

# A Study of Magical Realism of Intuition in Writer's Life of Paulo Coelho's Novels

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## Abstract

Paulo Coelho has achieved success by writing novels with spiritual themes in the magical realist mode. Content in his novels has a thin implicit layer of philosophy, which speaks through textual recollections and inter-textual levels of meaning. Coelho has entwined the theme of his novels with magical realism which is a brilliant mirror image of gigantic literature, created inside a huge literary grid, where the worldwide literature and cultural codes coexist while being continuously invigorated. These codes have reappeared and are reconstructed with the assistance of skilful perceptions of Coelho. Paulo Coelho's novels are characterized by the use of various literary devices that also came to be symptomatic of the magical realist technique. The intense awareness of storytelling, emphasis on imagination and fantasy, the use of extremely rich, figurative language in the form of symbols, motifs, metaphors and a new, multiple point of view of these concepts as well as a primary interest in spiritual life and philosophy of the characters represent only a limited listing of devices the author applies in his literary work. The magical realist aspect of his works seems to be vital and would be worth a more detailed analysis. Before analysing the novels of Paulo Coelho in terms of the magical realist elements, the researcher at first briefly traces in this chapter the origin, definition and clarification of the term magical realism and discusses popular magical realist writers and critics of various periods.

**Keywords:** *Magical Realism, Writer's Life, Paulo Coelho's Novels, worldwide cultural literature.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the past few decades, researchers have explored the topics and interconnections of cognition, intuition and emotion in the context of decision-making across disciplines. The key questions of research are how cognition, intuition and emotions are defined and how they contribute to construct meaningfulness and meaningful decisions in life. Psychobiographical research, as the study of the life of "historically significant and extraordinary individuals" and contribute to explore the topic over their entire life spans with the aim to uncover and reconstruct the lives of individuals psychologically with regard to intuition and intuitive decision making. Intuition has until now hardly been addressed in psychobiographical research – psych biographical studies often rather use developmental or health-related theories which are then applied to a person's life. Particularly during the past years, psychobiographies as research method, as well as a theoretical approach have gained international recognition, exploring the lives of outstanding individuals, such as politicians, actors, religious leaders, psychologists, artists and writers. In psychobiographic studies, a general research gap has been identified to contribute to a new and complex psychological understanding of extraordinary individuals to act as role models. The constructive use of intuition and the positive intuitive decision-making process are aspects of a positive psychology perspective which is according to Luthans (2002) needed in research and according to Mayer (2015c, 2017) needed in psychobiographical works. This is particularly required with regard to the long tradition of pathogen orientations in psychobiographical research which need to be expanded, if not overcome. The extraordinary person studied is Paulo Coelho, the world-known writer and novelist who has overcome many difficulties and challenges in his life to become a healthy and faithful person. In this article, it is assumed that this development of a person is based to a large extent on intuition and constructive, positive decision-making processes. Although the writer and his work have been studied extensively, no psychobiographical work could be found that deals with intuition and intuitive decision-making processes in psychobiographical studies in general or with regard to Paulo Coelho in particular. Therefore, a research gap has been identified in research on psychobiographical research on Paulo Coelho, and on intuition and intuitive-decision making with regard to qualitative studies across the life span. However, it is assumed that studies across the life span could contribute to new information on how intuition and intuitive decision-making are used and/or developed

across a course of a lifetime. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to uncover and reconstruct the selected individual's life through the focus on intuition and intuitive decision-making by exploring conscious and unconscious life decisions. In doing so, this study provides new insights and a new understanding and perspective on the writer Paulo Coelho his life, health, faith and success.

## 2. MAGICAL REALISM

Magical realism has a distinct place among the genres in contemporary world literature. The general popularity of this genre both among the readers and the critics is evident from an inexhaustible number of theoretical works dealing with and attempting to analyse the term. Many critics and literary theorists have focused especially on the overuse and misuse of the term magical realism and this leads to the need to find out the characteristics of magical realism. Magical realism has been a complicated literary theory for eight decades. There are three distinguished periods in its history such as the first period in the 1920s set in Germany, the second period in 1940s in Central America and the third period in Latin America in 1955. Maggie Anne Bowers asserts in her book *Magic(al) Realism* about these periods, "All these periods are linked by literary and artistic figures whose works spread the influence of magic(al) realism around Europe, from Europe to Latin America and from Latin America to the rest of the world" (2004: 7). The major figures in the development of the term Magical Realism are Franz Roh, the German art critic who was best known for his work in 1920s, Massimo Bontempelli, the Italian writer from 1920s to 1930s, Alejo Carpentier, the Cuban writer and Angel Flores, Latin American literary critic in mid-twentieth century and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Latin American novelist in the late twentieth century. Though this term is associated with Latin America, the influences are traced from European literature, particularly in the modernistic period. Most of the critics have a doubt about the history of Magical realism. Among them the popular Cuban-born critic of Latin American literature and culture is Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, who finds it difficult to authenticate a 'true history of the concept' (1977: 112). Seymour Menton, the American critic, tries to unravel its past in his book, *The True History of Magic Realism* (1998). The majority of the contemporary critics such as Amaryll Chanady, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris reveal the ideas of the German Art Critic, Franz Roh. However, in spite of theoretical problems, magic realism continues to have a special appeal for critics. It was widely used earlier in poetry and painting and at present in novels and particularly in films. It can be argued that magic realism can be a valid term to describe a number of thematic, proper and essential characteristics common to a corpus of literature, and can be considered an aesthetic category different from others such as Surrealism or Fantastic Literature, with which it has often been confused.

Magical Realism is an amalgamation of fantasy and realism. However, the combination is based on the reality that everything happening in the work is usual and an everyday incidence. The Magical realist brings a spark of life to the imagination, which in turn stimulates the mind of the reader. Luis Leal stated that Magical Realism cannot be identified either with fantastic literature or with psychological literature, or with the surrealist or hermetic literature (1995: 119-124). Some of the writers said that before Franz Roh, the German art critic, Guenther brought out the term, even earlier, in fact, in the late eighteenth century when it was expanded by Novalis, the German Romantic philosopher. By the time the term was transferred through translation to Latin America, magical realism had already been adopted formally, becoming a standard literary concept after being established in the Latin American literature. At the end of the twentieth century, the term 'magic realism', 'magic(al) realism' and 'marvellous realism' both have become highly fashionable and highly derided. In recent years the term 'magical realism' has become the most generally used one of the three terms, referring to a specific narrative mode. Wendy B. Faris explains in *Magical Realism: Theory History and Community* that 'Magic realism' is the concept of the 'mystery [that] does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it' (1968:15) and 'magical realism' from the point of view of Salman Rushdie in his *Midnight's Children*, is the 'commingling of the improbable and the mundane!' (2006: 3). According to Maggie Ann Bowers, Franz Roh developed the term 'magical realism' in 1925. Roh applied this term in the 1920s to a group of German painters who precluded Expressionism and promoted the representation of reality from a different viewpoint: through a keen observation of ordinary objects, the painter uncovers the mystery hidden in them, making them appear more real. Roh emphasises the realistic character of the New Art; instead of transcending reality as Expressionism did, it attempts to grasp reality with a particular spiritual intensity.

## 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF MAGICAL REALISM

Before analysing the selected novels of Paulo Coelho, it would be worth mentioning some distinct features of magical realist mode. Amaryll Chanady's article in *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved*

Antinomy (1985) has influenced greatly the studies of magical realism. She brings out the characteristics which are fit for this contemporary period. She draws outlines and differences between several modes and genres that deal with the supernatural. She expands the definition of Flores and emphasises on the depiction of fantastic elements in the text:

The manner in which the codes of the natural and the supernatural interact in the text distinguishes the fantastic and magical realism from each other. Whereas the antinomy appears to be resolved in magical realism, the contradictions between different conceptions of reality are placed in the foreground by the author of a fantastic text (1985: 69).

Wendy Faris writes in her article, *Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism in Postmodernist Fiction* (1998), about the characteristics of magical realism such as the irreducible element of magic, the strong presence of realism between two worlds, merging of two worlds and time, space and identity. She reiterates by writing, "magical realism combines realism and fantastic in such a way that the magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed" (1998: 169). It is observed that these characteristics are changing according to the periods. The central ideas of magical realism are: significance of magic and myth, political critique and rationality, doubt about reality, identity and so on. Most of the critics like Chanady and Faris suggest several common characteristics of magical realism. Some of them which are apt for the writers like Paulo Coelho are: fantastic elements, incorporation of myth, hybridity, authorial reticence, setting and themes.

### 1. Fantastic Elements

Magical realism and fantasy, the two different genres, though often confused, have similarities and differences. They are close to each other but not the same. According to Roh, the German historian, art critic and photographer, the magical realism is not a blend of fantasy and reality but a way to uncover the mystery hidden in everyday reality (1985: 33-73). The focal point is not the fantastic, dreamlike, or supernatural elements that appear, but rather the real world that serves as the framework for the literary work. As Lori Chamberlain states: "the supernatural is made to seem part of everyday life and events of the imagination are equivalent to other kinds of events" (1986: 10). In the words of Goff Hancock, the difference unfolds: "The artist aims for new visions, not just imitations. Magic realism shows the difficulty of distinguishing what is real from what is fantastic. It's all a trick of perspective; magic realism goes beyond copying reality to inventing it" (1986: 35). The literary movement of magical realism is associated with a style of writing or technique that incorporates supernatural or magical events into realistic description without questioning the improbability of these events. This fusion of fantasy and fact is meant to question the nature of reality as well as call attention to the act of creation. By making realistic experience appear extraordinary, magical realist writers contribute to a re-envisioning of Latin American culture as vibrant and complex. Latin American fantasy grew out of a syncretic process that mingled European literary and religious traditions with native myth and folklore. Such links began to be forged in the 19th century in the works of such Argentinian writers as Juana Manuela Gorriti and Eduardo Ladislao Homberg; they began to spread to other nations in the early 20th century to Peru in the works of Clemente Palma of Uruguay, Jorge Amado of Mexico, Juan Jose Arreola and Miguel Angel Asturias of Guatemala, and so on.

### 2. Authorial Reticence

Authorial Reticence is one of the outstanding features of magical realism that refers to the silence and quietness of the narrator or writer in the description of magic or portrayal of supernatural events. In Chanady's words, it is the "deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world" (1985: 16). Ruth Noriega Sanchez said that authorial reticence creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation and makes the mysterious more unacceptable. However, in magical realism, authorial reticence facilitates acceptance, since it integrates the supernatural into the code of the natural which must redefine its borders (2011: 25). Reticence functions as a principle defining the very existence of magical realism. The author should refuse to judge on the veracity and the authenticity of the characters' worldviews. Chanady's remarks regarding the validity of the author's world-view would "relegate the supernatural to a secondary mode of being (the unreliable imagination of a character), and thus the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive logical codes, which is essential to magical realism, would become a hierarchy" (1998: 34). Therefore, in magical realism the incredibility should be accepted as real by both the reader and the characters in the story, otherwise, it may go into the genre of fantasy. Jane S. Jaquette identifies the use of authorial reticence and focalizers as the particular devices that achieve this resolution. She takes the famous episode of the ascension of 'Remedios the Beauty' in Gabriel Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

as an example and quotes in her book *Female and Male in Latin America*: “She watched Remedios the Beauty waving good-bye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her, abandoning with her the environment of the beetles and the dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o’ clock in the afternoon came to the end” (1973: 21).

One more example from *Ulysses* of James Joyce is that in its final episode, Joyce chooses a different solution to the problem of magical realistic feature of authorial reticence, still another dramatic form, the interior monologue. Here too, there is only direct presentation. There is no narration per se, not even first person narration. By casting the entire episode as a monologue, Joyce could avoid authorial commentary altogether on the material presented. So, this technique is quite common in the writings of some authors like Joyce, Jane Austen, Marquez, Paulo Coelho and so on. Authorial reticence in Paulo Coelho’s novels is identified in some of the locations in the texts. He is one of the greatest writers of inserting authorial reticence which is one of the common characteristics of magical realism. He becomes passive and will not create the context to explain the reason for the particular aspect; for instance, in *The Alchemist*, the sudden appearance of the old man who gives some suggestions to Santiago to find the treasure and says to the boy that he has to follow the omens. He also continues by saying that God prepares a path for everyone to follow so as to read the omens that are intended for him to decipher. Coelho does not intend to explain the importance of the flight of butterfly in the novel and is implied, “Before the boy could reply, a butterfly appeared and fluttered between him and the old man. He remembered something his grandfather had once told him: that butterflies were a good omen. Like crickets, and like expectations; like lizards and four-leaf clovers” (AC, 30).

### 3. Incorporation of Myth

The Oxford English Dictionary describes myth as a traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces, which embodies and provides an explanation and justification for something such as the early history of a society, a ritual or a religious belief, or a natural occurrence. Myth is strictly distinguished from allegory and legend by some scholars, but in general, it is often used interchangeably with these terms. It is a widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief; a misrepresentation of the truth; a widely held misconception. Myths came into existence before art, language and the written word. Myths were well-known stories of great men and women. They were formed in the olden days to explain natural or ordinary events or to justify social customs or religious beliefs. Myths were culturally significant stories or explanations of how things came into existence, for example, of how God made the world or how a hero undertook a quest. Myths are a part of religion. Religious stories express universal mythic themes such as the creation of the world, heaven and earth, the first man and woman, stories of heroes and heroines as well as serpents and dragons. Myths and mythic symbols are the products of imagination and creativity. All great works of literature are based on the mythic themes or stories such as ‘Noah’s Ark’, ‘Jonah and the great fish’, and so on.

The modern ethnic novel changes its shape in the hands of the writers in myriad ways and these novels represent the power of dominant culture. For instance, Toni Morrison writes about the African-American world, Scott Momaday writes about the Native American world, Anaya writes about the Mexican world, Gabriel Marquez writes about the Colombian culture, Paulo Coelho represents Brazilian culture and so on. Their lyrical, mythical, mystical, spiritual, philosophical themes are interconnected with magical realism. In his article, “Leaves of Grass and American Culture” Denis Donoghue wrote that “magical realism ... and romance extend the range of possibility, in deference to one’s desire to be free of limits; but in the end, these genres assent to the conditions they notionally transcend” (2003: 349). Incorporation of myth is one of the features of Magical Realism and writers and poets like Carl Jung, William Blake, T.S. Eliot and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe introduced it in their writings. Coelho even refers to William Blake’s understanding of God as an omnipresent divinity in his interview with Laura Sheahan: “This is our perception of the world, but God is as William Blake said – in a grain of sand and in a flower. This energy is everywhere” (2006: n.p). Yet, as interesting as these paths of intellectual exploration are, they are not in the heart of Coelho’s message. These writers practicing alchemy realise their artistic and imaginative aspirations through living and undergoing the alchemic process of personal progression. Their writings are the examples of the initial state of spiritual being who achieves his or her greatest dreams through pursuit. Paulo Coelho magnifies his writings through the incorporation of short spiritual and religious stories which can make the reader understand his flow of thought. Sometimes, he integrates his ideas in his novels through simple stories. That is why his books are read by all age groups. Even a kid can comprehend the difficult thought from the source of his writings. He incorporates moral stories in some way or the other for the delight of his readers.

#### 4. Hybridity

Hybridity is one of the essential characteristics of Magical Realism. Real description is mixed with fantastic and imaginary features in order to exaggerate their evident difference; a propensity for merging the real with the fantastic one, the routine with the extraordinary. In recent years, the concept of magic realism has paradoxically become global, as it is applied to literature far outside its original areas of definition. Magical Realism remains a most interesting critical tool to examine hybridity as it implies a link between two antithetic perspectives on reality: one labelled realistic or rational versus one considered “magic” or irrational. Vanessa Guignery et al. explore the nature of Hybridity in their book, *Hybridity: Forms and Figures in Literature and the Visual Arts*: “Its relevance regarding hybridity thus lies in its fundamentally dual nature, which also gave rise to two definitions: one European and one South American, the second challenging the first from the stance of someone who posed as an outsider to European culture though he was thoroughly conversant with it” (2011: 127). Magical realism story lines characteristically employ hybrid multiple planes of reality that take place in “inharmonious arenas of such opposites as urban and rural, and Western and indigenous” (2015: n. p). For example, as seen in Julio Cortázar’s *La nochebocaarriba*, an individual experiences two realistic situations simultaneously in the same place but during two different time periods, centuries apart. Julio Cortázar’s dreamlike state combines these two realities; this small bit of magic makes these multiple planes of reality take place. Salman Rushdie’s novels celebrate hybridity. His works show his strong belief in magical realism where the theme is mixed with various cultures and does not limit to any particular cultures or society. Hybridity permits the novel to create its own identity instead of forcing it to be a mere chronicle of history. It will be easier to understand the difficulties associated with post-coloniality and post-coloniality itself if someone understands the novel from the perspective of hybridity. Paulo Coelho shows in his novels his ideology and techniques of magical realism. He uses the symbols and omens to develop the story in each novel. Everywhere there is the vision of magic which palpitates beneath the things happening in the external world. In each of his novels, he unfolds the cultural hybridity that fabricates the core of magical realism. In an interview with *The Times* Paulo Coelho speaks out, “Even if I don’t write about Brazil, I see the world with Brazilian eyes. [. . .] I don’t have this wall. I believe that everything is magic and profane at the same time, everything is sacred and mundane” (2009: n.p). Paulo Coelho blends the magical and sacrilegious aspects that echoed in his novels by the admixture of cultures. In Rushdie’s words *The Alchemist* is “a bit of this and a bit of that” (1991: 394). First, it is important to note that Santiago’s name is chosen deliberately alluding to the patron saint of Spain and yet his journey will take him to the heart of Arabian culture, understood in a generic sense, through Morocco and on toward the Pyramids of Egypt, such that his journey re-enacts some of the topos of *The Arabian Nights* (1906). The first character Santiago meets is a mysterious individual who turns out to be a high priest of the Old Testament because he possesses two magical stones, Urim and Thummim, that is, the divinatory devices contained within the breastplate of garment worn by the high priest described in the Book of Exodus (28.15).

#### 5. Themes

There is a wide variety of magical realist themes depending on the historical periods, racially mixed culture or ethnicities and pre-Hispanic mythological elements in Latin American literature. The idea of fear overwhelms the possibility of transformation in magical realism. Time is another notable theme, which is frequently showed as circular instead of linear. Another particularly complex theme in magical realism is the carnivalesque. Paulo Coelho’s stories are taken from his spiritual life and philosophical experiences. The anecdotes or the myth he incorporates thoroughly engage the reader and takes them on a journey from the present state to a more meaningful identities. He says, “The pages contain accounts of some of my own experiences, stories other people have told me, and thoughts I’ve had while travelling down particular stretches of the river of my life” (2011: xiv). His novels convey strong universal themes through his novels.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Paulo Coelho enhances the profundity of his works with rich symbolism and he uses symbols generously to convey the meaning that add more depth to his novels. His symbolism has a myriad of origins as well as forms. His symbols create countless connections and sometimes his novels share the same or similar symbols as well. This can be exemplified through five of Coelho’s works wherein geographical places, unnamed characters, dreams, journey, numbers, forests, mountains, deserts, animals and water play highly symbolic roles. By providing a deeper examination of these novels, the immense importance of symbols in Coelho’s writings is clear. Coelho is inspired by the interpretations of Freud and Jung and a few dreams are incorporated into his novels. In each of his novels,

Coelho presents dreams from different angles. Coelho shows that dreams are personal and symbolic and they are connected to the Soul of the World through Personal Legends. The recurring dream of Santiago sets the plot and the robber's dream gives a clear picture of the location of the treasure. The dreams of Brida are the connecting link between the real life and her past incarnations. Pilar and Chantal cannot believe in the concept of a dream as they feel dreams cannot come true. Both of them sacrificed their dreams in the name of larger dreams. Pilar supports her childhood friend in spiritual healing and Chantal remains to stay in the same village, Viscos for the good of others. Athena's dreams come true due to her strong willpower and the support from the teacher of Calligraphy. The alchemist, Wicca, the Padre and the teacher who are the guides of Santiago, Brida, Pilar and Athena respectively always motivate them to follow their dreams and listen to the heart. Ultimately, they encouraged them to transform themselves and to find their spiritual path.

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