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**DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF MAGIC(AL)
REALISM IN SELECTED WORKS BY SALMAN
RUSHDIE AND GRAHAM SWIFT**

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ČESTNÉ PROHLÁŠENÍ

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CZECH SUMMARY

This Bachelor Thesis deals with the concept of Magical Realism in Graham Swift's *Waterland* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The principal aim of the thesis is to compare and contrast the concepts as well as to illustrate how the techniques used by both Swift and Rushdie may differ.

Key terms: magic, marvellous and magical realism, postmodernism

Bakalářská práce zpracovává pojetí magického realismu v románu Grahama Swifta *Země vod* a díle Salmana Rushdieho *Děti půlnoci*. Cílem práce je porovnat jednotlivé koncepce magického realismu v daných dílech a objasnit, v kterých ohledech se pojetí obou autorů liší.

Klíčové termíny: formy a vývoj magického realismu, postmodernismus

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INTRODUCTION

By the end of the twentieth century the term magic(al) realism encompasses a constantly increasing number of literary works. In other words, the particular narrative mode hidden behind the term becomes generally fashionable both among the readers and the publishers. However, not only the history of it, but mainly the defining of the term as such is a rather complicated process covering range of sources and traditions developing throughout the century. The principal aim of the thesis is to clarify the ambiguity of magic(al) realism along with revealing the origins, which have formed the current concept of the narrative mode. Furthermore, it attempts to delimit the term and its status within postmodernism and, last but not least, it tries to adumbrate the diverse approaches of selected writers in the theoretical part.

The essential part of the thesis focuses on the factual manifests of the foreshadowed phenomena in pursuit of defining and comparing the concepts of magic(al) realism in selected works by Salman Rushdie and Graham Swift by means of putting the theoretical knowledge into effect. The thesis has been written in order to provide an analytical comparison of works falling into the same literary genre, nonetheless, concocting in various cultural backgrounds that are rooted in distinct traditions. As for the selected works the thesis concentrates on Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* published in 1981 along with *Waterland* written by Graham Swift in 1983. The final part, subsequently, summarizes the analysis in terms of indicated conclusions.

1 THEORETICAL PART

1.1 Origins of Magic(al) realism

The introduction foreshadowed that the artistic concept of magic(al) realism is a peculiar phenomenon which is, undoubtedly, even nowadays difficult to define properly. There is a string of reasons of which the genre remains ambiguous not only for the literary world. As it will be discussed later in this chapter, there are various sources that have shaped the style. The sources do not include only narrative modes, but also the pictorial art from the beginning of the twentieth century which, actually, allows magic(al) realism to thrive. Concerning the fact that there is an essential rudiment which stands apart from the literary tradition it is explicit that magic(al) realism is distinguished by a great deal of ambiguity and uniqueness. That is to say, there are no fixed principles that would reliably mark it from other genres except the matter-of-fact depiction of magical happenings. Moreover, the global expansion of the style, including the adaption to diverse surroundings as well as writers bringing influences of their own, undisputedly, contributes to the concept's complexity too. Swift gives a shining example of the obscurity in the introduction to his *Waterland* when he broaches "I may also have been under the sway of the 'magical realism' in vogue at the time" (vi). Still, he does not confirm or even exclude any potential motives. This chapter deals with the range of sources that led to the development of the genre and the delimiting of them. Furthermore, it exposes some of the other causes that contribute to the depiction of the narrative mode. The expression 'magic(al) realism' is being used as the umbrella term that not only presents the ambiguity of the term as such, but also encapsulates the features of the particular sources and related terms.

1.1.1 Magic Realism

The very first rudiment of magic(al) realism can be, surprisingly, traced shortly after the First World War in Europe. To be specific, it arises in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. The fragile Germany, heavily defeated and coping with political violence and extreme economic difficulties, is undergoing an unstable period. The country is seriously suffering from destruction of the economic system, moreover, the post war situation burdens the Republic with demands for reparation. The desolated era experiencing a constant anxiety makes an effort to find a new meaning of the unfortunate reality. By that time the German art is enriched by magic realism which refers to a new form of painting. The term is said to be introduced by Franz Roh (1890-1965), an art critic, who brings the idea of art attempting “to produce a clear depiction of reality that includes a presentation of the mysterious elements of everyday life” (Bowers 131). More precisely, the magic realist painting resides in an accurate portrayal of a concrete object which is not, nevertheless, released from the mysterious intangible aspects of life. Thus, it is obvious that the word realism in magic realism stands for the realistic depiction of an object, whereas, the term magic refers to the eeriness within human being, since the world has to face the age when the enchantment weakens and modern mankind uncovers its monstrosity.

However, the inter-war period gives ample scope for new ideas apart from Roh’s magic realism, which is ultimately a source of confusion pervasively related to it. German magic realism emerges simultaneously with surrealism. The styles have some characteristics in common which leads to the fact that pieces of work of several later artists are greatly influenced by both the magic realism and the surrealist style. Moreover, there is even an opinion that one art movement is a branch of the other. Magic realism naturally does not remain in a place of its German territory and pushes forward the frontiers of its activity across Europe.

A distinct influence can be traced in Italy where the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli (1878-1960) transfers the thoughts from pictorial art to literature. It is a time of Mussolini fascist rule and Bontempelli, applying the ideas to writing, attempts to look at reality from a different angle. By means of literature he endeavours to arouse the collective consciousness and stir up the Italian society. Massimo's act is undoubtedly a turning point in the development of magic(al) realism which fortifies its position within the literary world and makes it accessible for other artists all over Europe.

1.1.2 Marvellous Realism

Magic realism conquers not only European countries, but also traverses the ocean and gets to Latin America. A French-Russian Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1904-80), who comes across a variety of artistic movements thanks to his temporary stay in France until 1930, brings it to the American continent. After returning to Cuba, strongly influenced by the European experience, he establishes a distinct form of magic realism. This version, which is known as marvellous realism, stems in the demand for depicting not only the material, but as well the non-material aspects of life, nonetheless, is fully aware of the diversity between Latin America and Europe. Hence, marvellous realism represents the mingling experiences and the multicultural Latin American world that form a particular ambience and diverse understanding of reality. In other words, there is a clear divergence, since magic realism as an art form focuses on a new distinctness of actuality, whereas marvellous realism deals with the range of both the general and the individual perspectives that the reality is composed of. Consequently, the marvellous in the term refers to any uncommon happenings or inscrutable presence that cannot be clarified by rational science. To sum it up, the term marvellous realism refers to delimiting the territorial boundaries of the style rather than to marking it off from magic realism in terms of features, however, the concept of marvellous realism, although originally inspired by magic realism is much closer to the subsequent magical realism.

1.1.3 Magical Realism

Last of the three, which is, at the same time, the youngest critical idiom of them all, magical realism wends its way in the opposite direction. In other words, renewing the European sources brought earlier to Latin America, it appears there shortly after the Cuban revolution at the end of the 1950s and expands progressively all over the globe. It is obvious that the historical context features in the development of the genre, since it brings a strong wave of euphoria that desires to strengthen the collective consciousness and to build its own modern Latin American literature. Owing to the boom of the literary technique and probably the most famous Latin American magical realist writer, the Columbian Gabriel José Garcia Márquez (1927), who is, actually, mostly associated, as one of a few, with magical realism even among the wide readership, magical realism is frequently, and mainly incorrectly, considered to be a purely Latin American domain. Nonetheless, the conception has been originally imported from Europe, restored and modified on the continent, popularized and diffused back to the rest of the world afterward. Even though the narrative technique visibly fits into the Latin American world, its artistic potential allows the authors to apply the concept to a range of settings and backgrounds. Among other essential features, it provides a possibility to defy the fixed notions of the world about by means of questioning reality and the existence of one single truth. Moreover, the archetypal pattern is a story depicting people living on political or social margins or those who struggle through the lack of social, possibly political power. In other words, it tends to disrupt the fixed perspectives without regard to the nature of the perspective. Hence it is no surprise that magical realist pieces of work can be recognized even in countries where it might seem unexpected or cultural backgrounds from North America, across the Old Continent, African countries up to Asia.

The oxymoronic idiom magical realism, flourishing mainly in the 1980s, may provoke a bizarre impression, since it juxtaposes two seemingly antagonistic terms. However, focusing closely on the concept the unification of them becomes relatively comprehensible. Even though the “magical” part of the term refers to magical happenings such as weird and creepy atmospheres, uncommonly gifted people, marvels as well as apparitions that occur in the stories, great emphasis is put on the matter-of-fact depicting of the supernatural happenings. The writer is

supposed to present such phenomena without causing any disturbance within the narration and the reader should, subsequently, accept “both realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level” (Bowers 4). The form of introducing the extraordinariness is crucial for the style, for the realist portrayal marks it off from fantasy and science fiction. In a word, it does not tear it from the material reality by throwing it into the impalpable world of imagination where readers are given space for making opinions based on their non-reading experience. Magical realism requires full acceptance of fiction as it is presented without regard to the extent of its probability. The realist side of magical realism is not by far complicated and yet there are, at least, two significant features that could be certainly pointed out. Magical realist writers build their stories on particular contexts interlinked with historical references not only in order to determine the text by being pointedly situated, but also to challenge the fixed notions of history and historical process as such. This approach, often employed by subsequent writers, is rooted in postmodernism whose impact on magical realism will be shortly discussed in a separate chapter.

From another point of view the idiom magical realism can be treated as a junction of two parallel universes which allows to handily embrace and express the multiplicity without emasculating one or the other world. There is then no surprise that the seemingly elusive narrative mode might be an apt way of self-expression for a range of artists who experience the multiplicity as well as the ambiguity of the supposed reality.

As it has been foreshadowed, the popularity and serviceability of magical realist writing dwells in its potential to oppose the dominant assumptions of reality through the text which offers a range of approaches. Questioning the suggested image of the world by searching for a different way of getting to know things allows writers to focus on diverse local or global issues. In addition to that, owing to the development and essence of magical realist writing that are based on mingling cultures and various influences, the narrative mode embraces a scale of themes. According to what has been already stated in this chapter, it is obvious that magical realist narration provides an opportunity to confront even delicate issues such as political systems along with authorities, mainly then colonialist tendencies and strategies, such as British policy in India. Even though magical realism became closely connected to postcolonial literature the political motif is

not the only one. It can actually bring into question any social and cultural assumptions which is the reason why magical realist literature deals with both feminist and rural points of view, racial prejudices and cross-culturalism as such. The frequent drift is undermining any sort of ascendancy or resisting the authoritative way of classifying the world, however, the crucial aspect is reaching and pushing forward the frontiers.

To sum it up, when magical realist writing exposes, partially by the spirit of postmodernism, “that the category of real is not definite then all assumptions of truth are also at stake” (Bowers, 68). The boisterous development of magical realism along with the ambiguity rooted in it keep it a complex narrative technique adopted by number of writers, all leaving a particular impact on the concept all over the globe. The divergence of the concepts will be discussed in the practical part of the thesis in means of analysing selected works by Salman Rushdie and Graham Swift.

1.2 Postmodernist tendency in magical realism

Swift admits in the introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of *Waterland* that the novel “was urging me to explore the whole mystery of ‘history’ (local, personal and global) – its meaning, if it has any” (viii). The main character, a history teacher, Tom Crick, retelling story of his family and recollecting turning points of his life, finally loses the validity of what he has mastered – teaching history. History becomes in the novel an abstract phenomenon that has nothing in common with the everyday reality. Moreover, it seems to no longer possess any referential value. Crick, having discovered the emptiness of his life, turns History into history by constructing complex narrative machinery “in order to be able to absolve himself, to write himself out of his own story” (Lane, 51). At the very beginning of the novel Swift inserted a sort of a thesaurus entry – a list of meanings of the word *historia*. The order of the meanings is seemingly unimportant, nonetheless, it actually betokens the nature of the novel, since the first place is given to *inquiry, investigation and learning. A narrative of past events or history* is listed not until the fourth and fifth place which hints Crick’s approach to it. To fulfil the first three meanings he is forced to supersede “the stranger-than-fiction” (Swift, 13) textbook History by the real history of everyone’s life.

Rushdie, when explaining his desire to write a novel about his childhood in India, acknowledges in the introduction to *Midnight’s Children* that placing the main character into the scheme had an inevitable impact on the novel as such, since “[i]f Saleem and India were to be paired, I would need to tell the story of both twins” (x). The novel, set in a particular context, includes undeniable historical references, however, Rushdie’s attempt was not to retell the fixed notions of what had happened, but to compile a personal history based on the life stories of people somehow entangled in the course of history.

From that point of view magical realism acquires the postmodernist approach to history that challenges the existence of an absolute truth claiming that the whole concept of history, which is said to be the right one, is actually constructed as a justificatory excuse for maintaining positions of political authorities.

Rebuilding the history Rushdie's narrator compiles the fragments of stories, frequently ambiguous memories and various individual perspectives no matter how suspicious they might seem. By the spirit of postmodernism, he is fully aware that if he wants to create a compact image of the history he must necessarily recognize different points of view and scope of individual standpoints. Furthermore, they all must be treated with equal validity.

To summarize it, both Rushdie and Swift adopt a postmodernist tendency in the treatment of history. While Rushdie inclines to accentuate its multiplicity as well as the existence of parallel perspectives, Swift tends to unravel the genuine sense and its utility.

1.3 Rushdie's and Swift's background

1.3.1 Ahmed Salman Rushdie

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in India shortly before India gained its independence in 1947. However, owing to the religious pressure which was growing stronger and stronger Salman's parents moved with their son to Pakistan and later on to Britain where they settled down. Hence, Rushdie, being given British citizenship and educated in History at Cambridge, started his lifelong struggle between Eastern and Western traditions.

His novel *Midnight's Children*, winner of the Booker Prize, was published in 1981 and gained significant success. Nonetheless, Rushdie, widely known for his controversy, published *Satanic Verses* in 1988 that caused a great disturbance in Islamic world. It led to the fact that ayatollah R.Chomejni subsequently imposed fatwa on Rushdie in 1989. This act much contrasts with the successes achieved in the rest of the world. Apart from winning several Book Prizes Salman Rushdie was appointed a Knight Bachelor in England and holds the title of Commandeur in Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France.

Having experienced emigration and living in the twilight zone of Eastern and Western tradition, getting credit as well as repudiation, Sir Salman Rushdie remains an alluring writer whose novels blend diverse literary elements, including magical realism, and whose personage and work may be considered embodiment of multiplicity.

1.3.2 Graham Colin Swift

Graham Colin Swift FRSL was born in London in 1949. He was educated at Dulwich and Queen's College, then he studied at Cambridge and University of York. Even though his novels have gained a large readership and won a range of prizes, Swift's career is in comparison with Rushdie's riotous artistic life relatively ordinary. Nevertheless, the outstanding post-war novel *Waterland*, published in 1983, took up a strong position within the literary world. Moreover, it was set into the English literature syllabus taught at schools. Furthermore, Graham Swift became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. As well as Rushdie in 1996 Swift was awarded the Booker Prize for his novel *Last Orders*.

The novel *Waterland*, set in Fens, includes according to Swift "a strong element of the supernatural and the fantastical, or at least the larger than life" (Swift, V). By the spirit of magical realism the book combines the history of the area with family myth revealing the impacts on succeeding generations. Swift challenges the legacy, significance and dominant notion of History for personal history and everyday life.

2 MAIN BODY

2.1 Concept of History

As it has been foreseen in the theoretical part of the thesis one of the essential features of magical realism as a narrative mode is the potential to question the fixed assumptions of truth and reality of the world around. Furthermore, it has been stated that the development of the technique was influenced by a range of traditions and factors, therefore, magical realist writings may differ in many ways depending on cultural and social background of the writer. Both Graham Swift and Salman Rushdie are, with their selected novels, solid evidence of that modification. Their work deals with identical or resembling leitmotifs and themes, nonetheless, they treat some of them in a different manner. In particular cases they even select distinct motives to work with the style. The subsequent chapters will attempt to focus on the cardinal leitmotifs and analyze the respects in which the concepts of magical realism in the selected novels differ.

2.1.1 History and act of storytelling in *Waterland*

In *Waterland* the category that is challenged is the conception of history. Swift focuses in his novel on the enigmatic concept of history in all its forms in order to elicit the meaning or utility of it whether it possesses, at least, anything like that. He takes it to pieces and re-establishes the notion of what has been so far set in stone.

Even though the novel has a realistic setting with apparent historical references, its function is not to provide primarily a realistic image or credibility. The aim is to be in contrast, to cast doubt upon the uniqueness of what the supposed truth is and, last but not least, evoke a sort of self-reflection among the readership.

History adopts various forms in the novel which is obvious from the very its beginning. The story is commenced by a list of possible interpretations of the term and although the order of the meanings has its purpose, *History* with capital “h” as a term for global history will be discussed the first.

Particular historical references and events are represented in the novel in many ways. The story, set in England, covers a period of time including a significant landmark of global history – the Second World War. Moreover, the narrator, Tom Crick, is a history teacher who refers, within his lessons, to other events known from history textbooks. However, since the very beginning everything indicates that the relevance of this history will be challenged if not partially or totally repressed. Set in the rural area of Fens, the narrator himself admits to be “far away from the wide world” (Swift, 9). Being aware that “all over the globe, a war was being fought” (Swift, 35), he still recognizes that the impact of the gloomy events happening around the world is moderated, since “no hint of this universal strife reached us in our Fenland backwater” (Swift, 35). The uselessness of global history as a scholarly discipline and as a record of significant events is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the novel. A final blow is delivered to it when Crick ceases to teach History claiming that it might seem stranger-than-fiction to his students who are forced to cope with everyday experience which noticeably differs from what the supposed reality looks like. The fate of History is sealed when the situation comes in useful for the

Headmaster who decides, certainly for the welfare of his students, to affiliate the subject with some other. He tells Tom that “we’re being forced to economize. We’re cutting back on history” (Swift, 13). The headmaster “believes that education is for and about the future” (Swift, 28). Hence, there is no place for a subject whose essentials are to dwell in the past. He explains to Tom that “[i]t just so happens, that I agree with the powers-that-be. Equipping for the real world. It just so happens that I think that’s what we’re here for [...] Send just one of these kids out into the world with a sense of his or her usefulness, with an ability to apply, with practical knowledge not a range of pointless information” (Swift, 29). The failure of History, as a record of logically and rationally explained events, reappears in different parts of the novel showing no purpose for ordinary people who have to bear the sorrows of everyday living. Thomas Atkinson, one of the characters, having experienced a personal tragedy gets to a turning point when “history has stopped for him. He has entered the realms of superstition” (Swift, 85). The dwellers of Fens are faced with local catastrophes, hence the *Big Events* happening far away from them do not seem to be that much disturbing, since “[e]vents of local but still devastating nature have eclipsed their importance” (Swift, 196). Quite surprising and contradictory then might seem the passage where a death of a local young boy is understated when being compared to all those sons who die every day in the war, after all “the wide world takes priority” (Swift, 40). Thus, “why make fuss about one drowned boy when over the far horizon and in the sky a war is being fought” (Swift, 40). Nonetheless, the narrator does that on purpose. The aim is to demonstrate the absurdity of such a statement. The fixed notion of History, considered a fabrication, is finally doubted and the actual point of history is about to be revealed.

“To uncover mysteries of cause and effect. To show that to every action there is a reaction. That Y is a consequence because X preceded. To know what we are is what we are because our past has determined it. To learn from our mistakes so it will be better, in future...” (Swift, 112). Crick’s students, seeking for the real purpose of history, are given another form of it which is, according to the narrator, rooted in the natural need of humans to get answers. History then transforms to its interpretation of inquiry or investigation. Human being is a curious creature that longs for an explanation. According to the narrator, people are driven by “[c]uriosity, which, with other things, distinguishes us from the animals, is an ingredient of love. Curiosity, which bogs us down in arduous meditations and can lead to the writing of history books” (Swift, 57). But to find an explanation it is unavoidable to search for reasons and causes. Doing so is actually a sort of a “historical process, since it must always work backwards from what came after to what came before” (Swift, 111). In other words, it is a complex investigation within which particular stories tend to accumulate since to reveal the first cause it means to go deeper and deeper otherwise there is still no valid answer to the question *Why?*. After all, a “man is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories” (Swift, 68). Apparently, another query arises – how far it is necessary to go to find a satisfactory explanation. The narrator admits that “in order to find out why Louis XVI died, it is necessary not only to reanimate in our imaginations his troubled life and times but even to penetrate the generations before him” (Swift, 112). However, that is, unfortunately, the impediment of it. The question cannot be fully answered. Crick highlights “I taught you that there is never any end to that question, because as I once defined it for you, history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge” (Swift, 113). This conviction rises from the postmodernist interpretation of history as an imperfect record of events made artificially by people in power, thus, it never objectively reflects the reality and cannot provide a valid source of information. Swift, via Crick in the novel, clearly shows this and supports the approach when the narrator simply states that “there are those who make things happen and those who ask why” (Swift, 201). In this point, the novel strongly accentuates the feeling of futility. The fixed concept of

historical reality that is supposed to provide a rational meaning proves to be partially fabricated and does not offer any relief. All these aspects contribute to the fact that no satisfactory clarification may be found and the intricate historical creation might only lead to reaching “the limits of our power to explain” (Swift, 113) instead. Nevertheless, the urge for explanation, for the *Because* rests unaccomplished. It is exactly the moment when, knowingly or unwittingly, the effort to provide an explanation becomes only telling. History adopts its third, yet most important, form in the novel when it becomes an act of storytelling.

The act of telling stories is a significant feature of the novel. Actually, it is not only a leitmotif of meta-fiction – that the novel is about storytelling, but it is also a crucial means of existing and surviving for the characters. At the very start it is treated as an intimate bond between a father and his sons. The father is able to share wisdom with his descendants via stories. It functions as a way of naming the world about and transmitting moral messages. Furthermore, apart from being taught, the narrator is given an opportunity to vivify the memories of his deceased mother. To tell stories represents a soothing device of coping with an unpredictable life, whether it means to remember or to forget. Another point of storytelling in *Waterland* is to evoke a sense of self-reflection both among the characters and the readers. This awareness leads to the indication of “the general rupture between the individual psyche and experience in general” (Lane, 42). In other words, the aim is to point out the difference between ordinary subjective experience and what is intended as a universal truth. It intermeshes with the postmodernist approach and Swift, putting emphasis on personal history, indicates the impossibility to create and validate one single objective reality. He demonstrates diverse perspectives of generations and various groups of people in the novel in order to awaken self-reflection among readers which is supposed to be aimed at the cultural, social and political image of the contemporary world.

Most probably, the greatest importance of storytelling is its concept as a magical historical process: a historical process in a sense of going backwards to previous events, recollecting them and dwelling in the blissful past; magical then since it allows the narrator to suppress the hapless present time by getting back to the old good days. It miraculously works when History fails to provide a rational explanation for all the misery that is cast upon the characters.

“Does Helen Atkinson, too, then, believe in miracles? No, but she believes in stories. She believes that they’re way of bearing what won’t go away, a way of making sense of madness” (Swift, 225). The act of storytelling becomes a way of bearing with personal tragedies and traumatic experience. It is a device that helps to eliminate fear and for Henry Crick, it symbolizes a *magic tale* that enables him to travel in time and get back to before everything went wrong. For him the (hi)story becomes a magic that helps him survive.

2.1.2 Concept of History in *Midnight's Children*

“I had wanted for some time to write a novel of childhood, arising from my memories of my own childhood in Bombay. Now, having drunk deeply from the well of India, I conceived a more ambitious plan” (Rushdie, ix).

Even though Rushdie has spent majority of his life in London and New York, he has never ceased to be enchanted by his native land – India. More precisely, he has always been fascinated by the diversity that India represents. He admires the Indian pluralism mirrored in the composition of population, in the variety of languages and, last but not least, in the mingling of traditions. The multiplicity is expressed in *Midnight's Children* by narrator's grandfather who talks with his friend. “I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim. Then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian. I'm still not much of a Muslim, but I'm all for Abdullah” (Rushdie, 46). Having moved to Britain, where he has been confronted with a totally different cultural background, Rushdie became an external observer to the eastern world, however, his desire to contribute to the Indian narrative traditions has never left him. In 1981 he published *Midnight's Children*. The novel, which was supposed to be a record of his childhood, merged into an attempt to compose a cultural history of the Indian nation. It is obvious from Saleem's statement: “What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopaedia – even a whole language...” (Rushdie, 133). Nonetheless, the novel does not deal with the notion of history as it is known from textbooks. “The history he provides is not that written in colonial history books, but is one constructed around individuals and their involvement in the historical process” (Bowers, 77). The narrator often gives examples of this parallel “Oh, yes: something else was happening in the world that day. A weapon such as the world had never seen was being dropped on yellow people in Japan. But in Agra, Emerald was using a secret weapon of her own” (Rushdie, 77). *Midnight's Children* symbolizes a form of a folktale that tries to recollect a story that gives birth not only to Saleem Sinai, a key figure to the

whole history, but also to the independent Indian nation – “a nation that has never previously existed” (Rushdie, 150).

The novel deals with a seemingly ordinary story of Saleem, a worker in a pickle factory, who retells his family tale. Yet, he is not a common person, since he was actually born together with Independent India. He is aware of it and admits “things done by or to me were mirrored in the macrocosm of public affairs, and my private existence was shown to be symbolically at one with history” (Rushdie, 331). However, they are both new to the world and, what is more, “mysteriously handcuffed to each other” (Rushdie, 3), which means that the creation and forming of their identities mingle in many ways.

The concept of history takes two forms in Rushdie’s novel. At first, the history of Saleem’s life, full of miraculous happenings, seems to be more important. It is written retrospectively by older himself. He does that by gathering memories and pieces of information he has been given during his life. As he starts the story by events that happened before his actual birth he has to rely on their validity whether they appear to be true or not. Furthermore, knitting together his own memories he realizes that time has disrupted their shape. Although he claims that “[s]ometimes legends make reality, and become more useful than facts” (Rushdie, 57), it is obvious that history is based on fragments and uncertainty. Saleem obstinately insists that “[m]emory’s truth, because [...] it creates its own reality, [...] and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own” (Rushdie, 292), but later on he says “Everybody forgets some small things, all the time! But if small things go, will large things be close behind?” (Rushdie, 308). Actually, it only strengthens the ambiguity of the fixed notion of truth. This usage of Saleem as a narrator and re-creator of the story provides the novel with a particular, subjective perspective and self-reflection. Again, asserting that “[r]eality is a question of perspective” (Rushdie, 229) it challenges the assumption of reality or what is generally considered to be true. It is, actually, a very significant feature. As it has been already mentioned, the narrator’s destiny is closely connected to that of India, the second form of history in *Midnight’s Children*. Their identities function as an analogy to each other. Saleem becomes a symbol or a mirror image and the knotty history of his life represents an allegorical history of India which is introduced by the author as “[t]he new myth – collective fiction in which everything was possible” (Rushdie, 150).

The concept of history in *Midnight's Children* is rather a story furnished with historical shapes, however, it tends to point out the ambiguity of the fixed notions of history. It attempts to indicate the existence of diverse forms of history such as cultural and socio-political ones. The aim is to expose the different strands that participate in the construction of the particular notions. Saleem supports it by "Midnight's Children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view" (Rushdie, 278). The multiplicity is repeatedly emphasized in the novel by the narrator who keeps asserting that "[t]o understand me, you'll have to swallow a world" (Rushdie, 535). The author has to accept this diversity of perspectives, furthermore, he has to treat each view with equal validity in order to provide a comprehensive depiction. Thus, the novel makes an allegorical reference to the incessant discord between individual notions of national history and consciousness, which are based on distinct cultural and political sources. In a wider sense it tries to explore the process of creating a narrative authority as such that is consequently supposed to symbolize "[t]he construction of social and political authority itself" (Lane, 152).

2.2 Different concepts of setting

Another notable aspect, which illustratively demonstrates the individual interpretation of magical realism, is the setting of the novels. Both novelists selected distinct areas into which the stories have been set. Although *Waterland* takes place in a rural region of the Fens and *Midnight's Children* is set predominantly in the urban area of Bombay, the scenes of the novels have something in common. That is to say, they are the wellsprings of the plot since they strongly determine both the story and the characters. Swift shows the significance of the setting in the introduction to the novel when he admits that the Fenland setting is an essential place “[o]ut of which so much of what happens in the book arises” (vi). In the case of Rushdie, the situation is similar because the urban and cultural centre of India aptly captures the rich diversity that Rushdie wants to highlight.

2.2.1 Concept of setting in *Waterland*

It has been foreshadowed that the setting of *Waterland* possesses certain features which significantly determine the novel. The region of Fens is a peculiar area. “To live in the Fens is to receive strong doses of reality. The great flat monotony of reality; the wide empty space of reality” (Swift, 24). At first, it seems to be a flat land “[i]n the middle of nowhere” (Swift, 11). “Flat, with an unrelieved and monotonous flatness” (Swift, 10) which might come in useful, because it does not take the focus off the story itself. Actually, it functions the other way round. This featureless land, which is “[s]o regular, so prostrate, so tamed and cultivated” (Swift, 10) is able to cause a great disturbance. On the one hand, it can transform itself, in the mind of a child, in a fairy-tale land. The narrator confirms that it “would transform itself, in my five- or six-year-old mind, into an empty wilderness. On those nights when my mother would be forced to tell me stories, it would seem that in our lock-keeper’s cottage we were in the middle of nowhere; and the noise of the trains passing on the lines to King’s Lynn, Gildsey and Ely was like the baying monster closing in on us in our isolation. A fairy-tale land, after all” (Swift, 10). On the other hand, it may “[d]rive a man to unquiet and sleepless defeating thoughts” (Swift, 10). Moreover, it is not only the flat surface of the area which is curious. The peculiarity of the Fens dwells as well in the process of their origin. The territory was initially water, but thanks to the process of gradual siltation the formation of the region has commenced. “The Fens were formed by silt. Silt: a word which when you utter it, letting the air slip thinly between your teeth, invokes a slow, sly, insinuating agency. Silt: which shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay” (Swift, 16). The accumulation of silt led to the formation of peat which was “the second vital constituent of the Fens and the source of their remarkable fertility” (Swift, 16). Later on, the land started to be reclaimed by people and the mastery of drainage and work with water became an attribute of the place. The narrator introduces the local inhabitants as water people, that is to say, “fishermen, fowlers and reed-cutters who made their sodden homes in those stubborn swamps, took to stilts in time of flood and lived like water-rats” (Swift, 16). The land of the Fens, which was made artificially by reclamation and the process of drainage, both

metaphorically and literary symbolizes a place where people necessarily feel the lack of solid ground under their feet because “every Fenman suffers now and then the illusion that the land he walks over is *not there*, is floating ... And every Fen-child, who is given picture-books to read in which the sun bounces over mountain tops and the road of life winds through heaps of green cushions, and is taught nursery rhymes in which persons go up and down hills, is apt to demand of its elders: Why are the Fens flat?” (Swift, 21). The motif of water and the continual struggle with it has a symbolic meaning too. The limitless life of rivers and their seeming one-way movement express a power that goes beyond the humankind. Even the Ouse, the river of the region, “flows, in reality, like all rivers, only back to itself, to its own source; and that impression that a river moves only one way is an illusion. And it is also an illusion that what you throw (or push) into a river will be carried away, swallowed for ever, and never return. Because it will return” (Swift, 149). It emphasizes the tendency to make all things level against the efforts of people to subdue it and, at the same time, it indicates the cyclicity of reality.

The setting of *Waterland* with all its attributes is, by all means, perfectly suitable for the purposes of magical realism. It provides a considerable amount of actuality for the story and, despite its apparent simplicity and ordinariness, the nature of the region opens opportunities for the writer. “Because, despite everything, despite emptiness, monotony, this Fenland, this palpable earth raised out of the flood by centuries of toil, is a magical, a miraculous land” (Swift, 120). Swift does not have to employ supernatural beings, but he can easily apply the miraculous potential of the setting.

2.2.2 Concept of setting in *Midnight's Children*

On the contrary, Rushdie's novel is set predominantly in the urban area of Bombay. The Indian metropolis appears to be quite understandable choice not only with respect to the theme of emerging Indian historical and cultural identity, but mainly for its rich diversity of the city as such. The fact that the narrator works in a pickle factory may be regarded as Rushdie's improvement of the concept of the setting. It functions as a brilliant metaphor of Saleem's effort to pickle the history or as he calls it "[t]he chutnification of history" (Rushdie, 642). At the same time, it expresses the desire to collect all the varied flavours of India. The multiplicity of the city is reflected in the novel by the language idiolects of particular characters. The narrator likes dropping his grandmother as an example of it. "I don't know how my grandmother came to adopt the term *whatsitsname* as her leitmotif, but as the years passed it invaded her sentences more and more often" (Rushdie, 49). It is, onward, reflected by a range of smells caught by Saleem's exceptionally sensitive nose and, last but not least, by the contrast between different social classes. Rushdie attempts to create an extensive portrayal of the Indian nation, therefore the concept of city opens to him opportunities to depict the formation of society in the post-colonial India. Apart from the exotic nature of Bombay, the author takes advantage of the various faces of the city. Despite the fairytale and miraculous character of the metropolis as such, Rushdie leads his characters to the one-horse streets and ghettos where a bizarre world of magicians can be found. The artists are even presented in abnormal situation when they become a part of an army. "A special I.A.F. troop transport had flown to Dacca, carrying hundred and one of the finest entertainers and conjurers India could provide. From the famous magicians' ghetto in Delhi they came" (Rushdie, 527). This carnivalesque concept of the city full of soothsayers, witches and conjurers is for the novel both the metaphorical and the literal source of magic. Even though the novel is set in an urban area, it is necessary to emphasize that the metropolis of *Midnight's Children* symbolizes a particular example of a city whose attributes and Indian context make it totally different from other world urban centres.

3 CONCLUSION

The term magical realism was introduced in the theoretical part of the thesis which aimed to expose the causes that led to the ambiguity of this narrative mode. It revealed the various origins which had formed the current concept of the term. Furthermore, it tried to delimit the term within postmodernism. But above all, it foreshadowed that the concepts of magical realism could differ according to diverse influences and cultural backgrounds of particular writers. The principle aim of the essential part of the thesis was to analyze the selected novels by means of comparing factual concepts of magical realism employed by their authors.

From the point of view of magical realism, Graham Swift fulfils the tendency of challenging the fixed notion of truth and reality. In the case of *Waterland* it is achieved by means of calling the concept of history into question. This strategy is based on the gradual disintegration of what history is supposed to mean. In other words, Swift focuses on all the potential interpretations of the term and confronts them in the novel. The fact that history adopts various forms in the novel allows him to evoke self-reflection among readers and to demonstrate the diversity of individual perspectives. He highlights the significance of subjective experience and thereby refers to the ambiguity of reality and the impossibility to arrive at a single objective truth.

Salman Rushdie's concept of history, on the contrary, is based on a different approach. Rushdie also casts doubt on the validity of a single truth, however, he is rather interested in the process of creating cultural history and the formation of national consciousness which is rooted in his personal background. Unlike Swift, Rushdie comes from a different cultural and historical context, thus the novel is added a sort of political dimension. The personal history of the narrator becomes a mirror image of an emerging history of post-colonial India. Rushdie's aim is not only to examine the way of presenting reality, but also to emphasize the significance of multiple points of view. In a word, a comprehensive portrayal of the truth may be achieved only by treating all the perspectives as equals.

Furthermore, both the novels differ in the concepts of their setting. While *Waterland* is set in England, in a rural region of Fens, *Midnight's Children* are set predominantly in an urban area of Bombay. Despite the difference between the settings, both the concepts possess particular features which determine the stories and thus open possibilities for the authors to work with the potential of the scenes which was depicted in the main part of the thesis. Nonetheless, in comparison with Rushdie's magical Bombay Swift's miraculous Fens rest much more sober.

Having compared the selected works by Graham Swift and Salman Rushdie, it has been proved that magical realism is a complex narrative mode which is "open to multiple interpretations" (Bowers, 128) and therefore the concepts of it might differ according to individual approaches of both the writers and the readers.

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