

## **Magical Realism in Sarah Addison Allen's The Girl Who Chased the Moon**

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with magical realism in Sarah Addison Allen's *The Girl Who Chased the Moon*. Postcolonial Literature is discussed and it is explained how magical realism is an element of postcolonial literature. The element of magical realism is explained in context with Allen's novel. This paper gives an elaborate view of the incidents in the novel that clearly depicts the magical elements and its role in the life of the characters. It is also analysed how the theory helped in the development of the plot and how the author masters the genre in reference to *The Girl Who Chased the Moon*. In the conclusion, the role of magical realism and its effects are also conferred.

## **Magical Realism in Sarah Addison Allen's The Girl Who Chased the Moon**

Post colonialism is the historical period or state of affairs that represents the consequences of Western colonialism. The term can also be used to depict the simultaneous development to regain and rethink the history and society of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism.

As the result of post colonialism emerged a new area of literature called postcolonial literature. Postcolonial literature consists of the works written by the writers who belonged to the colonial countries. The subject matter of these works is

often racism, oppression, hybridity, border crossing, orientalism, cultural identity, identity crisis, marginalisation, anti colonialism, decolonisation, nationhood as such.

Magical realism is one the key terms of postcolonial theory. It is an acclimatization of Western realist method of literature in defining the imaginary life of aboriginal cultures who know-how the mythical, magical, and supernatural in a distinctly different approach from Western method. The element tends to associate with the two remarkable worlds that undergoes closeness or near unification. The use of the term extended to cover the novels that spring from other geographical regions and progressively referred to in post colonial criticism to denote to the literature that illustrates on pre-colonial culture and amalgamates local myths in order to “interrogate the assumptions of Western, rational, linear narratives” (Ashcroft 133).

From the postcolonial perception, magical realism signifies the probing of the doctrine of clarifying philosophy that stimulates a binary vision of the world where the logical and the implication of development were essentially linked with the West. Instead of presenting magic and reality in disagreement, they are exposed to be combined so that the illogical is as much part of reality as the logical.

The magical realist rubric was authoritatively was set up into cultural glossary with the publication of a study titled *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europaischen Maleri* in 1925. A German art critic, Franz Roh authored the work and he coined the term, magischer realismus or magical realism.

The oxymoron magical realism is a balance of two contrasting digressive practices, realism and fantasy. Literary critics consider magical realism as a postcolonial invention that provides a vent out for the authors to get away from political compliance in order to put across their cultures in ways that would not be otherwise accepted by the government.

The heightened awareness of mystery strives to state life’s connectedness and hidden sense. Magical realism texts are a kind of subversive texts that are revolutionary against the socially governing forces. Magic realists imply magical realism to detach themselves from their power discourse. The other postcolonial construal of the form, magic realism is connected with non-western culture because of the charisma of bizarre

magic and myth in the magical realism works. The use of magic has been measured as a mindful gesture to oppose and offer a local substitute to the eurocentric classification of the world. In spite of magic, the tendency is still unshakable in reality. The repeated direct references to history fuse the status of postcolonial characteristics for magic realism.

Sarah Addison Allen is one of the budding American novelists. She has also written with pen name Katien Gallagher. She was born and brought up in Asheville, North Carolina in the heart of Blue Ridge Mountains. She studied at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She was graduated in literature. Since her graduation, she did not engage herself in writing. In 2007, she published her first mainstream novel *Garden Spells*. She published four novels in five years. Allen persists to write a mound of lending a hand to fantastic and familiar fiction which she calls as southern-fried magic realism.

Allen has won many awards for her novels. She has won 2008 SIBA Book Award for Fiction for the novel *Garden Spells*, Best Women's Fiction of 2007 by The American Library Association's Reading List, 2008 RT Reviewers Choice Award for Women's Fiction for *Sugar Queen*, The Department of Literature at UNC Asheville named Allen as the Goodman Endowed Artist.

This study deals with magical realism in Sarah Addison Allen's *The Girl who chased the Moon*. Magical elements in the novel heals the rift between the characters' relationship and the alienation created to the characters in the society.

Mythology is an important theme in magical realism. Mythology generally includes symbolical or allegorical meaning of a story. North Carolina is a place that is loaded with scary ghost stories, folk tales, and legends which are all the part of the life there. Sarah Addison Allen has adapted some of these myths in her novel *The Girl Who Chased the Moon*. These myths form the basis of the plot and infuse the magical element in the novel. The myths used in the novel give the reader a realistic, first hand feeling of experiencing the native beliefs. Allen has used plants to create a desirable effect in their mind and behaviour. All these supernatural elements are fabricated together to form a mesmerising magical realism novels. Allen has proved that Magical Realism coexists with myths, legends, and gothic elements. "It is, rather, a multifaceted and sweeping phenomenon that encompasses the mythology, history, geography and even architecture of the area" (Takolander 88).

The novel begins with Emily coming to Mullaby. The street had a gothic appearance which gives the novel a mystifying opening. She met her grandfather Vance and he received her with love but the very sight of Vance threatens her because Vance was well known for his gigantic appearance and was called as the Giant of Mullaby. He told her to choose any room in the house and Emily chose her mother's room. Grandpa Vance wanted her to tell him how the wallpaper in her mother's room looked like when she enters the room. "Tell me what the wallpaper looks like when you walk in. I'd like to know" (*TGWCM* 7).

When she was lying on her bed, she found an esoteric light in the backyard. A bright light moved in the dense tress and faded. “Welcome to Mullaby, North Carolina, she thought. Home of ghost lights, giants, and jewellery thieves” (TGWCM 11). The next day Julia acquainted with Emily. She also told her about the rumours prevailing regarding the lights. It is a light that wanders in the woods; it might also be a ghost that rambles through the woods as such. Allen has brought North Carolina’s wide spread myth in this novel. The mythical beliefs that she has borrowed are the brown mountain lights and the Maco light. In North Carolina’s Burke country, some strange lights appear in the distant brown mountain.

The next day, Emily, still not realising the mystical power of the wallpaper stared at her grandfather when Vance asked her whether the wallpaper changed. Emily thought that he is saying such things because; he still treats her as a child. She refuses to believe her grandfather and his supernatural claim. He also told her about hoe the wallpaper looked like gray and wet like stormy clouds when she entered the room. Allen gives few instances to prove to Emily that something magical is happening around her but she has reserved Emily’s personal experience for later.

One day, Win resolved the mystery about Dulcie by revealing a secret that the whole town knew about her mother. He told her about the relationship between Dulcie and Win’s uncle, Logan Coffey who committed suicide because of Dulcie. Emily rebuffed the accusation on her mother. Emily after leaving Win, came to her room and noticed the wallpaper that has changed from lilacs to tiny butterflies of every conceivable hue. Emily understood Vance saying that her room is like a universal truth and the wallpaper reflects her mood. Magic here is employed to reveal the truth which would otherwise be hidden to others.

It was full July Buck Moon night when Vance chased the light and spoke to it. Vance too has believed the rumour about the ghost light and he said that he cannot have Emily foe her mother’s mistake. When Emily and Win met in the Piney Woods Lake, Win set off to disclose the top secret. He told her about his ancestors that he said Coffey men were miserable. He told her about the Coffey men having the power of glowing at night. He said they were called as spirits of moon.

It’s genetic,” he said. “A simple mutation. But it’s particularly strong in my family. My grandfather had it. My uncle had it. My father has it.” He paused. “I have it.” ....”We call it The Glowing.” .... “Our skin gives off light at night.... (TGWCM 212).

Emily stood bizarre on listening to Win and She demanded a proof from Win for which he said her that he will show his glow in the bandstand that night. Next day, while waiting for Win, Emily had mixed thoughts about the strangeness of Mullaby such as believing giants, changing wallpaper and so on. If giants exist, wallpapers change; she suspected why Win can’t do, what he said he could do. That night, as he descended into the pool of darkness, Emily was dumb found on seeing Win glowing in front of her . “That’s when it happened. Like blowing on embers, a light began to grow around him” (TGWCM 237). Emily saw him like dream of day light at the dead of night.

Emily unlike Win was a normal girl with no super powers to whom magic, super natural powers are something that is strange, uneasy and frightening. She is an ignorant little girl who is absolutely unaware of existing mysteries in the town that she asked Win if his power hurt him. When she returned home, to her surprise, she found that the wallpaper had changed. This time it was new phases of moon that denoted the changes in Emily's mind. When she arrived at Mullaby, she was completely naïve, and then slowly she got to know about the mysteries and the secrets in Mullaby. The wallpaper represented such developments in her life at Mullaby. Emily prepared herself to accept him as he was and gradually her fear disappeared. Win confessed that it was him, the Mullaby light who visited her at the night because he was curious to see Dulcie's daughter. The moon is an allusion used by Allen to strengthen the element of mystery and also Win and Emily's relationship. Win and Emily overcame all the struggles caused by the supernatural power of the Coffeys and also united with love or each other.

Magical elements in the novel had helped the plot to develop and expand into a wider area. It has intruded into the characters' characteristics and directed them in such a way that they undergo a series of changes, realisation, sacrifice, satisfaction and contentment. Magical Realism is one of the strategies which include traditional folklore in a modern setting of a literary work. The works of this genre is multi-layered that includes subsequent twists and turns. . The supplement of magic and the real is an invariable prompt of the relativity of the storyline of the story.

In indulging the magical element in real world, the writer breaks the rules that draw a border that separates the real and imaginary worlds, through merging the elements of magic with elements of reality. Allen has taken the source of an event or an incident or a character from real world and makes it strange by giving them special powers which is a component of fantasy. Magical Realism is a conspicuous attribute to the postmodern and postcolonial imagination that blotch the variation between the real and fantastic. The characters and incidents will be alive even after the usual span of life or veracity is the important constituents of magical realist works and the theory is applied in Allen's novel *The Girl Who Chased the Moon* as such.

### **Works Cited**

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