

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE REAL AND THE FANTASTIC: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IDENTITY, HISTORY, AND DESTINY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AND ANGELA CARTER'S *WISE CHILDREN*¹

Petru Ștefan IONESCU²

¹ Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia

E-mail: petru.ionescu@uab.ro

Abstract:

*This research paper provides an exploration of the complex and reciprocal relation between identity, history, and destiny in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Angela Carter's *Wise Children*. We regard these two works as exemplary in their use of magical realism, not merely as a stylistic device, but also as a powerful narrative tool that helps define the complexities of human existence. Through a comparative analysis, this paper examines how Rushdie and Carter blend the real with the fantastical to challenge conventional narratives, exploring the intricate nature of identity and the dynamic reciprocity between personal and collective histories.*

¹ Article History: Received: 21.08.2024. Revised: 22.10.2024. Accepted: 27.10.2024. Published: 15.11.2024. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-NC 4.0](#). Citation: IONESCU, P.Ș. (2024). AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE REAL AND THE FANTASTIC: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IDENTITY, HISTORY, AND DESTINY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AND ANGELA CARTER'S *WISE CHILDREN*. *Incursiuni în imaginar 15. Magical Realism in Literature*. Vol. 15. Nr. 2. pp. 191-212, <https://doi.org/10.29302/InImag.2024.15.2.7>
No funding was received either for the research presented in the article or for the creation of the article

² <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57206724243>

In Midnight's Children, Rushdie blends the life of his protagonist, Saleem Sinai, with the historical reality of postcolonial India, using magical realism to blur the boundaries between the personal and the national, the real and the imagined. The novel's non-linear structure and fragmented narration reflect the tumultuous and often contradictory nature of postcolonial identity, illustrating how personal and national histories are intertwined and constantly evolving. The midnight's children, born at the exact moment of India's independence, symbolize the nation's future potential but also its inherent complexities, their supernatural abilities serving as metaphors for the highly diverse and complex nature of Indian identity.

On the other hand, Angela Carter's Wise Children explores identity using performance and theatricality, focusing on the lives of Dora and Nora Chance, the illegitimate daughters of a famous Shakespearean actor. Carter's narrative style, characterized by its playfulness and subversive humor, uses magical realism to blur the lines between reality and performance, suggesting that identity is as much a construction and performance as any role played on stage. The Chance sisters' improbable survival and their lives filled with theatrical performances and fantastical elements highlight the fluidity of identity and the artificiality of social constructs such as legitimacy and lineage.

Children play an extremely important role in both novels, their symbolism lying at the core of both narratives. Opposing the reality of the adult world to the fantastic freedom of childhood, with its lack of imaginative boundaries, the novels question the nature of reality and our accepted worldview.

This study draws on the primary literature, analyzing the two mentioned works, but also on a wide range of secondary literature, including postcolonial theory, feminist criticism, and narrative theory, to situate the analysis within broader cultural and literary contexts. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is particularly relevant in understanding the fragmented identities in Midnight's Children, while Judith Butler's theory of performativity offers insights into the fluid identities portrayed in Wise Children. By examining the symbolic roles of children in

both novels, the research highlights how Rushdie and Carter use magical realism to explore and critique the constructed nature of identity, history, and destiny.

Ultimately, this study argues that magical realism in these novels is not simply a narrative style but a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of identity and history in postcolonial and feminist contexts. Midnight's Children and Wise Children both challenge the linear, teleological narratives of history and identity, offering instead a vision of reality that is many-sided, fluid, and constantly being rewritten. Through their use of magical realism, Rushdie and Carter create narratives that invite readers to question conventional understandings of the self, society, the present and the past, offering new possibilities for the ways in which we understand identity, history, and destiny.

Keywords: magical realism; children; identity; history; destiny.

Introduction

Magical realism has emerged as a defining feature of 20th-century literature. It originates in Latin American literature, introduced by writers like Gabriel García Márquez and Alejo Carpentier. It has since been incorporated into world literature. Magical realism creates a unique type of narrative with boundaries between reality and fantasy becoming fluid, allowing writers to explore themes which are otherwise difficult to express within the traditional frame of literature. Latin American authors like Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges used magical realism to address complex social and political issues of their time and space, with a specific highlight on the inherent absurdities and contradictions of the realities depicted.

Magical realism integrates magical elements into a realistic narrative, blurring the distinction between reality and fantasy. Whereas in traditional fantasy the

supernatural is usually set apart from the real world, magical realism incorporates the fantastical as a natural part of everyday life (Faris, 2004, p. 1). According to this author: “magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them. Furthermore, that combination of realistic and fantastical narrative, together with the inclusion of different cultural traditions, means that magical realism reflects, in both its narrative mode and its cultural environment, the hybrid nature of much postcolonial society.” (Faris 2004, p. 1). An important outcome of this literary genre is that it enables authors to explore more freely controversial aspects of the human condition, addressing social, political, and cultural issues otherwise difficult to reveal within the limits imposed by conventional literary realism.

English literature has also taken on the opportunities allowed by this narrative genre, adapting it to its specificities, with writers like Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter using magical realism to discuss complex themes like identity, history, and cultural hybridity. In his celebrated novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), Rushdie employs magical realism as a narrative strategy, and this allows him to explore the fragmented nature of India's postcolonial identity construction as well as the interconnection between personal and national histories. In her last novel, *Wise Children* (1991), Angela Carter uses magical realism to a different goal. Following her previous literary achievements, her intention here is to subvert traditional gender roles and expose the performative aspects of identity. Both authors use this literary genre to question our everyday reality and our worldview and to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, offering

the reader innovative and challenging perspectives on the constructed nature of reality and identity.

This research aims to investigate how Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter use magical realism both as a narrative technique and as a tool for interrogating and deconstructing traditional notions of identity and history. By focusing on the symbolic role of children in these novels, the paper seeks to uncover the ways in which Rushdie and Carter blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy to explore the fluid and constructed nature of identity. The paper adopts a comparative literary analysis approach, focusing on thematic and narrative elements in *Midnight's Children* and *Wise Children*. The methodology is designed to explore how Salman Rushdie and Angela Carter use magical realism to address issues of identity, history, and destiny, with particular emphasis on the symbolic role of children in these narratives.

The primary research questions guiding this study are:

- How do Rushdie and Carter employ magical realism to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, and what is the significance of this blurring in the context of their broader thematic concerns?
- In what ways do the child characters in *Midnight's Children* and *Wise Children* symbolize broader themes of identity, destiny, and the intersection of the personal and the collective?
- How do these novels reflect and critique their respective cultural and historical contexts, particularly in relation to postcolonial discourses?

The primary sources for this research are the original texts of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

(1981) and Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1991). These novels serve as the foundation for the analysis, with particular focus on their use of magical realism, narrative structure, and thematic content.

In addition to the primary texts, this study draws on a wide range of secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and literary critiques. Key secondary sources include Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), which explores the concept of hybridity and its relevance to postcolonial identity and Wendy B. Faris's *Ordinary Enchantments* (2004), which offers a comprehensive analysis of the characteristics and functions of magical realism.

Bhabha's idea of hybridity, which is crucial to understanding the complexities of postcolonial identity, posits that "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 1994, p. 107). This hybridity is a key theme in *Midnight's Children*.

The Supernatural as a Reflection of National Identity

The supernatural in *Midnight's Children* serves more than a means to blend the real and the fantastic to create magical realism; they also serve to emphasize the novel's exploration of identity. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment of India's independence on August 15, 1947, has supernatural abilities. All the other one thousand and one "midnight's children" born in the first hour of India's independence share similar powers. Each of their powers are unique, symbolizing thus the diverse and complex identity of the new-born independent state.

Saleem's telepathic abilities allow him to connect with the other midnight's children which serves as a metaphor for the ability of the nation to interconnect, despite its plurality of cultures, languages, and religions.

These supernatural abilities are embedded perfectly with real historical events to create a narrative which suggests that the magical elements of the story are not actually separated from the real world. This type of narrative might be a little too much for a western audience but, placed in an Indian context, and exploiting the long-lived western fascination with oriental exoticism, the story becomes more credible, and the reader is led towards a suspension of disbelief and to accept that such magical elements might actually be deeply embedded in Indian culture, in India's history and identity. The reality in the novel accepts the fantastic as part of everyday life. In Rushdie's own words, "Midnight's children can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view: they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, (...) or as the true hope of freedom" (Rushdie, 2006, p. 203).

Describing "Midnight's Children" as a "postmodern epic" Timothy Brennan suggested that Rushdie uses magical realism to mediate between the challenging present of the modern nation and its "mythical past" (Brennan, 1989, pp. 100-101).

Blurring the Boundaries Between Reality and Fantasy

"Reality can have metaphorical content; that does not make it less real. A thousand and one children were born; there were a thousand and one possibilities which had never been present in one place at one time before; and there were a thousand and one dead ends" (Rushdie, 2006, p. 203). The narrative technique is one of the most

striking features of *Midnight's Children*. It blurs the fine lines between reality and fantasy, just like the fine lines between night and day are blurry, challenging readers to question the nature of historical truth. Saleem Sinai is the unreliable narrator who admits freely to altering facts, blending reality with fantasy, and interweaving personal memories with historical events. This narrative reflects the constructed nature of history, suggesting that history is not a fixed narrative, but a fluid and malleable construct shaped by those who tell it, mixing different points of view and compiling sources from more than one culture:

Rushdie's novel, in fact, works to prevent any interpretation of its contradictions as simply the outer discontinuous signs of some repressed unity – such as Marxist 'History' or 'the Real.' In fact, a novel like *Midnight's Children* works to foreground the totalizing impulse of western imperialistic – modes of history-writing by confronting it with indigenous Indian models of history. Though Saleem Sinai narrates in English, in 'Anglepoised-lit writing,' his intertexts for both writing history and writing fiction are doubled: they are, on the one hand, from Indian legends, films, and literature and, on the other, from the west – *The Tin Drum*, *Tristram Shandy*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and so on. (Hutcheon, 2001, p. 65).

Its structure is non-linear, there are frequent digressions, contradictions, and shifts in perspective. This fragmentation reflects the nature of postcolonial identity, with the past being often an inception of both pride and pain. The use of magical realism allows Rushdie to discuss such contradictions, introducing a narrative where the fantastical, beyond its acknowledged role as a means of

escape, is also a way of engaging with the intricacies of history and identity.

The magical elements in the novel, for instance Saleem's telepathic connection with the other midnight's children, highlight the interconnection between individuals and collective identities: "Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence" (Rushdie, 2006, p. 421). This statement emphasizes the argument that personal and national histories and destinies are intertwined, and that the individual's sense of the self is being constantly shaped and reshaped by history's compelling forces.

Rushdie's blending of reality and fantasy in *Midnight's Children* contributes to the challenging of conventional narratives of history and identity, suggesting the reader a more nuanced approach and understanding while trying to present the complex imagery of postcolonial reality. Rushdie employs the genre of magical realism because it enables him to explore the multiple strata of identity, in a complex society and culture where the personal and the national identities are inextricably linked, and where real and the fantastic are mixed together until they become indistinguishable and interchangeable.

Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1991) offers the reader a different approach to magical realism, focusing on the performative aspects of identity, highlighting the fine red lines between everyday reality and performance on a theatrical stage, and performance on the great stage of life. The novel follows the lives of Dora and Nora Chance, twin sisters and illegitimate daughters of the famous Shakespearean actor Melchior Hazard. Through their involvement in the theatrical world, Carter explores themes of legitimacy, identity, and the artificiality of social constructs, emphasizing the performative nature of reality

(Sage, 1994, p. 55-57). Carter's novel is filled with Shakespearean themes and references. Melchior Hazard's engagement and dedication to Shakespearean theatre, the ultimate symbol of British high culture, defines him up as a hallmark of English cultural tradition. His entire life is a series of continuous performances of Shakespeare, identifying him with this British cultural heritage. Another typical example of British culture is the continuous reference to class and social structure. The Hazard family represents the upper classes of Britain and high culture, the established cultural norms. Wealth and privilege represent their inherent condition. The illegitimate and therefore underprivileged characters in the novels are his daughters, the Chance sisters. Typical for classic British class rules, despite the biological connection, their social status is a marginal one. While Melchior shines stationary at the centre of the British social universe, Dora and Nora orbit around him on an elliptical trajectory at the periphery. It is a social class juxtaposition that defines and underlines the embedded rigid class and legitimacy structures of British society, with the Hazards representing the elite and the Chances embodying the lower classes and outcasts situated on the more marginal levels of society. This class delimitation is further enhanced by the setting, with the sisters living in Brixton, a typical working class and immigrant environment. English eccentricity adds to the cultural identity dimension of the novel. The personalities of the main characters, vibrant, whimsical and eccentric, with their flamboyant outfits and rejection and defying of societal norms reflect the ongoing tradition of different and unaligned English characters. English strong female characters who act as the pillars of their families are embodied by Grandma Chance, the stark unconventional personality who raises the Chance sisters in a quite

untraditional way. London is highlighted in the novel as the defining English cultural hub. The culturally rich South Bank, associated with theatre and culture, or the Old Vic theatre, with its performances of Shakespearean theatre are the quintessence of British cultural life, but at the same time a “privileged” space where, for once, high and low culture are allowed to intersect. The merging of Shakespearean theatrical experience with music hall underlines once more this blending of high and popular culture, illustrating once more how this mixture represents another defining aspect of British cultural identity.

The Symbolism of Children in *Midnight's Children* and *Wise Children*

One of the focus points of this research is the exploration of the symbolism of children in the two novels. The children are present in both titles, emphasizing thus their importance within the construction of the narrative. At the same time, the contextualisation of the children within the titles suggests already the challenging narratives of both novels and the unconventional, subversive approach both authors employ in their works. Both titles place the children in unconventional settings. In Rushdie's case we have the association between children and midnight. Although the explanation might be very simple at a first glance – it is about children that were born at midnight, in the exact moment when India was gaining independence from Great Britain – the fact that there are one thousand and one of them immediately sends the reader in the search for symbolism and hidden significations. We know now that the choice of midnight has to do more with the fantastic, then the politically and culturally spectacular but literary less significant historical real event that is described in the

novel. The blend between the real and the fantastic, the hallmark of magical realism, sets the tone of the novel from the start.

Firstly, children would not be associated with midnight. Children should be long asleep by midnight. The realistic key of reading the novel tells us that. But there is so much more than the real here. Midnight has had very special significations since the earliest forms of recorded literature. Its symbolism has been explored and employed extensively, with a special emphasis in fantastic literature. Midnight is the time when night fights the day, darkness meets the light and evil challenges the good. It is the time when the boundaries between reality and fantasy start to blur, and day-time conventions and realities lose their power and meaning. The magical moment of the night, with its different realities and representations, opens and reveals entire new and fantastic worlds populated by extraordinary creatures. Such worlds are governed by different laws, and all the impossible things from the real world become natural there. These are the worlds where the exceptional midnight children roam in Rushdie's novel.

The real world is the world of the adults, with all their rules and regulations of life they impose on their children. The fantasy world is the world of the children, where all the rules imposed by the adults disappear and the children can roam free and carelessly in their own worlds. But the freedom of the fantasy world comes with corresponding dangers. This is a theme that has been explored intensively in literature, from orally transmitted fairy tales to written literature, from *Peter Pan* to *The Lord of the Flies*.

The darkness and evil and dangers associated with the night, with midnight, transgress into the real world, bringing the dark creatures of the night, the ones that

pollute our dreams and torment our psyche, into the light, when conditions are proper. These are the dangers that our heroes must face and fight off. And the best way to blend the reality of the day with the fantasy of the night seems to be magical realism.

In *Wise Children*, Angela Carter challenges the reader in the same way as Rushdie, starting from the title, but a bit more explicitly. Wisdom is said to come with age. Since the oldest literary texts preserved, old age has been associated with wisdom. Therefore, to state from the title of a novel that children are wise is to challenge the traditional view of the world from the very start. Carter's playful narrative style continues throughout the novel as does the challenge of the conventional worldview. The reversed reality combined with the magical reveals a fantasy world constructed on the background of Shakespearean theatre that serves as a fantastic stage where the boundaries between real life and stage performance blur indistinctively to make place for an entirely new world where facts and fiction merge, where the real and the fantastic blend into each other, sometimes painfully, mostly colourfully, to release the reader into the magical reality of the dreamlike vision of a life experience masterfully shaped by Angela Carter to encourage new generations of readers into being constantly wise children.

The reversed reality of children being wise translates into the reversed reality of adults being not. The old theme of the purity of children versus the moral corruption of the adults is being reinterpreted here to highlight the theme of lost innocence and the challenging pursuit of it once again. In the real world, children are naïve, unexperienced, easily manipulated, and therefore need the protection and guidance of adults, to get them through the dangers of life. Adults, in the same real world,

are the responsible ones, the experienced and wise ones, who know right from wrong and act accordingly, in the best interest of their children. In a reversed twist of fate (or fiction), the roles are reversed in *Wise Children*. Melchior, the all-accomplished star-actor, acts all but wisely in relation to his unacknowledged daughters. The responsibly and wisely acting adult, his brother Peregrine, is actually a big child. He is the one who enables the fantastic dreams of the twin daughters. And the final family reunion to celebrate Melchior's one hundredth birthday is also the reunion of the two centenary twin brothers, Melchior and Peregrine, after a very long separation. The event symbolises the reunification of the child with the adult, of the real and the fantastic, the end of the pursuit for the lost innocence. Now, all the actors on Carter's fantastic stage become wise children.

Both novels use children and magical realism to challenge traditional forms of narratives and the generally accepted worldview on reality, fantasy, adult life and the lives of their offsprings. Playfulness and irony accompany the narratives to express the child perspective on the "serious" adult reality and magical realism completes the subversive nature of the novels. Childhood and adulthood are played against each other in an elegant performance meant to question the nature of our reality and the accepted worldview. It questions all the lessons we have been taught as children, and all the lessons we teach to our children as parents. The highly symbolical use of children in both novels is a lesson which, in the reversed play of reality and fantasy, is not taught to children, as lessons usually are, but to adults.

Children as Symbols of National Identity

In Rushdie's novel, the midnight's children symbolize the new nation of India, a country freed from

foreign dominance and colonialism, at the dawn of a new era and in the process of defining its new identity, an identity yet to be shaped in this newly created political, social and cultural construct. Each child born at midnight is endowed with a unique magical ability, which serves as a metaphor for the diversity and richness of India's cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage. As Ellen Boehmer notices: "post-independence narrative also has the capacity to establish new metaphors of nationhood: not only to rewrite history, but to create and to frame defining symbols for the purposes of imagining the nation. Perhaps most iconic amongst such narratives is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981)" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 189). Saleem Sinai is the protagonist and acknowledged narrator: "there are so many stories to tell, -too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!" (Rushdie, 2006, p. 1). He is one of the midnight's children and his unique abilities - his telepathic powers - allow him to connect with the other midnight's children, as a symbol of the interconnectedness of the country's diverse population.

Saleem's telepathic abilities are much more than a fantastical element of the story; they represent the collective consciousness of a nation in transition. The above-mentioned interconnectedness enabled by Saleem Sinai allows Rushdie to explore the idea that the identity of the Indian nation is by no means singular but actually made up of multiple, often conflicting, voices.

The supernatural powers of the midnight's children also highlight the tension between tradition and modernity, a central theme in the novel. For instance, while some children, like Saleem, have powers that connect them to others, symbolizing unity and communication, others have abilities that represent more destructive forces, reflecting the darker aspects of the nation's history. This duality in the

children's powers underscores the complexity of India's postcolonial identity, which is both a source of potential and a site of conflict.

By blurring the lines between history and fantasy, Rushdie suggests that history is not a fixed narrative but a constantly evolving story that is shaped by those who have the power to tell it (Hutcheon, 2001, p. 65).

Illegitimacy and the Construction of Identity

One of the central themes in *Wise Children* is illegitimacy. It provides a key for the examination of the constructed nature of identity. Dora and Nora's illegitimacy turns them into outcasts, placing the twin sisters on a peripheral rotation at the margins of society. Yet, they live their lives with resilience and adaptability, constructing and reshaping their own particular personalities and challenging thus the traditional concepts of legitimacy and identity. Their involvement in the world of theater helps emphasizing the performative aspects of identity, as they adopt various roles both on and off the stage.

Carter uses the traditional concept of illegitimacy to critique social structures that privilege certain forms of identity over others. She employs here what Judith Butler called "a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption" (Butler, 2002, p. 21). The traditional view on legitimacy versus illegitimacy and on personal identity is challenged completely in Carter's novel. The concept of identity becomes more fluid, especially when dealt with the performative aspect of identity construction. Personal identity becomes more of a "self-identity", one that ensures the continuity of perception and performance in time: "'personal identity' within philosophical accounts almost always centers on the question of what internal feature of the person establishes the continuity or self-

identity of the person through time" (Butler, 2002, pp. 22-23).

Dora and Nora Chance, instead of compliance in the roles of victims of rigid and archaic social structures, embrace their status as outsiders thus subverting traditional narratives of legitimacy and inheritance. The idea that unfolds is that identity is not something that is given or inherited, but something that is created and performed. The novel's exploration of identity is thus closely tied to its use of magical realism, which allows Carter to blur the lines between reality and performance, truth and fiction (Peach, 2009, p. 69).

The lives of the wise children are filled with improbable coincidences, miraculous survivals, and larger-than-life characters, all of which contribute to the novel's magical realist atmosphere. These elements serve to emphasize the fluidity of identity and the artificiality of social constructs. Dora's reflection "What a joy it is to dance and sing!" (Carter, 1991, p. 57), repeats like a refrain throughout the novel, becoming almost a leitmotif that highlights the novel's celebration of life as a performance and thus the idea that performance is part of the construction of identity, something that is constantly being renegotiated.

By presenting a world where legitimacy is a matter of performance and where the boundaries between reality and artifice are constantly shifting, Carter challenges traditional narratives of identity and offers alternative possibilities for identity formation (Warner, 1994, p. 194).

In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, children are more than simple characters in the story; they represent pivotal symbols that define the novel's exploration of postcolonial identity, history, and destiny. In such confusing times, identity is lost and searched for, constructed and

reconstructed, shaped and reshaped, while uncertainty remains the only constant:

So among the midnight children were infants with powers of transmutation, flight, prophecy and wizardry... but two of us were born on the stroke of midnight. Saleem and Shiva, Shiva and Saleem, nose and knees and knees and nose... to Shiva, the hour had given the gifts of war (...) and to me, the greatest talent of all-the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men.

But it is Kali-Yuga; the children of the hour of darkness were born, I'm afraid, in the midst of the age of darkness; so that although we found it easy to be brilliant, we were always confused about being good (Rushdie, 2006, p. 202).

The notion of identity, be it personal, group, or national identity is by presenting fluid and very different, contrastive, alternate identities that are forced to blend within the central ones. And even among their group identity – the midnight children – they are not sure of what they are. The thin line between good and evil seems to be blurred again, and the perception of reality and personal identity becomes very personal.

As personal as in Carter's *Wise Children*. In this novel, children and childhood play a central role in the exploration of identity, performance, and legitimacy. Distinct from the supernatural midnight's children in Rushdie's novel, the children in *Wise Children* must deal with a more down-to-earth, but equally complex, reality. Dora and Nora Chance fight against the harsh reality cast by their illegitimacy and their status as "unofficial" children. These elements are central in Carter's construction and definition of fluid identities and in her concept of the artificiality of such social constructs as

legitimacy and lineage. Fighting to build their own identity in contrast and opposition to the established social norms, rejected by their own father, being thus rejected their legitimacy, the twin sisters fluidize their identity construct and their acknowledgement and acceptance of the rigid social norms, bending them through performance, on and off stage. And even between the two twin sisters, personal identity is very important. "This is *my* room" (Carter, 1991, p. 2) tells Dora Chance in the beginning of the book, inviting readers to pay attention to the fact that they are twins but "not Siamese", underlining thus the importance of personal identity even at such a level of closeness, or maybe just because of that. The issue of personal identity becomes even more striking and important, extrapolated to a society that drives its members to imposed or suggested uniformization, even more so in the age of social media and of the tyranny of public opinion.

Conclusion

Magical realism is more than just another narrative technique in both *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *Wise Children* by Angela Carter. It becomes a fundamental tool for the exploration of themes of identity, history, and destiny. Although the thematic concerns and cultural contexts are different in the two novels, they both share the daring challenge of conventional narratives, casting new perspectives on the human condition. Rushdie and Carter use magical realism in an innovative way, inviting the readers to reconsider the ways in which personal and collective histories are constructed and understood. Their narratives lead us to consider that identity and reality are social constructs which are constantly changing and reshaping, according to the perceived reality of each of us.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* provides a rich yet nuanced portrait of the complexities of postcolonial identity and the challenges of nation-building in the aftermath of colonialism. The novel's blending of the real and the fantastical and its fragmented narrative structure challenge readers to question the nature of historical truth and the intricate ways in which personal and national identities blend into each other.

Carter's *Wise Children* also plays with the notion and meaning of national identity, although in a rather different way. The social, cultural and political turmoil associated with the building of a new national identity in *Midnight's Children* is replaced by a different kind of tension and opposition; it builds its theme of identity while focusing on performance and theatricality in Britain, thus offering a complementary exploration of identity and reality. The entire novel is a playful subversion of traditional narratives which, combined with many intertextual references to Shakespearean drama and other cultural forms, creates a spectacular narrative that is both deeply rooted in tradition and radically innovative. Carter's use of magical realism allows her to critique patriarchal and other traditional systems, offering a vision of identity that questions and challenges the generally accepted notions of gender and legitimacy.

Rushdie and Carter dare us to reconsider our perceptions of identity, history, and reality, challenging the traditional understanding of these concepts as fixed and static, asking to view them as constantly changing, being shaped and reshaped by the stories we hear and tell about ourselves and the world around us.

In a broader cultural context, their novels can be regarded as part of a larger movement in literature that seeks to destabilize established narratives and offer alternative perspectives on identity, reality, and the human experience. By blurring the boundaries between

reality and fantasy, Rushdie and Carter create ambiguous and complex narratives, reflecting the complicated nature of human identity and the relativity of historical memory and perspective.

Midnight's Children and *Wise Children* use magical realism and the symbolism of children to explore the difficult themes of identity, history, and destiny. Their innovative narrative techniques and the blending of the fantastical with the real, challenge conventional understandings of self and society, presenting the reader with new and different perspectives on the ways in which personal and collective identities and histories are constructed and understood.

Their works remind us that identity, history, and destiny are not fixed or predetermined but are constantly being negotiated and reimagined in the ongoing process of human experience, urging us thus to reject fatalist perceptions of our reality, challenging us to constantly be an active part of those concepts and to help construct, shape and reshape them in our best interests.

References:

Primary Sources:

Carter, A. (1991). *Wise Children*. Vintage.

Rushdie, S. (2006). *Midnight's Children*. Random House.

Secondary Sources:

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.

Boehmer, E. (2005). *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford University Press.

Brennan, T. (1989). *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. St. Martin's Press.

Butler, J. (2002). *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Taylor&Francis e-Library.

Faris, W. B. (2004). *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Vanderbilt University Press.

Hutcheon, L. (2001). *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Taylor&Francis,

Peach, L. (2009). *Angela Carter*. Macmillan.

Sage, L. (1994). *Angela Carter*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Warner, M. (1994). *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Additional Sources:

Carpentier, A. (1995). On the Marvelous Real in America. Zamora, L.P., Faris, W.B. (eds.) *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Duke University Press. 75-88.

García M.G. (1970). *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Harper & Row.

~~~~~  
**Petru Ștefan IONESCU** has lectured on English and American literature and culture at the 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, Romania, for several years. His primary research covers literature, culture, and European civilization, explicitly focusing on English and American modernism, Decadence, dandyism, and the evolution of European cultural concepts.