sky as if everything were moving much faster than normal and the scene shifted abruptly to a square, surrounded by grand buildings where a few old men were urgently telling secrets to a group of young boys as if some form of very ancient knowledge were about to be lost forever. (53)

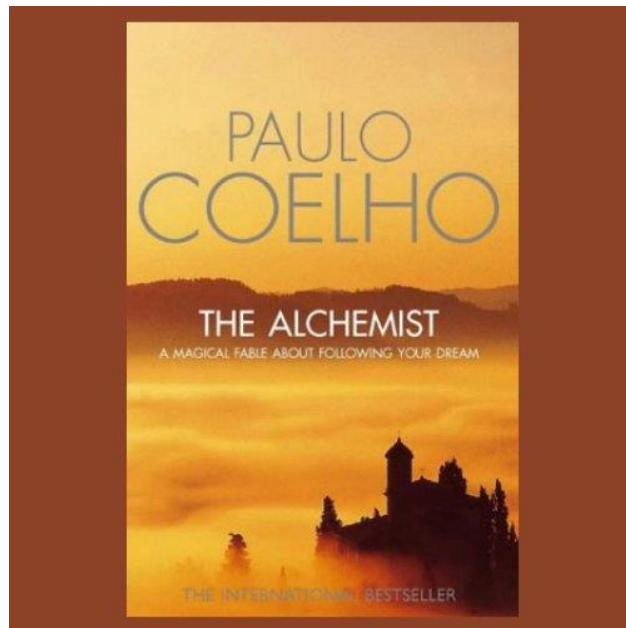
Brida's dream is decked with a boy who calls himself "the devil" (53) in medieval clothes, apt for a festa, says "add seven and eight and you'll have my number, I'm the devil and I signed the book" (53). Again there is a change of scene where she is close "to the sea, to reveal temples carved out of the rocks and the sky, covered by black clouds pierced by brilliant flashes of lightning" (54). Suddenly after sometime a heavy door like the one of an old castle appears before Brida who is tempted to open it just when the voice on the phone interrupts her to "come back" (54). This scene has been well interpreted by David K. Danow through his theory,

In confronting that small compendium of magical realist event, one would be hard pressed to deny the possibility even the likelihood, that at least some of what is related may well have a certain basis in reality- if not always literally, then in some sense, figuratively. (*The Spirit of Carnival: Magical realism and the Grotesque* 66)

Isabel Allende rightly opines that magical realism can effectively represent people's obsessions. Like Brida in this novel, Clara in Isabel Allende's novel *The House of the Spirits* is born with special powers and spiritual intuition. She can see the future events before they occur which will decide her fate and the decisions she makes. Whereas in *Brida*, though the protagonist possesses the gift of "discerning the spirits" (124), she is unaware of her special power. It is the teacher of the Tradition of the Moon who makes Brida realize it by taking her back in time and showing what the tradition had in store for her about her past incarnation. To enable her to learn her past, Brida is taken to a forest where Wicca with her magical voice hypnotizes her, and she acts as per her teacher's voice. Lying in the midst of the forest, she has been commanded to imagine as if she is in the centre of the universe, closer to the stars and the planets. Though in a new place Wicca's voice follows her and Brida feels protective. In the middle of the Universe, she sees a Gothic Cathedral, even conscious of the cold stone floor. While she is imagining things, the voice of Wicca seems to emerge from a person behind her. The enormous wrought-iron Cathedral door adorned with the scenes from the lives of the saints, the cold metal handle, "the pews, the side altars, the decorated columns and a few lit candles" (67) - all appear to be real. She enters into another door that leads to a library and its spiral staircase is lined with torches fixed to the wall. In the foot of the stairs, she finds Wicca whose presence makes her feel secure. This transcendental journey has been set off by Brida in search of her past lives in the present incarnation. Taking a person centuries back while living in another world is quite magical. Therefore, magic realism's alternative world works to correct the reality of established viewpoints like realism, naturalism and modernism (*D'haen, Thaw, "Magical realism and Postmodernism: decentering privileged centers" from MR: Theory, History, Community* (www.uta.edu/English/wbfaris/MagicalRealism.html)).

“Soulmate” is a magical term introduced by Coelho through Magus in the Tradition of the Sun. Finding one’s soulmate itself is entirely magical and extraordinary. Soulmate does not need to be one’s lover always. For even after falling in love with somebody else, one can find one’s soulmate and it could also be more than one in one’s lifetime. Brida approaches Magus who has magical powers, for the second time to learn how to find her soulmate. According to the Tradition of the Sun, a particular light in the eye of the person is the sign to identify that someone is one’s soulmate. Since this light in the eye differs from person to person, another sign has been mentioned in the Tradition of the Moon that is a point of light above the left shoulder. “A point of light”, he said. “A point of light above the left shoulder of your soulmate. That is how it is in the Tradition of the Moon” (113).

Soulmate and the light above the left shoulder are events that are beyond ready comprehension in a realistic, down-to-earth environment which are incomprehensible to ordinary readers. Even the frequent readers of Coelho find it hard to agree the soulmates theory. For instance, in one of the articles published on July 1, 2009 in *Brida on Your Opinion on the Narrative Structure*, Shefali from London disagrees that if the divided souls are the soulmates, then all are each other’s soulmates as we all have souls making up a single soul. Whereas in the same article yet another reader named Nayana Jagtap (Apr. 7, 2010) recommends that I got *Brida* “at the time I wanted [...] ‘At some point in our lives, we all find our soulmates and recognize him or her’... It is so true...” (<http://www.inthenews.co.Uk/news/Brida.html>).



Courtesy: https://www.amazon.com/Alchemist-Fable-About-Following-Dream/dp/B000BO2D3C/ref=sr_1_2?crid=3JA6KM9QRCRSX&dchild=1&keywords=the+alch

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:4 April 2020

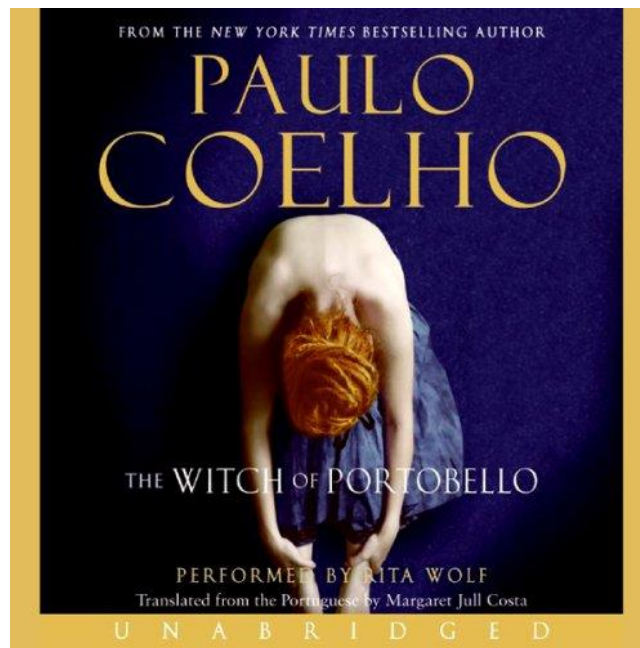
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There is also a tinge of magical undercurrent that runs faintly in other novels apart from the novels chosen specially for this analysis. For instance, Coelho introduces dreams which are meaningful and portentous, as one of the major themes in *The Alchemist*. The gypsy claims that dreams are a language used by the soul of the world to communicate with people. They are part of the fabric of a universal language that binds beings together. Through this description of dreams, and the events that unfold in the narrative, Coelho's magical, fairy tale style takes shape and comes to the fore. Melchizedek himself is a fantastical character, who knows a positively supernatural number of things about Santiago's personal life, has magical stones to offer, and claim to be able to turn himself into different things. Santiago turning into different things and his talks to the elements: the Desert, the Wind, the Sun and finally Soul of the World forms the climax of the narrative. A few aspects of this scene should be highlighted. First of all, Santiago's communication with these inanimate forces is the realization of the Alchemist's assertion that all things, even rock and animals have souls. In this way *The Alchemist* shows a certain amount of affinity with magical realism.



Magical realism is a narrative to create the ineffable in-between in order to break away from the universally agreed logic of things (*Magical Realism Transformations in the Witch of Portobello* (<http://www.flipkart.com/theWitchofportobello.html>)). Magical realist narrative technique allows the writer to narrate magic and real events at the same time. In *The Witch of Portobello*, Lukas, Athena's ex-husband, presents himself as a person who has followed his

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parents' rules which was to "obey his duty". The narrative tone supports Luka's neutral personality and Athena's influence creates the ineffable in-between. However, there is a strong indication that Lukas is wavering between rationality and mysticism. Also Heron, who works as a journalist for the BBC when he meets Athena, represents logic and objective truth. His trip to Transylvania is an attempt to demythologize the vampire story. However, he soon realizes that the myth is used by the Romanians for touristic purposes and leaves the project. He describes Athena's dancing in the restaurant in Romania as "a goddess revealing herself in all her glory, a priestess invoking angels and demons" (130). The readers do not know where this inspirational dance has come from. The dance ritual can be seen as magical transformation of the narrative itself.

Towards the end of Athena's ecstatic dance, she communicates with someone or something supernatural. Philemon and Hagia Sophia are the supernatural spirits, Athena communicates with. Philemon is the silent guide of Athena because Athena does not listen to what her male spirit guide tells her, but still knows when he is present. When Athena decides to converse with Philemon, it seems initially that Hagia Sophia and Philemon will talk about love. It is Philemon (or Heron) who asks what love was, and it is Athena (or Hagia Sophia, or Sherine) who conveys the meaning of love and guides him. The concept love transforms in the ineffable in-between. The blank spaces that Athena is trying to fill in seem to relate to the absence of Athena's birthmother. As Athena moves on in her quest to completely fill in the blank spaces, she gets in touch with the Mother through the guidance of Deidre O'Neil. In the novel, Athena gets a vision of the mother in a mirror in Deidre's house. The mirror which represents a reflecting surface, changes into a magical tool for transformation and creation. Hence magical realism assumes a vital role in transforming the meanings of existing concepts in this novel.

Magical realism is an extremely productive way to develop stories. Very interesting and bizarre events are mixed with a typical reality to create a perfect blend. This narrative style captures the readers throughout the story. It also makes an exciting and interesting read. Magical realism employed in all these novels provides us with many new and overwhelming situations. Every novel differs in various aspects. In *The Pilgrimage* the reality takes a magical shape during the author's journey towards his magical sword and he comes into contact with those experiences with the help of his guide, Petrus. In *The Valkyries* incredible events occur when the author ventures into a forty day tour in Mojave desert with his wife Chris to meet his guardian angel. They are directed by Gene and later by the Valkyries who have special powers by nature. *Brida* totally varies in this respect.

In the former two novels, it is the author who himself experiences this, "seeming appearance" (*Postcolonial Literature – An introduction* 237) whereas here it is a third person named Brida who is basically interested in learning magic, comes into contact with utterly unexpected circumstances. It is vindicated that magical realism and mysticism are inseparable for

mystical experience has a touch of magical elements present in it; whereas supernatural or magical realism mystifies the readers. It has been best illustrated by Paulo Coelho through the novels specified in this chapter: An animal (dog) becoming the protagonist's personal demon and the protagonist acquiring extraordinary power from something unknown (*The Pilgrimage*); the protagonist predicting the diseases through the voices of others who are not alive and spreading the energy of love among the people (*The Witch*); conversation between the protagonist and inanimate forces (*The Alchemist*); the characters transforming into some other personalities (*The Valkyries*) and finding one's soulmate with a light on the left shoulder of a person (*Brida*) – are magical or supernatural occurrences that appear in reality. The readers in their pursuit find it hard to believe yet spiritual learning or mysticism demands such seeming appearances. The protagonists in their quest towards spiritual communication and learning with the superior energy witness many magical occurrences that motivate them to unveil the mystery that exists in their pursuit thereby making themselves wise. In short, this skillful technique focuses on the reality and leaves the readers to remain in mystery.

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