



Magical Realism in a Fantasy World: A Reading of Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*

GM. Raziya¹ & Dr. K. Kalaiaras²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Research Department of English, Pioneer Kumaraswamy College, Nagercoil

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

²Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor, Department of English, Pioneer Kumaraswamy College, Nagercoil

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu



Open Access

Manuscript ID: BIJ-2025-ES-067

Subject: English

Received : 29.08.2025

Accepted : 11.09.2025

Published : 31.12.2025

DOI:10.64938/bijsi.v10si4.25.Dec067

Copy Right:



This work is licensed under
a Creative Commons Attribution-
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Abstract

*The twentieth century had a really dark beginning. It was the time when a few held their hands upon the others. It was the period when a few cared only for their living. It was the age when a few oppressed the hope and dream of many for their own pleasure. The present paper explores trauma and history in Susan Abul Hawa's novel *The Blue Between Sky and Water*. In the wake of current political conditions, literature has a responsibility to record history when history itself falls short. The Middle East has probably seem more political upheavals than any other region in the world. The present paper explores Magical realism is a literary style, it describes the fantastic or supernatural elements are incorporated into a realistic narrative without questioning their existence. The main focus of the story deals on the characters' reactions, emotions and experiences within the magical setting. The fictional elements Susan's book embrace historical tragedies and portrays its magical consequences on the marginalized voices of the region. The psychological depth of her character is explored through omniscient point of view in her novel. Some writers used techniques like magical Realism and fantasy through which reality and fantasy were mixed to depict the pathetic condition of the innocent. Adhering to this fact, Susan Abul Hawa's pens her second novel *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015). The paper explores the Palestinian's painful experiences which are transmitted to their descendants via colonization. This paper entitled "Magical Realism in Fantasy World: A reading of Susan Abulhawa's. *The Blue Between Sky and water*" aims at presenting the elements of fantasy found in the novel thereby showing the effect of pain undergone by the Palestinians.*

Keywords: magical realism, supernatural elements, emotions, psychological, depth, pathetic condition

Magical Realism and Fantasy are contrasting concept in contemporary literature. Such fiction blends the realities of physical or supernatural aim of leading minds of varying ability on different trails. Fantasy and fairy stories according to Tolkien (1984), are not limited to audience predominantly made up of children. Fantasy is a genre that one places under one big umbrella called non- realistic literature, the other being realistic literature. During 20th Century period, some held their heads high while the others were oppressed to the extreme. Realistic portrayed of

these events became impossible since the powerful had their power in art too. Unlike some writings that were only for the suppressed. Magical Realism is one such powerful technique blending reality and fantasy in order to present the real condition of the world. Realism and Fantasy come out as the result of blending the marvelous and supernatural elements. Thus, the co-existence of realistic as well as fantastic may produce a new experience. In Hegerfeld words,

Characteristically, magical realist fiction approximates literary realism in that it presents



a fictional world that is clearly recognizable as a reflection of the extratextual world, . . . Significantly, the fantastic elements in the mafic realist text cannot be explained away, reduced or reconciled to its realism. The fantastic event does not turn out to be a hallucination, a dream, an elaborate intrigue, a practical joke, or an outright lie on the part of the narrator, but is part of the fictional world. (Hegerfeld 50-21)

Abandoned by her husband, Um Mamdouh lived with her three children. She was a very silent woman who does not even talk with her own children. She was “The village crazy woman” (12). On some occasions, she would be found staring off at the distance. Sometimes, she would be seen speaking in a strange language to no one. Or, she would be laughing without any reason. This pathetic condition of Um Mamdouh made the children helpless. However, they saved their mother from all dangers. While this was the reality, Sulayman’s emergence came out to be a fantasy. Sulayman was actually an old djinni, who was expelled from his tribe for falling in love with a mortal. Once some boys were seen masturbating. She could not bear that and so, began to curse them. However, the boys were not frightened by her arrival. They started to tease her. When Um Mamdouh mentioned the name of Sulayman, they also criticized him. The incidents that follow this showed the emergence of Sulayman through the face of Um Mamdouh. Suddenly, before she could stop him, Sulayman began to emerge through her face.

Specks of stars from a black sky glistened on the contours of her head as his presence grew. It expanded to the width of her shoulders, a dark immensity with raging eyes of red fire. It spat gibberish in a voice that thundered from all directions, and a cauterizing smell, like pollutions, soaked the air. (16)

The sudden change in Um Mamdouh shocked the boys and their families. This incident had a great impact on the boys. After this happening, the village of Beit Daras began to worship Um Mamdouh. They came to her with many questions for which they demanded answers. They wanted to “explore the world of the unseen” (19). Sulayman was not a real person but he was more like an angel to Beit Daras. The dangers from the next to village was prophesied

by Sulayman. Throughout all the dangers, this djinni remained with them till the death of Um Mamdouh. “Sulayman helped them escape captivity” (31). This djinni saved the lives of many people including Atiyeh and Mamdouh. However, the death of Um Mamdouh kept Sulayman away from the people of Beit Daras for some time. Um Mamdouh was the reality while Sulayman was a mere fantasy. These two elements are amalgamated in the most beautiful way. Though Sulayman became passive after the death of Um Mamdouh, he was now and then invoked by the members of this family. Whenever Nasmiyah was in trouble, she began to call Sulayman. However, she never got any response from him. During Mazen’s arrest too, Nasmiyah summoned Sulayman for help. But, that did not make any difference. While the situations were so, Sulayman never left the family. He was always there to help them. He did not appear to save than from silly disasters. He came only to help them tackle death. On Khaled’s birthday, when Rhet Shel was in danger, he appeared. He emerged from the body of Abdel Qader fantasy of Sulayman’s appearance mixed up with the reality of Rhet Shel’s danger resulted in the amalgamation of reality and fantasy.

The Nakba of 1948 resulted in migration. People from Beit Daras began to move to the nearby villages. Nasmiyah too was ready to go to a safer place. However, the men of the village for protecting their land. Nasmiyah went with her husband’s family. She planned to take Mariam with her. However, Mariam wanted to be with her mother and brother. She also promised to join Nasmiyah the next day. At that night, she had a very strange. It awakened her. In the dream, a little girl who was like Mariam appeared. But, that girl had dark coiled hair. Also, her name was foreign. She showed Nasmiyah some papers from Khaled that pointed out that after leaving the water well, Mariam was waiting for her. This vague dream completely confused her. Though these words were like fantasy, they were real. The next day she found Mariam hiding in their own house in Beit Daras. But, at first, she was in the water well. The words of the girl were the real condition of Mariam. Also, the girl who was like Mariam was Nur. She was the granddaughter of Mamdouh. She had all the qualities of Mariam like mismatched eyes and



the ability to see the colors. This girl also was a real person. Thus, a fantasy at a point becomes real at another point thereby bringing about a very close amalgamation of reality and fantasy. Similar to Sulayman's appearance was the appearance of Khaled to Mariam. This little girl was very different in her physical. Her arms were brown. Her hair was black. The most peculiar thing about Mariam was her mismatched eyes---one green and the other brown with hazel accents. Mariam liked her green eye which made people to look at her and admire her. She had some vision of her own. Nasmiyah and Mamdouh believed that her visions were the effect of her green eye. Her life was filled with colors. She was living a new world of her own. She has a life in her imagination. When she was not allowed to go to school, she went to the river. She had her schooling there. Khaled was teaching her to write and read. This was not known to anyone. Whenever she went to the river, she met Khaled. At the same time, when Nasmiyah went to see who Khaled was, she found no one there. However, the family believed Mariam's words only after seeing the photograph taken near the river.

It had been snapped on one of the days Nasmiyah had tried to surprise Mariam by the river, to meet Khaled. Mamdouh was standing on the riverbank with his arm around Nasmiyah, who stood sassily, hand on her hip. Their mother was there in a fine embroidered thobe she had sewn herself, but she was somehow still absent. And Mariam, perhaps eight years old, was captured in an expression of casual conversation with her friend Khaled, a boy of perhaps ten years, with a white streak of hair, as the two of them sat around her wooden box of dreams. When the photographer gave them that photo, the family could not recall seeing Khaled that day "...at the river and, until holding the photograph, had assumed he was a creation of Mairam's imagination". (32)

Though the photograph brought a strange sense of fear in the minds of Nasmiyah and Mamdouh, they did not want to disturb Mariam from her own style of life. They understood that her life was impossible without Khaled. Her life was made colorful just by Khaled. Once when Nasmiyah asked Mariam who Khaled was, she told that he was Mariam's grandson. At that moment, this point was just a

fantasy. However, Nasmiyah's grandson Khaled too had white streak of hair at the top of his black mane. She was surprised and taken back with shock when she saw Khaled for the first time. Her confusion made her ask him if he knew or dreamed about a girl named Mariam. However, his answer was always negative. Khaled who was a person of imagination became real showing the amalgamation of reality and fantasy.

When Mariam was real, Khaled and Sulayman were parts of fantasy. The reverse too happened. That is, when Khaled became real, Mariam and Sulayman became a fantasy. The so so-called episodes of Khaled began when he was just six years old. That day was not an unusual one. Khaled was walking to the school with his cousins and friends. All of a sudden, Jewish women came with their children. The native kids began to run in panic. The place was filled with commotion. The Jewish children hurled stones and broken bottles at the native children. Khaled's short entrance into the blue was disturbed when his cousin dragged him from the place. This first experience lasted just for a few seconds. Khaled did not understand the difference between reality and fantasy. This amalgamation of reality and fantasy confused Khaled. However, his subsequent episodes gave him a vivid picture of the reality and fantasy. Khaled's second episode was accompanied by Sulayman. During this episode, Sulayman took Khaled to the ocean and helped him to witness the cruelties done to Abdul Qader and other fishermen by the Israeli Soldiers. The real events at the sea were mixed up with the fantasy of Khaled's life of episodes.

Magical realism attempts to capture reality by way of a depiction of life's many dimensions, seen and unseen, visible and invisible, rational and mysterious. In the process, such writers walk a political tightrope between capturing this reality and providing precisely the exotic escape from reality desired by some of their Western readership. (Cooper 32)

In the Blue Between Sky and water, Susan deliberately uses Magical Realism in fantasy world, which noted that "also uses elements of magical realism and paranormal to get insides the mind of her characters. While telling the complex stories of



a family uprooted from the land of their forefathers" (Khan 5). Reality and Fantasy are amalgamated in a proper proportion thus justifying the other term, for Magical Realism, that is, mixed or Hybrid Realism. Through the showing of the fact through magical realism the unknown and hidden facts are brought to the front for the world to understand.

Works Cited

1. Abul Hawa, Susan. *The Blue Between Sky and Water*. London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2015. Print.
2. Cooper, Brenda. "'Sacred names into profane spaces': magical realism." *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a third eye*. London: Routledge, 15-36. Print.'
3. Heger, Anne C. "A Working Definition." *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magical Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain*. Amsterdam- New York: Rodopi B. V., 2005. 37-65. Print.
4. Khan, Abdullah. "A virtual journey." *Hindu* 1 Nov.2015, weekly ed., Sunday Magazine sec.: 5. Print.