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| Magic Realism | |
| Beckett  Independent Study  2020 | |
| **(Warning these books and films do contain disturbing material. Please visit Common Sense Media on the web and see Mr. Beckett for further insight)** | |
| Must Read Core Text: *Life of Pi* | |
| If your University path is in the social sciences (‘ology’ courses) or in the Humanities (Languages, Literature, History, Philosophy, Art, Religion, and more) it is recommended that you consider an additional novel. | |
| * *Beloved*: Toni Morrison | |
| * *The Metamorphosis:* Franz Kafka 65 pages | |
| * *Midnight’s Children:* Salman Rushdie | |
| * *Satanic Verses:* Salman Rushdie | |
| * *1Q84:* Haruki Murakami | |
| * *The Brief Wondrous life of Oscar Wao*: Junot Diaz | |
| * Sw*amplandia:* Karen Russell | |
| * *Someone Comes to Town Someone Leaves Town:* Cory Doctorow | |
| Film Texts: Choose One | Short Story Texts: Choose One |
| *Pan’s Labyrinth* | *Very old man with Enormous Wings*: Gabriel Garcia Marquez |
| *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* | *Train Dreams:* Denis Johnson |
| *Bird Man* | *The Paper Menagerie*: Ken Liu |
| *A Little Princess* | *1000 year old Ghosts: Laura Chow Reeves* |
| *Midnight in Paris* | *The Man Who Could walk through walls:* Marcel Ayme |
| *Amelie* | *The Second Bakery Attack:* Haruki Murakami |
| *The Life Aquatic* | Americca: Aimee Bender |
| *Donnie Darko* | *Samsa in Love:* Haruki Murkami |
| *Big Fish* | *The Ceiling: Kevin Brockmeir* |
| *Beasts of the Southern Wild* | *The Distance of the Moon*: Italo Cavino |
| *Big* |  |
| *Oh Brother Where Art Thou* |  |

**Thesis Generating Prompts:**

1. How do the authors of three of the texts you read/watched keep the story ‘real’ despite the fantastic or magical elements?

Or as Salman Rushdie might put it: how does the magic help us to understand deeper human truths?

1. In what ways are the magical or fantastic elements, of at least three of the texts you read, symbolic or metaphorical? What are the symbols? How do they operate? Are there any similarities between them?
2. Just what is magic realism and how do these three texts fit into the notion of what magic realism is.

**Potential Outline 1**

Theme: (TRAUMA) indifferent injustice and the absurdity of life versus magic realism

**A quote that I feel sets the tone**

“I looked up at the mass of signs and stars in the night sky and laid myself open for the first time to the benign indifference of the world.”   
― [Albert Camus](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/957894.Albert_Camus), [The Stranger](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3324344)

**A kernel of words for my introduction:**

We all face certain annihilation-because we all will someday die. Faith, stories, and magic all require a kind of belief. We believe the words on the page, the images on a screen and so on.

**Tentative Thesis:**

Faced with the all too recognizable blandness of death and despair, in some texts, magic realism acts as a kind of balm for life’s grim realities.

Points

1. Characters faced with catastrophic tragedy
2. Characters access a kind of everyday inexplicable magic
3. Characters are able to move forward despite the darkness of it all

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|  | Topic Sentence | Pi | Train Dreams | Bird Man |
| Body Point 1 | Characters faced with catastrophic tragedy | Death of whole family  torture and near death on the life boat | cursed  Death of whole family  Living as a hermit  pulchritude | Profound personal despair and crisis (he is viewed as a joke)  attempted suicide |
| Body Point 2 | Characters access a kind of everyday inexplicable magic | Richard Parker  the blind man  the island | The Wolf Girl, | Starred in a movie yet has the ‘powers’ of the Bird-Man |
| Body Point 3 | Characters are able to move forward despite the darkness of it all | Able to start a family in Canada  able to control his story | Grainer lives a happy but lonely life. Is a kind of window into the era. | He is able to make a comeback as a serious actor |

**Potential Outline 2**

Theme: Just what is magic realism and how does it work in these texts?

**A quote that I feel sets the tone**

“In general, magical realism is literary in scope and tone and style. Many works of magical realism have a lyrical or ethereal quality to the writing. Even the way sentences are phrased adds to the mystical feel of the genre.

Writers of magical realism play upon the unexplainable events in peoples’ lives, making the extraordinary and fantastical almost believable. In the end, readers are never quite sure what’s real and what isn’t; they just know that it *could* be possible. It reveals the magic that is in the world around us.”

― Michelle Witte

**A kernel of words for my introduction:**

Magic realism is an important and perhaps vital literary mode in contemporary art, literature, and film. Defined by realistic even mundane plots in which supernatural, magical, and unexplainable things happen in a mundane and unexplained way.

**Tentative Thesis:**

Magic realism is a vital and important mode in modern narrative art forms. Magic realist stories share three important facets: lyrical or mystical writing, hybrid characters, and, unexplained magic that is accepted as ordinary.

Points

1. Lyrical, ethereal, or mystical quality to the writing
2. Hybrid characters
3. The there is a kind of everyday inexplicable magic

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|  | Topic Sentence | Pi | Train Dreams | Bird Man |
| Body Point 1 | Lyrical quality to the writing | Pi’s religious reflections  “The volume of things was confounding—the volume of air above me, the volume of water around and beneath me. I was half-moved, half terrified.” | The strangeness of the Bonner’s Ferry and the Moyea valley:  “Much that was astonishing was told of the dogs in the Panhandle and along the Kootenai River, tales of rescues, tricks, feats of supercanine intelligence and humanlike understanding” | [Young Birdman](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1235280/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): ... it'll explode into millions of eardrums. You'll glimmer on thousands of screens around the globe. Another blockbuster. You are a god.  [Riggan starts flying]  [Young Birdman](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1235280/?ref_=tt_trv_qu): See? There you go, you… |
| Body Point 2 | The there is a kind of everyday inexplicable magic  “marvelous events are presented as normal, run-of-the-mill, everyday things happening to ordinary, everyday people.” | **Man-eating island**  “The feeling of horror came slowly. I had time to pick at the other fruit.  Each contained a tooth…Understanding dawned upon me. I did not scream. I think only in movies is horror vocal. I simply shuddered and left the tree.” | **Grainier’s family after death**  Granier’s vision of his wife’s death  Granier’s reunion with the wolf girl | **Birdman flies**  Man on Roof: “Do you want me to call somebody? Do you know where to go?”  Riggins: “Yeah I know where to go”  [Riggins leaps off the roof top]  Man on Roof: “NO, WAIT!” |
| Body Point 3 | Hybridity:  Specifically, magical realism is illustrated in the inharmonious arenas of such opposites as urban and rural and Western and indigenous. | Pi is a hybrid of East and West. Science and Faith. Christian-Muslim-Hindu. Rational and irrational. Vegetarian and Cannibal | Grainer is much like a western cowboy hero at odds in society, at home in his cabin, but not fully wild like the wolf girl. The wolf girl is both animal and person—a feral isolate but more than that. | Riggins is a hybrid between a washed up actor and an actual superhero. He wants to be an artist but also to be popular and famous. |

How do symbols work in Magic Realism?

Symbols in magic realist texts can act in similar ways. In short: magic exists, magic symbolises bigger social forces, and magic is underpinned by a terrible existential melancholy.

Points

1. Characters access a kind of everyday inexplicable magic
2. The magic is a symbolizes something bigger.
3. The magic does not erase the sadness or melancholy that is central to being human

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|  | Topic Sentence | Beloved | Train Dreams | Paper Menagerie |
| Body Point 1 | Characters access a kind of everyday inexplicable magic | Sethe’s long dead daughter returns as an adult woman but with uncanny and nasty child-like appetites. | Grainer’s wife, his daughter, and the dogs of the Moyea valley have a kind of magic that connects to the wildness of the land and the time before technology, industrialization, and settlers. | Jack’s mother’s magic is special from her village. |
| Body Point 2 | The magic is a symbolizes something bigger. | Beloved’s return illustrates how slavery warped and destroyed family bonds and how the ghosts of extreme trauma always come back | The magic of the Wolf-Girl is a symbol of the waning frontier of the west. The coming industrialization and end of both the indigenous and pioneer lifestyle | Jack’s mother’s magic is a connection to a world of peasant China that was destroyed by Mao, communism, and modernity |
| Body Point 3 | The magic does not erase the sadness or melancholy that is central to being human | Sethe is re-traumatized these many years later. She loses her best thing, all of her children and only Paul D is left picking up the pieces.  Beloved like so many nameless blacks is utterly forgotten to history. | Granier’s life is long and lonely. He is a hermit and doesn’t really realize it. He dies alone as he lived. His passing represents the fading of the west into modern times. | Jack is finally able to understand his mother’s viewpoint after she dies. He must live with the guilt of rejecting her and never really understanding her past. |