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**ARTISTIC AMALGAMATION OF “THE MAGIC” AND  
 “THE REAL” IN ROALD DAHL’S MATILDA**

*Silviya Florance. S., Research Scholar in M. Phil. (FT), Department of English,  
 Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore*  
*Dr. (Mrs.) Raichel M. Sylus, Assistant Professor (SG), Department of English,  
 Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore*

**Abstract:**

*Children's literature is known for its unique standards in the arena of literature. Writers like C. S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, J. K. Rowling and many others have contributed to this field. Roald Dahl is one such eminent writer of the twentieth century. He is known to be one of the best story-tellers of the century. Dahl's works are known for its dark humour and unexpected endings. His novel Matilda is one of the finest example of the technique called magical realism. It deals with the interesting and exciting story of a five and a half year old girl named Matilda. In this book Dahl has artistically blended the two worlds of reality and fantasy. It exemplifies with the telekinesis power of Matilda because of which her twisted life is set right. This paper concentrates on the part where the extraordinary elements are presented in the character, the setting, the time and the plot of the novel. It also focuses on how the fantastical elements are merged with realistic elements in forming a perfect story for the children. It also analysis the magical realistic aspects of the story and the impact it creates on the readers.*

**Keywords:** *Roald Dahl, Matilda, Children's Literature.*

Literature for children is a paramount in the field of literature as it is important to imbibe children with the required knowledge in their formative years. Books serve as the best source of knowledge for children. Children's writers use unique skills in alluring the minds of young readers with their varied methods of storytelling. Colourful covers, illustrations are methods through which the books are created attractively. The appearance of the books is also important when it comes to children's books. The content of any children book is designed in such a way that the child does not lose interest in reading and also understands the message the writer wants to convey. Here the talent of the writer is put to test. Writers concentrate on teaching moral principles and life lessons to the children with fun and entertainment. Different writers use myriad methods to capture the minds of the young readers.

One such fascinating way is the use of a narrative technique called Magical realism. Magical realism is a term coined by a German art critic Franz Roh in the middle 1920s. It is a form of narrative art where fantasy is blended with reality. The fascinating elements are so well merged with reality that the readers without any hesitation and disbelief accept the fantastical occurrences in the story and enjoy reading it. Magical Realism is defined by Erwin Dale Carter in his work *Magical Realism in Contemporary Argentine Fictions*: “First it is a combination of reality and fantasy and second, it is the transformation of the real into the awesome and unreal . . .” (3-4). Reality and fantasy are mixed up into an unreal and real plot.

The writer before writing understands the mentality of his/her target audience. Children are fond of creating uncanny elements in their world. The writer therefore observes the source of attraction of a child. As Sigmund Freud mentions in his essay “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”:

Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a

world of his own, or rather rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him? . . . . The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously. . . . (437)

It is understood that a creative writer very well understands the mind of a child as he becomes one to write a work of art. The writers are very well aware of how to implant the seed of morality, education or anything creatively into the hearts of the young readers. Books are a whole new world for children where they get fresh experiences and new life lessons. Talking animals, wonderland, wizard school and alien beings create excitement and anticipation in reader's mind. Writers like C.S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling, J. M. Barrie, Lewis Carroll and others have imprinted their master pieces in the world of literature with the aid of magic.

Roald Dahl is one such prolific writer. He is known as the best story teller of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All his works for children are exclusive and attractive. He uses Anthropomorphism and Magic realism as techniques in his artistic creation. As to children everything they learn about is something new, they should be provided with the best of it. So they are provided with the best experience through the new world of fantasy which is provided by the book. The books not only entertain but serve as an escape from the harsh realities of life. The art of Magical realism lies in the portrayal of fantasy as absolutely reality. The fantastic elements create excitement and curiosity in the mind of readers and also convey the message of the writer in the most interesting way.

*Matilda* by Dahl is a book which teaches children to follow truth, to be good and strong. Matilda is a five and a half year old girl who is brought up by careless parents but still retains her integrity. Matilda's parents tell her to watch T. V but she prefers books to it. Though she is called a scab she never misbehaves with her father. She plots simple tricks and teaches a lesson to those that are unjust. Matilda is like other child protagonists; brave and strong hardly depending on anyone for anything. This is the case of many of the child protagonists in a children's book. As Norah Nivedita Shaw observes Ruskin Bond's works in her essay "Delineating the 'Heritage of childhood' in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories" in the book *Canons of Children's Literature*:

Though most of his child characters are fun loving and carefree yet at the same time they are brave, daring and at time prove to be more wise and intellectual than adults or their guardians. Moreover one finds them absolutely independent hardly relying upon the elders for their personal problems. (176)

The child protagonist is thrown into full limelight. In the story they are not part of the world they live in but the world revolves around them. Matilda is one such heroine of her own story. Like Harry Potter and Alice she undergoes a supernatural mission. The protagonists always have a mission to be accomplished and in novels with fantastical elements this is made smooth and facile.

The book is seasoned with extraordinary elements which is really catchy to read. The extraordinary is portrayed within the ordinary. Matilda is an ordinary school kid with an extraordinary and exceptional intellectual talent. She is just five and half years old but she has read all the children's books in the public library, she has read books written by writers like Dickens, Hardy, Kipling, Orwell; she can multiply big sum of numbers, she can multiply 19 and 14 without using a calculator and she can read sentences unlike other five and half year old kids. Miss Honey, Matilda's school teacher is awestruck to see such a young intellect. The thoughts of Miss Honey is narrated in the following manner in *Matilda*:

There was no doubt in her mind that she had met a truly extraordinary mathematical brain, and words like child-genius and prodigy went flitting through her head. She knew that these sort of wonders do pop up in the world from time to time, but only once or twice in a hundred years. (69)

Matilda is a normal child at the same time she later discovers her special power. The story begins ordinarily and steadily brings in the extraordinary. Here the writers prepare their reality to blend with the

supernatural. The writers just don't jump from reality into a fantasy world but they gradually blend the both. From the beginning Matilda is portrayed as a prudent child so her sudden power of telekinesis doesn't seem too unreal for the readers. Magic is presented in the disguise of reality.

The plot of the story also commences as in a real world and then it slowly moves into the fantasy world. In the story, Matilda is just a five and half year old girl who goes to school who later discovers her power of telekinesis. This approach of steady blending of reality and fantasy can also be traced in the series of Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling. As described in the essay "J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series: A Revolutionary Attempt in Children's Literature" by AnjuBala Agarwal in the book *Canons of Children's Literature*: "The novels revolve around Harry Potter, an orphan who discovers at the age of eleven that he is a wizard, living within the ordinary world of non-magical or Muggle people" (166). The protagonist of the story is an extraordinary person living in an ordinary world and they discover their possession of supernatural power and make use of it to destroy the evil. Matilda through her power teaches a very good lifetime lesson to Trunchbull who is the epitome of filth, greed and cruelty.

The fantastical elements in a story may either be temporary or permanent (temporary like Matilda's and permanent like super heroes'). Sometimes the powers are given to the child with a purpose after the accomplishment of which the powers disappear. It may also be like in the stories of super heroes, they use their power in times of trouble and then they live like normal human beings. In Matilda's case her power is exposed only for a short period with which she helps Miss Honey to get back her rightful possession. Later Matilda observes that she has lost her powers:

'This morning,' Matilda said, 'just for fun I tried to push something over with my eyes and I couldn't do it. Nothing moved. I didn't even feel the hotness building up behind my eyeballs. The power had gone. I think I've lost it completely. (223)

It is made obvious that the super power of Matilda was temporary and purposeful. So after that she moves to live in her ordinary routine life. It depends on the writers to decide whether the powers should stay or leave the protagonist. For each story the structure differs to Harry Potter, to Spiderman and to Matilda.

The writer neither totally removes reality nor totally includes fantasy but he balances the two worlds. Though Matilda has special powers vested with her still she has the same innocence and immaturity like other children. For instance she is wise enough to use telekinesis but not matured enough to handle her super power. It is Miss Honey who guides her to take things calmly and slowly as it could be dangerous for her. As Dahl writes:

"But whatever happens, and I say it again, we must tread carefully from now on. I have not forgotten that strange and distant glimmer on your face after you tipped over the last glass.' 'Do you think doing it could actually hurt me?' Is that what you're thinking, Miss Honey?' . . . (175)

From this, it is understood that Matilda is just like other children ignorant and innocent. It is the combination of both magic and reality. Both the factors co-exist in the story. The fantasy world is presented so much like reality so one cannot actually differentiate, but there is a difference. All these literary ornaments of a work of art are used to provide complete entertainment to the readers. Readers also have a role to play in the completion of a literary work. The author's mission is accomplished when the readers comprehend the mind of the writer.

The reader's contribution to the literary work is that they enjoy and get entertained or equipped (values of life) by the particular work of literature. The blending of the two worlds create absolute excitement in the mind of readers. More than the writers it is the acceptance of the readers which makes the magic work more effectively. Readers do not question the power of telekinesis that Matilda acquires rather they willingly allow magic to help Matilda to deal with the situation. So fantasy here works as an escape from the harsh realities of life. Because the reader may be a Matilda suffering from the cruel tortures of

authorities so for them this provides a solace. As Beena Agarwal explains in her essay "Children's Fantasy and Animal Kingdom: A Critical Appraisal of Ruskin Bond's *Too Much Trouble*" in *Canons of Children's Literature*:

However children's literature in spite of the prominence of fantasy . . . Exhibits a world that nurtures the basic values of goodness, tolerance and construction of the images of life that can induce solace against all pervasive obscurities of human existence. (46)

Generally books serve as an escape from reality and fantasy is like an additional element that refreshes the raging mind. Even Matilda herself in the novel forgets her ill treatments and sadness by reading lot of books. As it is narrated in the novel:

The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing people who lived exciting lives. She went on olden-day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village. (15)

The books are like magic spells that dispel one's grief and transports them into a whole new refreshing world for a while. Magical realism as a narrative technique has really aided the writers to fulfil their objectives of reaching the minds of the readers. In reality, fantasy many seem uncanny but it helps the readers to believe in some magic that will heal their bruised mind. Through such experience their hope or strength to fight against the cruelties of life is renewed and revived. Literature is a mirror of life and in the end a book is nothing if it doesn't really help a person in some way. With fantasy fighting struggles is made possible and effective.

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