

# MAGICAL REALISM IN MATT HAIG'S THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY

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# MAGICAL REALISM IN MATT HAIG'S *THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY*

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## ABSTRACT

<sup>6</sup> This research discusses about Magical Realism in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*. The novel, as the data source, tells about of the main character, <sup>7</sup> Nora Seed, a woman who finds herself in a mysterious library between life and death after her suicide attempt. <sup>10</sup> Each book in the library contains a different version of Nora's life based on the choices she could have made. <sup>12</sup> This library represents a different version of her life, each based on choices she could have made differently. The scope focuses on the elements of magical realism and the roles of the midnight library as a liminal space. This research focuses on revealing the elements of magical realism and roles of the midnight library as a liminal space. This research uses theory of the elements of magical realism <sup>1</sup> by Wendy B. Faris, which consists of the irreducible element, the phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, merging realm, and disruption of time, space and identity. <sup>14</sup> This research uses descriptive qualitative method and uses intrinsic approach. The novel incorporates the library as a liminal space that bridges in life and death, between reality and imagination, as well as temporal and spatial boundaries. The result of the analysis indicates that the novel can be categorized as the literary work of magical realism because <sup>4</sup> the elements of magical realism can be found in the novel and the library in this novel represents as a place between life and death, temporal and spatial, and the transitional of the library.

**Keyword :** *elements, library, life and death, magical realism, midnight*

## INTRODUCTION

Imagining the world and its reality was the goal of magical realism in both literary and artistic contexts. There are multiple stylistic traits of magical realism (Geetha, 2010). People are drawn to magical things for a number of reasons. A life of enchantment and heightened reality, which might be characterized as a life of wonder and mystery, is what some people want, while others want to know their place in the great world and solve their questions about life and everything around it. (Chamberlains, 2016:14). Magical realism in literature is characterized by its blend of realistic settings with magical elements that are treated as natural parts of the story's environment (Rajabi, 2020). Unlike fantasy, magical realism does not follow specific rules for its magical elements, they occur spontaneously and for symbolic purposes. This research analysis of the elements of magical realism and the roles of the midnight library in the novel of Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*.

Magical realistic text falls within two genres, such as fantasy and realism, in contrast to critics' opinions that a work of literature should be longer and focused on all of them. (Munawar, 2020). With some significant exceptions, the novel's tradition has evolved into a primarily realistic form. (Bowers, 2004:20). According to Neil Gaiman (2024), Literary works that portray the real world as having a magical or fantastical undercurrent are known as magical realism. People will take into account other logical explanations because they have grown accustomed to real life, even though strange things that are impossible to rationally explain occur in the real world. (Widyawati, 2022).

The novel illustrate the intricate connections between mental health, decision making, and self-discovery. This study examines how the components of magical realism are implemented in accordance with Wendy B. Faris theory of magical realism. This detailed explanation of the elements of magical realism is expected to be able to help the author to find and analyze magical realism and can provide Nora's experience in the library of magical realism. Therefore, this study elaborates the magical realism portrayed in the novel, especially its elements and the role of the midnight library as a liminal space.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Magical realism is a literary genre that frequently questions or critiques established political and social structures by fusing the supernatural with everyday objects. (Waham, 2023). Only those who have never studied or practiced magical can truly understand its mystery. It's to naturally use our inner effect to bring about constructive change. (Cunningham & Harrington, 2002). One feature of science fiction that sets it beyond magical realism is that any unsettling event must have a logical, physical explanation. (Bowers, 2004:28). The magical elements can symbolize inner conflicts and emotional states, presenting an alternative form of understanding human experiences. As the importance of mental health gains global recognition, offering profound hope in navigating the complexities of the human experience (Purohit, 2023).

#### **The Elements of Magical Realism**

Wendy B. Faris proposes 5 elements of magical realism in literary works, entitled "*Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*" (2004) as follows.

##### **1. Irreducible Element**

According to Faris, irreducible elements as phenomena within the story that cannot be fully explained by science or reason. This magical component is presented as an accepted part of the narrative world and creates a tension between the real and unreal. This quality is among the fundamental components of magical realism. Items with irreducible elements are uncommon or unexplainable by the natural law principles developed by western empiric philosophers, such as general knowledge, reasoning, or accepted views.

## 2. Phenomenal World

The descriptions of magical realism emphasize the phenomenal world's great presence, which is its second quality. Many aspects of magical realism's realism set it apart from a lot of fantasy and allegory. The purpose of this element is <sup>4</sup>to prevent the work from being a work of fantasy since the imaginary world is an authentic or real part of magical realism, which prevents the fiction from being a completely affecting fantasy. The world is used by magical realism to maintain the realization of a work.

## 3. Unsettling Doubts

The concept of unsettling doubts enables magical realism to represent different cultural beliefs or alternative understandings of reality. This doubts is bound to the reader cultural context, whether he is familiar with an empirical logical culture that alienates him from magical logic, he also will not feel out of place with the magical presence that is present in the fiction.

## 4. Merging Realm

<sup>2</sup>The fourth characteristic of magical realism is mobility or connection between two realities. Therefore, the magical realism view is situated <sup>16</sup>inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions, at the intersection of two realities. Magical realism often incorporates diverse perspectives or belief systems, blending multiple interpretations of reality. Wendy B. Faris reflects the coexistence of different world views or cultural understandings, as seen in the acceptance of magical elements within realistic settings. This feature allows the reader to start sensing the intimacy and near unification of the two worlds namely of magical and reality.

## 5. Disruption of Time, Space and Identity

Last but not least, these fictions disrupt conventional notions of time, location, and identity in addition to fusing disparate realms. Magical realism reorients our sense of identity as well as our time and space habits. Magical realism challenges conventional ideas of linear time, fixed locations, and stable identities. Wendy B. Faris argues that these disruptions reflect the complexities of human experience, allowing characters to move fluidly through different versions of reality.

## METHOD

This study examines magical realism <sup>6</sup>in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* using a <sup>3</sup>descriptive qualitative methodology. The intrinsic approach is used in this study. *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig serves as the study's data source. There are 268 pages in the 2021 novel *The Midnight Library*. Quotations from *The Midnight Library* novel are used to convey the information. Reading Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* several times, comprehending it, selecting the information that is relevant to the analysis issue, and categorizing the information according to the problem statements are the steps involved in

collecting data. The techniques of the data analysis are applied in this research is interpreting the classified data, analyzing the classified data, applying the theory used in analyzing the data, and concluding the analysis.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Elements of Magical Realism

The analysis is divided into two parts, the elements of magical realism and roles of the midnight library as a liminal space. According to the theory by Wendy B. Faris, the elements of magical realism consists of irreducible element, phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, merging realm, and disruption of time, space, and identity, which will be elaborated below.

#### 1. Irreducible Element

The irreducible element experienced by Nora is her internal conflict regarding self worth and fulfillment. Nora examines multiple versions of her life and each a different path taken in response to a choice regrets. While these alternate lives dramatically, they all lead Nora back to the same realization. This struggle for self acceptance is inescapable and underpins her entire journey.

The scene in the pages 36, creates a magical realm between life and death in the library, where every book is a different version of the protagonist's life that has been influenced by the multiple decisions she could have made. This symbolic environment enables Nora to use her experiences in the alternate reality to examine her regrets. Every book on the shelves depicts a distinct existence that is rich in experience and reflects the effects of even the slightest choices. At the heart of this large, eternal world is Nora Seed, accompanied by Mrs. Elm, the librarian, who kindly explains that each book is an opportunity to consider how her life might have turned out differently if she had chosen differently.

#### 2. Phenomenal World

In magical realism, the phenomenal world is the authentic element that prevents the work from collapsing into fiction that utterly disregards reality. Nora's understanding of her life is refracted through her feelings of regret, disappointment, and longing. She experiences her phenomenal world as one of failure and believe that her life is defined by missed opportunities. However, the deeper she goes into the library alternate lives, she realizes that these perceptions are colored by her internal struggle.

The scene in the pages 49, shows in the version of her life that Nora lives in, she appears to be fulfilling a long-forgotten dream by working at a pub and interacting with people that she should know. She makes an effort to act normal, but her inner conflicts betrays unease and confusion. This scene demonstrates how the phenomenal world brings possibilities to life, but it also demonstrates that merely living out a fantasy does not equate to actually being a part of it. Through this experiences, it suggests that simply correcting past

regrets does not automatically lead to fulfillment, explored through Nora is journey a cross multiple phenomenal worlds.

### **3. Unsettling Doubts**

Unsettling doubts manifest as a central theme, shaping Nora is journey of self discovery. Her regrets from the persistent uncertainty about whether she makes the right choices in life, leading her to believe she has squandered every opportunity for happiness and fulfillment. These doubts are reinforced by the parallel lives she explores in the library each offering glimpse into what could have been but also revealing that no life is free from own struggles.

The scene on pages 29, When Nora realizes how completely out of place her current existence feels, it overwhelms her. She sees her previous decisions as failures, each of which has caused her to drift farther from the person she had planned to become. She formerly dreamed of being a swimmer, pianist, philosopher, and traveler, which contrasts with her present sense of nothingness. Standing in one of her alternate lives, she is struck by the realization that, despite her efforts, she feels deeply out of place. The list represents all the identity and dreams she once believed might have saved her from the regret and dissatisfaction she feels in her root life. This moment serves as the beginning of unsettling those doubts.

The scene in the pages 46, Mrs. Elm reminder to Nora that the greatest danger is in the liminal space between lives, where her root life could be entirely destroyed if she loses the will to live. In her direct and honest response, Nora declares that she intentionally overdosed and that she wants to die. However, Mrs. Elm notes that Nora is still in the library, indicating that she might still have a desire to live within herself. The library as a space that exists between reality becomes a powerful symbol of choice and possibility. Nora is given the chance to investigate her possible life choices and reflect on the one she has left behind. This scene illustrates a central theme that even in moments of deep despair, the opportunity for change and self discovery remains. It reminds that the desire to end life may coexist with an unconscious wish to find meaning and hope.

### **4. Merging Realm**

Merging realm is embodied by the library it self is a space that exists between life and death where infinite versions of Nora Seed's life are accessible. This realm allows Nora to step into alternate realities shaped by the choices she does not make, effectively collapsing the boundaries between what is real and what is possible. As she journeys through these lives, the experiences she gains begin to influence one another, and she starts to carry emotional and psychological insights from one version of herself into the next. The library becomes a space where identities, regrets, and hopes intersect, enabling Nora to merge fragments of who she could have been into a fuller, more self aware understanding.

The scene of the pages 29, Nora considers the remains of a life that was full of unrealized possibilities. She is reminded of a period when her future still seemed bright and open by the philosophy books and antique furniture from her college days. The silent,

motionless plants make her think that it might be easier to live without thinking or feeling than to bear her sadness. Surrounded by philosophy text books and traces of a former self, she feels disconnected from any sense of meaning or possibility. The merging space between life and death where different versions of Nora is life unfold. Within this realm, boundaries between reality and her experiences across alternate lives begin to inform one another. The merging realm becomes a place of reflection and reconstruction, where Nora gradually pieces together a new understanding of herself through the lives she might have lived.

## **5. Disruption of Time, Space and Identity**

Disruption of time, space, and identity through the concept of library that exists between life and death, represents a different version of Nora Seed's life. This liminal space defines conventional understandings of reality, allowing Nora to move fluidly between alternate lives as if time and space were malleable. This challenges the idea of a fixed identity by presenting multiple versions of Nora, each shaped by different choices, careers, and relationships.

The scene in the pages 118, sensing that participating in a life she hardly comprehends carries emotional costs, Nora prefers to remain silent. She glances out at the scene, where slabs of ice give way to islands blanketed in snow and a gorgeous glacier that is partially obscured by clouds. Despite being alone, Nora's emotional control is demonstrated by the beauty of nature. Both her disengagement and a fleeting sense of connectedness to the outside world are evident in this silent moment. This mirrors the way Nora can only access parts of her potential selves, with some lives visible and others obscured by uncertainty and regret. The disruption of time is reflected in the way in a moment of transition, further emphasizing the instability of the present moment.

## **2. Roles The Midnight Library as a Liminal Space**

Roles of the the midnight library as a liminal space of the magical realism concluding illustration in setting of the experiences by Nora as the main character. Roles of the library includes the library as a place between life and death, temporal and spatial, and the transitionary of the library. Each of the role is elaborated below.

### **1. The Midnight Library as a Place between Life and Death**

The library serves as an illustration for the space between life and death, enabling Nora Seed to face the effects of her decisions. And rather than presenting death as a fixed end point, the library explore the phenomena and potential that exist in moments of experiences by Nora. This symbolic setting depicts Nora to reflect on regret, choice, and the meaning of her own existence and depiction of the library depicted of message even in the face of despair the possibility of transformation. The library symbolizes the space between life and death, where the boundaries of reality are suspended to allow for deep personal reflection.

The scene in pages 39, Mrs. Elm explains that the Midnight Library does not exist in the realm of everyday reality. It is neither completely imagined nor completely actual,

existing in the liminal world between life and death. By allowing Nora to face her regrets and reevaluate her life from a location outside of time and existence, this liminal environment represents the novel's main theme of transition. Mrs. Elm is statement that the library is not death or life, neither is it the actual world in the traditional sense highlights its function as a differences realm and reality where the ordinary rules of existence are suspended. This is between space becomes essential to Nora journey, offering her a rare opportunity to explore the consequences of her choices and the many lives she might have lives.

## **2. Temporal and Spatial**

Temporal and spatial in library explains the complexity of human experience and the impact of choice. The library functions as a space out side of time where Nora Seed is free to move between countless parallel lives. Each life exists in its own timeline and setting, Nora transitions between them without regard for chronological order or physical boundaries. Instead, identity is portrayed as fluid shaped by the dynamic interplay of time, place, and decision.

The scene in the pages 10, Nora is reminded of her mother while playing chess with Mrs. Elm. Her mother's incessant criticism made her feel inadequate. When Nora was a baby, her mother taped down her ear to fix what she perceived to be a defect. This memory comes to mind. This seemingly insignificant act betrays a more common pattern of control and rejection that influenced Nora's view of herself. Nora Seed's early experiences with judgement and conditional love, setting the foundation for her low self worth and the regrets. The mention of Mrs. Elm in this moment introduces a figure of quiet support and non judgement. Her mother's early interventions reflect the society and family pressures to meet certain ideals, and Nora's journey through alternate lives in way of reclaiming and learning of self acceptance. In this moment not only illustrates that Nora's strained maternal relationship but also begins to expose the emotional that shape of perception of her choices.

The scene on pages 67, At around midnight, Nora is lying in bed returning to what appears to be her former existence. She feels that this version has promise right away because her cat Voltaire is still alive, even if everything seems to be the same. She feels comforted and hopeful by this minor but significant change. Being just past in this moment suggests that Nora is beginning to move beyond her regret and stepping into a new phase of life where change feels possible. The mention of Voltaire as her cat adds to emotional significance. Voltaire's earlier death symbolizes of loneliness for Nora, so the hope that she is alive here symbolizes of the comfort and the possibility of healing. This small detail grounds her renewed hope in something deeply personal and meaningful.

## **3. The Transitionary of the library**

The library functions as a transitionary space where the boundaries between life and death, reality and possibility. It exists offering Nora Seed a chance to step out of her current existence and explore of the alternate reality by different choices. The library transition quality underscores the idea that identity is not anchored in any single version of life.



Through this dynamic and ever changing space, Nora comes to realize that personal growth is rooted in the process of transition itself of the recognition that life is not a static journey but an on going exploration of who we can become. The library as a transitionary of the space highlights the power of choice and reflection in shaping one understanding of self.

The scene on pages 96, Nora comes to the realization that her entire career has been centered on winning her father's approval, putting his approval ahead of her own goals, significant relationships, and love of music. By having an affair and leaving her mother behind, he betrayed the family and continued to treat Nora coldly. Anger and disillusionment spike as a result of this reflective time. Nora's deep frustration and pain caused by years of sacrificing her own dreams and happiness to her father's expectations. She gives up meaningful parts of her self by her love for music, her relationships, and her personal ambitions in the career that is aligned with what her father wants, and highlighting the destructive impact living for others. Despite her sacrifices, her father's betrayal through abandonment of her mother adds layers of hurt and disillusionment, making Nora is question of the value of her efforts. This moment shows the struggle to reclaim personal and find own path beyond the limitations imposed by family and societal expectations.

## CONCLUSION

Five aspects of magical realism and the functions of the library are recognized in Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* after the data was analyzed in line with the topic of the magical realism. According to the research analysis, Nora Seed ends up in a library known as the midnight library after having a troubled history. The library shows the elements of magical felt by Nora and makes her find out another dimension which shows another life that she might have wanted all her life. Choosing between life and death also makes Nora feel different and lost. Between life and death, Nora finds herself in a place where she can reflect on her past and consider innumerable scenarios depending on different decisions. The flexible use of time and space allows for identity and meaning in life. The library becomes a space where Nora as the main character takes stock of her regrets in the dreams and reveals how change can happen in moments of silence.

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