An Exploratory Study into Magical Realist Narrative Techniques in Contemporary Young Adult Literary Fiction.

An exegesis/project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

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Abstract

In her work, *Ordinary Enchantment: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (2004) Wendy B. Faris examines the narrative techniques underlying magical realism. In this exegesis, I examine Faris’ theory of narrative techniques made up of five elements that Faris claims form the building blocks of magical realism.

Further, I explore Faris’ theory in a case study of a work of contemporary young adult literary fiction. Taking *Northern Lights*, by Philip Pullman for this case study, I examine how Faris’ model of narrative techniques informed the narrative of my creative project, the writing of a novel for young adults from twelve onwards, titled, *The Shell-Keepers of King Island*.

I undertake an historical review for the purpose of positioning Faris’ theoretical model of magical realist narrative within its historical perspective. This review aims to answer the question: What, according to historical review defines magical realism as a mode? I analyse and discuss Faris’ theoretical model of narrative techniques in magical realism as applied to contemporary adult fiction and explore her definitive five elements. This analysis aims to answer the question: How does Faris’ theoretical model of narrative techniques define magical realism? I then explore the following questions: How can Faris’ five elements of magical realist narrative be applied to the case study, *Northern Lights*? How may these five elements inform the narrative of my creative project, *The Shell Keepers of King Island*?
My ultimate aim in this exegesis is to add to our knowledge on magical realism narrative techniques. My further aim is to investigate whether Faris’ five elements may be successfully applied to contemporary young adult literary fiction. To this purpose, I review *Northern Lights* and my creative project, *The Shell-Keepers of King Island*, in light of Faris’ model of five primary elements.

From Faris’ formulation and the exploration of the five elements, I conclude, firstly, that Faris’ understanding of the historical context of magical realism informs the development of her theory of five elements. Faris also furthers our understanding of magical realism’s European and Latin American origins from the art theory of Franz Roh’s *Magischer Realismus* (1925), and surrealism to the renowned, post-colonial literature of the mid twentieth century and into contemporary literatures across the world.

Secondly, I conclude that Faris’ theory of five elements offers a useful framework by which to better understand magical realism narrative techniques. Thirdly, Faris’ formulation of the five elements also furthers our understanding of the unique technical characteristics of the mode and its cross-over position between realist narrative and fantasy.
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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Introduction

“Fiction was invented the day Jonas arrived home and told his wife that he was three days late because he had been swallowed by a whale.”

Gabriel García Márquez,

In her work, *Ordinary Enchantment: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative,* Wendy B. Faris examines the narrative techniques underlying magical realism. In her work, Faris suggests that magical realism has been universally successful because the underlying techniques enable use of the mode across cultures. Faris writes:

I think it is not too much to propose that because of the high quality and widespread diffusion of the texts that it has been producing, magical realism may constitute the single most important mode in contemporary international fiction.

In this exegesis, I will examine Faris’ theory of five elements that form the building blocks of magical realism. I have selected Faris’ *Ordinary Enchantments* as the theoretical foundation of this exegesis because it singularly provides an exhaustive analysis of the narrative techniques of magical realism. Further, *Ordinary Enchantments* extends Faris’ earlier comprehensive work, — and the first omnibus on magical realism — *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community.*
Further, I will explore Faris’ theory in a case study of a work of contemporary young adult literary fiction. I have chosen *Northern Lights*, by Philip Pullman for this case study. I have selected *Northern Lights* as my case study because its style and scope are suggestive of magical realism, although not formally recognised as such, even though Pullman states his story is not a fantasy. I will also examine how Faris’ model of narrative techniques has informed the narrative of my creative project, the writing of a novel for young adults from twelve onwards, titled, *The Shell-Keepers of King Island*.

In her opening chapter in *Ordinary Enchantments* Faris, respecting Tzvetan Todorov’s work on fantasy, *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. claims:

Much of magical realism is encompassed in Todorov’s formulation of the fantastic as existing during a story when the reader hesitates between…where an event is explainable according to the laws of the natural universe as we know it, and the marvellous which requires some alteration of those laws”.

Faris claims: “In other words, magical realism expands fictional reality to include events we used to call magic in realism” I suggest, the semantics behind this claim underpins the critical difference between what Faris describes as magical realism and what the uninitiated reader might describe as fantasy. Faris cites, Amaryll Chanady, one of the six
authorities on the history of magical realism she includes in her omnibus, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. 

Faris cites Stephen Slemon, a writer she admires and also includes in her omnibus, for further clarification:

> The anchoring in concrete reality created by…an established system of representation based on scientific fact is dislodged in [magical realism], and yet nothing like a complete rhetoric of fantasy takes its place.

I suggest, Slemon’s use of the word ‘rhetoric’ implies literary fantasy has its own theory of narrative techniques that Faris would say do not apply in magical realism. Unfortunately, Faris makes no reference to technique in literary fantasy. Nor does she refer to fantasy in other literatures. However, underpinning her study on magical realism, Faris’ suggests the following overarching definition of magical realism:

> Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [the magical and the real].

Faris’ definition implies that magical realism narrative tethers the fantastic to the reality. Through the author’s detailed description of ‘the ordinary’, the real world of the narrative
‘the marvellous’, this magic emerges. Neither as a spectacular event, nor as something totally unrelated or alien to reality, but as a hybrid reality, ‘organically’, ‘blurring the distinction between them’ so it becomes an accepted part of the ordinary.  

In *Ordinary Enchantments*, Faris examines the narrative techniques underlying magical realism, concluding, “Magical realism is characterised by five elements that form the building blocks of magical realism”. Faris describes the five elements as: i) the irreducible element, ii) unsettling doubts, iii) the phenomenal world, iv) merging realms and, v) the distortion of time, space and identity. These elements form the subject of discussion in chapter two of this exegesis where detailed explanation of the complexities of each element will be given. Here, I will define each briefly.

Firstly, Faris suggests the Irreducible Element, in which “the text contains an irreducible element of magic”. In other words, an event occurs that cannot be explained “according to the laws of the universe as they are formulated in empirically based discourse”. Take for example, a character in a story that has been born with wings is not verifiable in accordance with logic, it is irreducible and magic.

Secondly, Faris suggests the element of unsettling doubts, in which “the reader may experience some hesitation in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events”, [the magical and the real]. Take for example, a character in a story who has been born with wings. Such an event cannot be explained according to logic. However,
while it is not possible, neither is it beyond belief that human shoulders blades might grow into wings. As reader you must reconcile unsettling doubts.

Thirdly, Faris suggests the element of the phenomenal world in which, “descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world.”\(^{18}\) According to Faris’ the phenomenal world generally refers to ghosts, spirits and otherworldly bodies.\(^{19}\) However, Faris’ definition of the irreducible and the phenomenal elements lacks some clarity. I will investigate these difficulties further in chapter two.

Fourthly, Faris suggests the element of merging realms in which, “the narrative merges different realms”.\(^{20}\) Authors of magical realism sometimes create worlds that are representative of this world but are not actually quite the same as this world. They are not ‘fantasy’ worlds but rather ‘fantastic worlds’ or ‘magically real’ worlds.\(^{21}\)

Fifthly, Faris suggests the element of disruptions of time, space and identity in which, “magical realism disturbs accepted ideas about time, space and identity”.\(^{22}\) In magical realism, it is often difficult to locate the origins, the time or the location of the narrative or the authorial voice. For example, magical realist texts often conflate historical and current events into the one description; transfer reality into a spiritual space and confuse the origin of the narrator of an event so it is unclear whose point of view the reader is hearing: the author’s voice, a voice from another realm or perhaps a voice from history.
Faris states magical realism is a ‘remystification’ of Western thinking. It recognises other mythical, spiritual or indigenous interpretations of the world and puts the mystification back into western thinking. In Faris’ words:

Magical realism is a narrative that is imbued with a visionary power…suggests the existence of forces that are not encompassed by reference to ordinary human perceptions of a purely material reality, or to empirical explanations.23

In the first chapter of this exegesis I will examine the historical lineage of magical realism in order to position Faris’ theory within an historical perspective. Specifically, the chapter aims to answer the question: What, according to historical review, defines magical realism as a mode?

The second chapter of this exegesis will analyse and discuss Faris’ theoretical model of magical realism narrative techniques within contemporary adult fiction. I will fully explore Faris’ definitions of her five elements. Chapter two aims to answer the question: What, according to historical review, defines magical realism as a mode?

In chapter three of this exegesis, I will answer the following questions. How can Faris’ five elements of magical realist narrative be applied to the case study, Northern Lights? Further, I will apply Faris’ theory to my own writing process asking, how may these five elements inform the narrative of my creative project, The Shell-Keepers of King Island?
In chapter four, I will seek to summarise and discuss my key research questions.

My ultimate aim in this exegesis is to add to our knowledge on magical realism narrative techniques. Further, I aim to investigate whether Faris’ five elements may be successfully applied to contemporary young adult literary fiction.

I further aim in the following chapters, to enthuse the reader with the art of magical realism which Faris’ describes as, “the single most important trend in contemporary international fiction”.24
Chapter One: An Historical Perspective

“History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and our perceptiveness and knowledge”

*Salman Rushdie*25

In this chapter, I will undertake an historical review for the purpose of positioning Faris’ theoretical model of magical realist narrative within its historical perspective. This chapter aims to answer the question: What, according to historical review defines magical realism as a mode?

Faris’ formulates her five elements — the irreducible element, unsettling doubts, the phenomenal world, merging realms and the distortion of time, space and identity — in part, from her exploration of the historical origins of magical realism.26

According to Faris, magical realism has its origins in a pictorial term used, in 1925, by art historian Franz Roh in *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus*, to describe post-expressionist painting.27 We may trace the beginnings of the literary provenance of magical realism to Roh’s phrasing. According to Roh, “to depict realistically is not to portray or to copy…it is a question of representing before our eyes, in an intuitive way, the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world”. And also from Roh, “Only when the creative process achieves its goal from the inside out can it generate new views of reality, which is at most built in pieces, never imitated as a whole.”28 Faris explains that Roh, in
his 1925 essay, describes art techniques for “achieving the miraculous and the mundane”. Faris cites Roh, “the point is not to discover the spirit beginning with objects but, on the contrary, to discover objects beginning with the spirit.”

Irene Gunther, whom Faris includes in her omnibus of magical realism, expands: “Magischer Realismus” was the fastidious depiction of familiar objects, the new way of seeing and rendering the everyday, thereby “creating a new world view”, that inspired the style. However in a footnote, Faris is careful to point out she is not attributing the development of magical realism to Roh but that the term stems from his phrasing.

Gunther concludes, “[The] appropriation of a pictorial term by literary critics has been facilitated by the pliant meanings of both “magic’ and ‘realism.” Faris’ own definition of magical realism provided in the introduction of this exegesis, “combining realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them”, carries much of Roh’s meaning.

As cited in the introduction, Faris suggests:

Magical realism is a narrative that is imbued with a visionary power that gives witness and reports events that humans ordinarily do not and, therefore, suggests the existence of forces that are not encompassed by reference to ordinary human perceptions of a purely material reality, or to empirical explanations.
Like Roh, with his “Magischer Realismus”, Faris is suggesting that magical realism gives expression to other perceptions [ways of interpreting the world] other than those “formulated in empirically based discourse.” In this way, Faris suggests, magical realism is unique in its “binary nature: the forced relationship of irreconcilable terms”, the magical and the real.

This raises the questions: How magical? How real? How irreconcilable? And, Whose perception? According to Faris, in magical realism, descriptions can be magical, or real, but conflate within the narrative and create a hybrid reality. We hear the echo of Roh’s words, the new way of seeing and rendering the everyday, thereby “creating a new world view”. Faris suggests, this distinctive feature of binary opposition, the magical and the real, makes the mode attractive to authors who wish to express a perspective or belief that for political, social or cultural reasons is not shared by Western mainstream society. In *Ordinary Enchantments* Faris writes:

Magical realism has become so important as a mode of expression worldwide, especially in postcolonial cultures, because it has provided the literary ground for significant cultural work; within its texts, marginal voices, submerged traditions, and emergent literatures have developed and created masterpieces.
Faris further explains that magical realism originated in Europe developing alongside surrealism, much in the same way as Roh’s “Magischer Realismus” developed alongside expressionism. According to Faris, surrealism “challenged the tradition of realism, encouraging excursions into the surreal, beyond conscious reason into realms of dream, myth, the unconscious and ‘primitive’ culture.” 39 For Faris, this became the “essential difference between the two, surrealism was an intellectual, social and political movement while magical realism was essentially a mode of writing that revealed psychological, social, emotional and political motivations, after some scrutiny”.40

For Faris, however, the crucial point in the development of magical realism came with the great exodus of European intellectuals that occurred due to the Second World War. 41 As Guenther explains:

[There was an] unprecedented cultural migration from Europe to the Americas in the 1930s and 1940s, as the muses fled the horrors of the Third Reich.[…]Conjecture aside, it was in Latin America that the concept was primarily seized and literary appropriation, transformed. 42

Magical realism today is understood as a largely Latin American event known as ‘el boom’. 43 In the 1960’s, the extraordinary success of Colombian writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel, One Hundred Years of Solitude secured magical realism as a world-wide, renowned mode.44 However there were others in Latin America who paved the
way. Faris outlines the early history of magical realism in Latin America: “In the 1930s and 1940s, Latin American writers and literary critics adopted magical realism as a peculiarly Latin American style”. As example, Faris draws our attention to Alejo Carpentier, who lived in Paris in the 1920s and was heavily influenced by surrealism. Carpentier wrote *Lo Real Maravilloso Americano* in which, Faris says, “he asserted that Latin America was, literally, ‘marvelously real’ and its magical realism was “distinctly American.”

Faris explains that, “Carpentier’s America was an improbable juxtaposition of marvellous mixtures”. These words, ‘marvellous mixtures’, echo Faris’ description, as discussed earlier, of magical realism as “the forced relationship of irreconcilable terms”. Faris cites Slemon who suggests that Carpentier’s ‘marvellous realism’ was culturally and politically motivated as an act of national identity:

As part of that literary history, Latin American magical realist writing grew out of the first wave of post colonial romantic primitivism, which affirmed the sense of a usable, natural, and indigenous past [finding] a distinctive style in which to portray that sensibility.

According to Faris, by the 1960s and onwards, “Latin American magical realism was read worldwide and was marked by its post-colonial message”. Faris highlights that writers like Miguel Angel Asturias, a contemporary of Carpentier, drew on Mayan
mythology and the colonial oppression of indigenous peoples” to express suppressed ‘sensibilities’. ⁴⁹ The word ‘oppression’ is useful because it helps to explain the incentive for Latin American writers to engage so enthusiastically in the mode. As Faris outlines in her opening statements in *Ordinary Enchantments*:

“Furthermore, [the] combination of realistic and fantastical narrative, together with the inclusion of different cultural traditions, means magical realism reflects, in both its narrative mode and its cultural environment, the hybrid nature of much of postcolonial society.” ⁵⁰

In other words, Faris is saying that magical realism emerged as a conduit for expressing “cultural loss and recovery” experienced by communities and people that have been colonised or oppressed.⁵¹

According to Faris, many literary critics and authors of magical realism, Carpentier and Asturias in particular, refused to acknowledge the European origins of magical realism.⁵² However, in 1955, Angel Flores, in an essay titled, *Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction*, suggests that magical realism was a continuation of the romantic realist tradition of Spanish language literature (with its origins in Cervantes) and its European counterparts but in its Latin American form it was unique.⁵³ Chanady suggests that, “magical realism can hold a position as both particularly Latin American and [still] owe much of its lineage to European influences”.⁵⁴
According to Faris, while there are those who would like to claim magical realism as solely a Latin American literary phenomenon in fact the mode owes its origins to Europe, starting with Roh’s phrasing. However, in *Ordinary Enchantments*, Faris has been particular in selecting case studies from fiction that “extends beyond ‘el boom’ because she says, “magical realism is not just a postcolonial style. It also represents innovation and the re-emergence of submerged narrative traditions in metropolitan centres throughout the world.”

Faris further writes:

Magical realism’s multi-cultural perspectives originated in the peripheral and colonised regions of the East: Latin America and the Carribean, India, Eastern Europe, Africa. But the mode is becoming less and less marginalised, even though it retains the charm of the marginal position.

Faris use of the term ‘marginal position’ here, needs to be read alongside her other terms ‘submerged traditions’ and ‘emergent literatures’, which she uses to describe any community, group or person who does not have a voice in the mainstream thinking of the dominant group. Faris’ ‘charm of the marginal position’ is not explained. I posit she uses the term emotionally to evoke the expression of ‘other voices’ in magical realism.
which consequently implies voices that offer something different to Western empirical ideas.

However, according to Faris, in contemporary magical realism other marginalised voices, other than post-colonial, neo-colonial and emerging cultures, are using magical realism to express their discontent. Faris, for example, dedicates a full chapter to feminist voices expressed in magical realism fictions.

This historical review positions Faris’ theoretical model of magical realist narrative within its historical perspective. Magical realism originated in Europe derived from an art movement known an “Magischer Realismus”, migrated to Latin America where it became renowned as ‘el boom’ and emerged all over the world as a style that enabled the expression of unheard voices. It is these three historical landmarks that have shaped magical realism as a narrative technique. In the words of Faris:

Contemporary magical realism has developed as a narrative mode that produces fictions in diverse cultural traditions, its continuing popularity ensuring those productions a growing international audience...which may encourage toleration of the dissonance caused by radically different voices, is being integrated into cultural consciousness, and not only in postcolonial situations.” 59
At the commencement of this chapter, I suggest that undertaking an historical review assisted Faris in part to formulate her theory of five elements that are the basis of her theoretical model of narrative techniques. In the following chapter I examine Faris’ theory in the light of examples from contemporary adult fiction, as a further influence on the development of her theory of five elements.
Chapter Two: Faris’ Theoretical Model of Narrative Techniques

I believe that superstitions, or what are commonly called thus, correspond to natural forces which rational thinking like that of the West, has rejected.

Gabriel García Márquez, 60

In the previous chapter I examined the origins of magical realism in order to position Faris’ theory within an historical perspective and define magical realism as a mode. In this chapter, I will analyse and discuss Faris’ theoretical model of narrative techniques in magical realism as applied by Faris to contemporary adult fiction and fully explore her definitions of the five elements. This chapter seeks to answer the question: How does Faris’ theoretical model of narrative techniques define magical realism?

As discussed previously, in Ordinary Enchantments, Faris proposes five primary elements as the narrative building blocks of the binary opposition between realism and fantasy: i) the irreducible element, ii) unsettling doubts, iii) the phenomenal world, iv) merging realms and, v) the distortion of time, space and identity. 61 This chapter explores each element in detail drawing on Faris’ examples from contemporary adult literary fiction. In her exploration, Faris utilises a wide range of texts. I have chosen to cite the following: Toni Morrison, Beloved, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel, One Hundred Years of Solitude and ‘The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings’, Salman Rushdie, Midnight’s Children, Patrick Süskind, Perfume, Laura Esquivel’s Like Water for Chocolate, and Marie Darrieussecq Pig Tales. In addition, I include two more, Angela
Carter, *Nights at the Circus* which Faris makes reference to but does not cite and Jeanette Winterson, *Passion* because my own reading of this text brought to light so much of Faris’ theory.

2.1. The Irreducible Element

In the introduction, I gave the following brief explanation of the irreducible element “in which the text contains an irreducible element of magic. In other words, an event occurs that cannot be explained according to the laws of the universe as they are formulated according to empirically based discourse”.62 “Therefore,” Faris explains, “the reader has difficulty marshalling evidence to settle questions about the status of events and characters in such fictions.”63

However, what does Faris actually mean when she writes, “an event occurs that cannot be explained according to the laws of the universe”? Faris refers to Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*, as example.64 In this story a child, Beloved, is murdered by Seth, her mother. Years later, the child materializes as a grown person to torment her mother.65 The reader is unsure whether Beloved has actually returned alive or as a ghost. The detail that surrounds her returned presence suggests she is alive. This cannot be verified according to Western logic. Even so, the author encourages the reader to accept the phenomenon by having other characters hesitate over it: “Women outside of Seth’s house ask themselves, “Was it the dead daughter come back? Or a pretend?” 66 Faris refers also to the end of the novel where Beloved has just dissolved into the ether; Morrison writes in the closing chapter, “…those who had spoken to her …began to believe that,
other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn’t said anything at all”. Faris writes, “We readers ask ourselves, was she no more than [their thoughts]?”. According to Faris, “the reader has difficulty marshalling evidence to settle questions about the status of events and characters in such fictions”.

In the introduction to this exegesis, I discussed briefly the question of difference between literary fantasy and fantasy in magical realism. This ‘matter of the reader settling questions about the status of events’, I suggest, goes some way in attempting to answer that question. Therefore, and in the absence of further explanation from Faris, I suggest that in magical realism the reader is questioning the fantasy in the narrative, ‘settling questions about the status of events’, whereas in fantasy the reader accepts upfront the divergence from reality, even expects it.

2.1.1 The Purpose of the Irreducible Element

Magical realism creates an irreducible element that is born out of a detailed narrative realism. But to what purpose and to what end?

Faris posits that, “magical images or events, glowing alluringly from within the realistic matrix, often highlight central issues in a text”. Faris refers to Gabriel García Márquez’s tale, ‘The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings’. In this story a winged, old man arrives in Pelayo and Elisenda’s courtyard. At first, the creature is a great curio, drawing people from far and wide; everyone has an angle to make money out of his presence; stalls are set up to feed the tourist who have come from kilometres away. Even
the local pastor contacts the church authorities to have the old man deemed an angel. Eventually, however, the novelty pales and the old man is regarded as an inconvenience.  

According to Faris, García Márquez’s surrounds the old winged man and the carnivalesque human behaviour with extensive realist, descriptive detail of the event and, by doing so, leads the reader away from the inexplicable wings, to focus instead on the behaviour of the locals. The reader focuses on the self-interest and on the indifference to the old, winged man’s plight which is García Márquez’s central theme and purpose.  

Faris refers to Toni Morrison’s Beloved, where Seth has murdered her three-year-old daughter, Beloved, to prevent her being raped. At first her daughter returns as a child ghost and haunts the house but later she returns in person to live with her mother. In the end, Beloved’s confusion of love and revenge destroy her and she dematerialises. But the irreducible element of the dead child returned to life serves the purpose of revealing Seth’s enduring pain that represents the enduring pain caused by slavery that lasts long after the event, Morrison’s central theme and purpose.  

2.1.2 The Use of Detail  

In her analysis of the irreducible element, Faris refers to the detailed realistic narrative from which the irreducible element emerges: “magical realism uses text to disrupt what at first appears to be a realist representation”. In fact, Faris explains, “one of the most immediately striking ways in which magical realism imbricates the extraordinary within the ordinary” — or, I posit, uses text to disrupt what at first appears to be a realist representation — is through the accumulation of realistic details to describe impossible
events”.\textsuperscript{76} By this, Faris means that the exaggeration of detail acts to tether the incredible within the real world. To explain further, Faris refers to an example from García Márquez’s novel, \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude}. In this example, blood from one of the characters, Arcadio, flows out of one house and into the street making its way deliberately to another house where José’s mother, Ursula, is baking bread:

A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across uneven terraces, went down the steps and climbed over the curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned the corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendia house…[substantially more detail]…and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread”.\textsuperscript{77}

This example shows how, according to Faris’ definition of magical realism, “the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them”.\textsuperscript{78} The marvellous in this example is that the blood which, although an inanimate substance, can determine its own path from one house to another: “Because the trail of blood cannot normally climb curbs and turn corners at right angles and does not possess a humanlike capacity to direct its own progress, the more realistic the details…the trail of blood accumulates, the more magical its progress appears.”\textsuperscript{79}
Faris writes, “the narrator’s presentation of the irreducible element on the same narrative plane as other, commonplace happenings means that in terms of the text, magical things ‘really’ do happen as a component of the narrative reality.”

2.2. Element of Unsettling Doubts

As discussed in the previous section, Faris suggests, magical realism is defined by the way in which the irreducible causes the reader to hesitate: “the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events.” In magical realist texts household objects fly, people die and return to life: tears become potions; sneezes become rubies. As readers, these unusual occurrences in a narrative, that otherwise and importantly seems to be a representation of reality, cause us to hesitate.

As discussed in chapter one, in relation to the historical origins of magical realism, Todorov introduced the idea of the ‘hesitation’ the reader experiences in encountering the fantastic in literature: “the reader hesitates between…where an event is explainable according to the laws of the natural universe as we know it, and the marvellous which requires some alteration of those laws”.

Faris reminds us of the remarkable butterflies in One Hundred Years of Solitude, that every night, for years invade the house at dusk. This seems beyond nature’s usual and acceptable habit so the reader hesitates, only to be told in the next few words that “every
night on her way back from her bath Meme would find a desperate Fernanda killing [the] butterflies with an insecticide bomb.” Faris explains, “The phenomenon of the butterflies seems to be a marvellous one but the fact that they die from an insecticide subjects them to the rules of the physical universe, so we are puzzled about their status.” As too the flying carpet in the same novel:

One afternoon the boys grew enthusiastic over the flying carpet that went swiftly by the laboratory at window level carrying the gypsy who was driving it and several children from the village who were merrily waving their hands.

I suggest, the narrative neither contextualises this event nor acknowledges that it is extraordinary. However because the boys are ‘waving their hands” in a normal way as we do at an aeroplane or even a bird, we sublimate our hesitation because the unsettling element is not beyond possibility. It is simply a part of García Márquez’s fictional world of the narrative. The reader has unsettling doubts, hesitates and reads on.

2.2.1 Allegory

According to Faris’ stance, the reader might be tempted to interpret the butterflies and the flying carpets as allegory: “another possible strategy for the reader [confronted with unsettling doubts] is to interpret a particular instance of magic in an otherwise realistic fiction as nothing more than allegory”.

23
An allegory “is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning”. However, Faris goes on to say that “the weight of the non-allegorical thrust of realistic narrative conventions [in magical realist texts] works against a reduction of the magic in magical realism to a primarily allegorical mode”. In other words, Faris suggests that magical realism is too steeped in reality to be reduced to allegory. However, I posit that the ‘magical’ in magical realism could be construed as the ‘symbolic’ meaning and ‘realism’ and the ‘literal’ allegorically.

I suggest this is easier for Faris to claim than it is for us as readers to grasp. Faris does not expand her point on allegory beyond what is quoted here and it sounds as if she is saying ‘trust me it is not allegory’. Her lack of further explanation, I suggest, rests in her overarching argument and centralising definition that: “Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them”. I suggest the word ‘organic’ reduces the idea of allegory.

From Faris’ stance, the magic is ‘organic’ not symbolic; the magic is constructed out of the text, a textual magic. Nevertheless, I suggest, it is difficult not to read, for example, Beloved’s return as anything but symbolic of the universal pain of slavery. According to Faris’ point of view Beloved’s return is not due to authorial symbolism, but to the story itself: Beloved, the character’s, desire to be with her mother: “the weight of the non-allegorical thrust of realistic narrative conventions work[ing] against a reduction of the magic to a primarily allegorical mode”. I suggest Faris understands that readers will
try to explain this unusual writing style through empirical logic reducing the inexplicable to mainstream literary techniques, for example, allegory. I suggest Faris is, however, too oblique in her reasons as to why they should not.\(^{90}\)

Faris further cites, Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate*, as an example of what could be mistaken for allegory. In this story, food merges the magical and the real and creates a space or a realm where the inexpressible can happen.\(^{91}\) Esquivel tells the love story of Tita and Pedro. Pedro must marry Tita’s sister, Gertrudis, because Tita as the youngest daughter must remain unmarried to care for her mother. At Pedro’s wedding Tita cries tears into the wedding cake mixture that causes the guest to regurgitate the cake. Later she cooks quail in a sauce of rose petals and bouquet that Pedro has given her. “The dish communicates her forbidden feelings of love to Pedro, to whom it tastes like ‘the pleasure of the gods’. Gertrudis becomes overwhelmingly lustful after eating the dish. Tita’s lust has been physically distributed in the food.\(^ {92}\) I suggest the food is not allegorical because it is not symbolic. It exists as magic and has grown out of the descriptive text to become an intuitive interpretation of a life.\(^ {93}\)

### 2.2.2 Perceptions

If the narrative reality is not perceived from an empirical point of view, then, whose? As we discussed in the introduction, Faris asserts, “Magical realism has become… so important because it has provided the literary ground…[for] marginal voices.\(^ {94}\) Initially in the historical context these marginal voices were Latin American post colonial, today
they come from emerging cultures all over the world and in particular from Africa. But they are not always political voices, they may, for example, be voices on feminism or, slavery or homosexuality. Anne Hegerfeldt, writing later than Faris’ publication, provides an analysis of magical realism in British fiction and adds something broader. She writes:

Narrative, magical and metaphysical modes of thought are shown to influence people’s perceptions and decisions just as much as do objective ‘facts’; they, too, shape psychological and social reality. In this sense, the magic realist argument… are just as real as the material world...[All] modes of thought and perception, be they rational-scientific or other, can only ever provide constructions of the world — which means that world views are never absolute and universal, but necessarily provisional and open to revision.  

However, according to Faris: “As Western readers become increasingly accustomed to irreducible elements of magic, their surprise and hesitation may begin to disappear.” Faris is not concerned about this. Faris, regards magical realism as political and social writing and if it is resulting in a “complex process of cultural interchange…this is the context in which magical realism is growing and changing”. Faris even suggests that “magical realism foreshadows the centralising of other than empirical ways of thinking
into Western literature. Such a phenomenon would mean that magical realism was no longer an expression of the marginal voices but of centralised, Western thinking”.

2.3. The Phenomenal World

In the introduction I gave a brief definition of the phenomenal world in which, “descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world”. According to Faris this is ‘the existence of the mysterious realm of the spirit”. This phenomenal world exists but is modified by being, as Faris explains, “grounded textually in a traditionally realistic, even explicitly factual, manner”. Furthermore, Faris writes, “[magical realism] may include magic and folk wisdom…but real history is a weight that tethers the balloon of magic as if to warn against too great a lightness of mythical or magical being”.

According to Faris, “the phenomenal world is the realism in magical realism, distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory”. Faris asks us to make a distinction between a general fantasy and magical realism. Faris, unfortunately, still leaves the reader in some doubt about how this intrinsically unique, magical realism narrative technique is different. Her references to ‘grounding’, ‘traditionally realistic’, ‘history’, and ‘factual’ are embodied in her definition. I can only posit that Faris once again presumes the implied meaning in her definition: “magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary,
blurring the distinction between them”. Although Faris does not use the term ‘escapism’, it assists in our understanding how magical realism is not escapist.

According to Faris the phenomenal events, like Beloved returning from the dead or the butterflies that never go away are examples of the, “the incursion of several varieties of otherness, of personal, historical, cultural, or literary pasts, and of different kinds of virtual realities, including textual ones”. 101 Faris refers to *Midnight’s Children* in which Rushdie “carefully situates his narrative in the events surrounding India’s independence and in which the main character, Saleem Sinai, is born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the very moment of India’s independence”. 102 Saleem carries in his head “voices that traverse his head like the operations of a radio transmitter, so that the resulting text is not only linked to the world of spirits but also to history”. 103

By sunrise, I had discovered that the voices could be controlled—I was a radio receiver, and I could turn the volume down or up; I could select individual voices; I could even, by effort of will, switch-off my newly discovered inner ear…by morning I was thinking, ‘Man, is this better than all India radio”.

In this example, the author, Rushdie, has employed magical realist technique through the phenomenal element of the head becoming a radio receiver while the character, Saleem, abates the reader’s unsettling doubts about this by talking of it in a very matter of fact
way, ‘switching it off and on’ and declaring it ‘better than India radio’. All three of Faris’ elements, the irreducible, unsettling doubts and the phenomenal world, that form the basis of her narrative theory are present.

However, Faris does not succeed completely in explaining the difference between the element of the irreducible element and the phenomenal world that by definition is irreducible. I conclude that the irreducible elements are components within the text while the phenomenal world—the hybrid world created by the co-existence of the magical and the real—is the whole text, the complete narrative.104

2.4.Merging Realms

In the introduction I gave a brief definition of the element of merging realms in which, “the narrative merges different realms,” the realm of magic and of reality. According to Faris, magical realist narrative conjures a narrative space that we might call the ‘ineffable in-between’...a space in which the magical and the real co-exist”.105 Yet, according to Faris, this space is “not...any recognisable supernatural realm, such as a secret garden, heaven, the underworld, or a mythical past (although it may use elements from such realms). The space lies somewhere between reality and fantasy. As Faris explains further:
The magical realism vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions. Ghosts and texts, or people and words that seem ghostly, inhabit these two-sided mirrors, many times situated between two worlds of life and death; they enlarge the space of intersection where a number of magically real fictions exist.\textsuperscript{106}

This ‘reflecting in both directions’ is interesting in the light of Faris’ claim, as previously discussed, that: “magical realism has provided the literary ground for significant cultural work; within its texts, marginal voices, submerged traditions, and emergent literatures have developed and created masterpieces”.\textsuperscript{107} “Magical realism is being integrated into cultural consciousness”.\textsuperscript{108} It suggests a narrative space in which beliefs, myths, and customs, other than Western empirically based ideas, can not only be expressed and acknowledged by Western readers.

According to Faris, this textual space in magical realism is often used to “merge ancient and traditional…indigenous and Western…and ontologically, within the texts, magical and material.” And, “Perhaps…is analogous to the axis of the world that in many systems of thought is imagined to join the realms of the underworld, the earth and heaven”.\textsuperscript{109} This reflecting of opposite worlds, reminds us of the “binary nature: the forced relationship of irreconcilable terms”, the magical and the real discussed in the introduction;\textsuperscript{110}
Faris provides an example from *Pig Tales* by Marie Darrieussecq, “a story in which the narrator is captive between two worlds, the human and the animal, not belonging to one or the other”. Faris explains that Darrieussecq “regards this situation as symptomatic of certain aspects of contemporary life, such as living in a suburb”.\(^{111}\) It is a useful example. Not only for what it reflects about merging realms but also because it highlights just how far magical realism has grown from its solely post colonial tag.

In the discussion on the irreducible element and exaggerated detail, Faris referred to the blood that made a deliberate and complicated pathway to a particular house. Faris expands, “Those details weave a textual fabric that joins different worlds, one in which a stream of blood exists in an ordinary world of precise identities and measurements and one in which it possesses magical properties”. In this example we sense the way in which Faris’ elements come together in a textual technique to create a specific narrative effect.

The irreducible elements that make the reader hesitate, and create a phenomenal ‘other’, occur in the space between the magical and the real. Merging realms grow from that space and reveal other ways of interpreting the world.

### 2.4.1 Extra-textual Worlds

According to Faris, in magical realism “Extra-textual histories create extra-textual worlds”.\(^{112}\)
Referring to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Faris cites the incidence where the United Fruit Company has massacred the local workers but this has not been recorded in Macondo’s history: “Every time that Aureliano mentioned the matter, not only the proprietress but some people older than she would repudiate the myth of the workers…everything had been set forth in judicial documents and in primary-school textbooks: that the banana company had never existed.”¹¹³ Here real history and narrative space are conflated by the novel’s ironical exposure of the omission of the true historical facts.

According to Hegerfeldt, “The combination of history and myths, ‘sharing the fictional space’ with history, is an essential aspect of all collective memory”.¹¹⁴ Hegerfeldt is referring to the way in which magical realism gives voice to marginalized people. So too, *Beloved’s* child, who is returned from the dead, echoes the inner human pain caused by slavery that recorded history ignored.

2.4.2 Literalising Metaphors

In discussing the poetics of magical realism, Faris describes literalising metaphors as a bridging technique that “enable[s] the narrative to conflate the different physical and discursive worlds”.¹¹⁵ One of these bridging techniques occurs when the “reader is induced to participate in a particular type of verbal magic whereby the metaphorical is imagined to be literal, connecting words and the world.”¹¹⁶ In García Márquez’s short story ‘Light is like Water’, two boys playing home alone deliberately break a light bulb
in order to row their boat inside the house: ‘A jet of golden light as cool as water began to pour out of the broken bulb, and they let “it run to a depth of about three feet. Then they turned off the electricity, took out the rowboat, and navigated at will among the islands of the house…Light is like water…you turn the tap and out it comes.’”

The light that produces water must be real because how else could they row their boat? The technique of ‘literalising the metaphor’ makes the boat real within the narrative. From Faris’ theoretical view, Garcia Marquez’s has used a “bridging technique” that “conflates[s] the different physical and discursive worlds. We know water runs from a tap so it is not impossible to accept that it has run from the light bulb. It is more difficult to believe that the boys can row their boat inside. However, children get up to all matter of mischief when left on their own. With this in mind, the real and the magic conflate creating the narrative space in which we as readers can believe the story. The boys do literally row their boats.

Faris cites a further example from *Midnight’s Children*: After the British have left Bombay and the Indians are taking over, Rushdie has the protagonist, Saleem, comment, ‘the businessmen of India were turning white.’ He was not simply saying, in an allegorical way, they were behaving like the British but telling us that they had literally turned white. Faris posits, “magical realism takes the narrative beyond narrative conceived as mimesis to a re-representation of reality”. Literalisation has the effect of producing narrative technique that does not copy or mimic the real world but creates a
world that is like the real world but is a reinterpretation of that world. In Faris words, “the invention happens solidly within the narrative, taking us beyond a mere representation of the world, as we perceive it, to a re-representation.” This concept of ‘re-representation’ explains the technique that magical realist writers employ to present other realms, or worlds that inhabit magical realism.

2.5. Disruption of Time, Space and Identity

according to Faris, “Magical realism disturbs accepted ideas about time, space and identity.” For example, in One Hundred Years of Solitude, “Four years, eleven months and two days of rain, an insomnia plague that erases the past and the meaning of words, and a room where it is always March and always Monday.” Such description disrupts our sense of time, space and identity. According to Faris, in [magical realism] we wonder what kind of beings we are seeing. It is not so much a question of how but of what.

Faris offers a further example from Perfume in which the author, Süskind, creates a man whose perfumed body has the ability to appeal to everyone. In the closing chapter, he is overtaken by crowds of people, who can’t get enough of him and feverishly disembody him. In this instance, Grenouille is able to smell a virgin across town. The disruption of time, space and identity is apparent in Grenouille’s ability to do this. How could he smell such a specific odour from the other side of town?
According to Faris, “magical realism introduces a confusion between what exists outside the subject and what only exists as a function of it…what is truly ‘empirical’, and what is, under the appearances of the sensory world, only pseudo matter, endowed with a purely mental truth.” Furthermore Faris writes: “the flesh is literally inscribed with an idea…undermin[ing] the distinction between mind and body, idea and corporality. This is exemplified in Grenouille’s phenomenal ability to smell.

2.5.1 Defocalisation

According to Faris, “In magical realism, the focalisation—the perspective from which events are presented—is indeterminate; the kinds of perceptions it presents are indefinable and the origins of these perceptions are unlocatable.” Faris calls this ‘defocalisation’:

Thus magical realism modifies the conventions of realism based on empirical evidence, incorporating other kinds of perception. In other words, the narrative is “defocalised” because it appears to come from two radically different perceptions at once [the magical and the real].

According to Faris, “because magical realism questions the norms of realistic representation that is based on sensory data, the defocalised narrative that results from such a destabilising origin, undercuts the assumed reliability of realism from within it”.

35
Faris refers to *Midnight’s Children*, where Saleem is carried across India in a flying laundry basket, to illustrate this:

...I was in the basket, but not in the basket...I was tossed with the basket but also not tossed. Afterwards, Picture Sing said, “No, Captain, I couldn’t feel your weight.”

Was he in the basket, or wasn’t he? The inevitability of the question confirms the disruption of time, space and identity. As Faris explains, “the narrative voice reports events that cannot be empirically verified [and this] disrupts the identification of reliable representation in narrative with ordinary human consciousness”. Faris uses the term ‘human consciousness’ without definition. I posit, she means ‘knowledge’ and suggest Faris’ is saying here that the narrative becomes defocalised, firstly, because it disrupts the narrative conventions of realist writing and, secondly, the lack of a definable origin for the event creates reader uncertainty.

According to Faris, this textual manipulation further disrupts the normal causal relationships. Faris refers again to *Perfume*, Faris explains that it is unbelievable that a man’s smell could affect people so overwhelmingly and it is incredible that it could attract crowds from kilometres away. Faris asks this question, is it Grenouille’s perfumed body that causes the crowds to descend on him? Or is it Süskind telling us of man’s innate thirst for greed and brutality? “What empirical thinkers consider ‘cause’ is,
in magical realism, driven by non-empirical, irreducible causes resulting in unusual effects”\textsuperscript{135}.

Faris further cites \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude} and says, “With regard to time, the voice that narrates in “the future perfect of Macondo” is indeterminate…situating us in a realm where all is ended but all is possible. Faris also reminds us of José Arcadio Buendía, in \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude}, who lived and died tied to the trunk of a chestnut tree, sitting on a stool through all seasons. \textsuperscript{136}

I include, here, my own examples from \textit{Nights at the Circus}, in which the author Angela Carter maximises this technique of the disruption of space. At birth Fevvers (feathers) hatched from an egg and was born with wings. In the story she works in the circus and lives a carnivalesque life. On one occasion she is courted by the Grand Duke who tries to make love to her and threatens to keep her in a cage but Fevvers escapes in his [toy] miniature replica of the Trans-Siberian Express: “In those few seconds of his lapse of consciousness… Fevvers ran helter-skelter down the platform, opened the door of the first class compartment and clambered aboard.” The magic is nevertheless tethered to reality, for we learn that on Fevvers immediate arrival home, several hundred kilometres, her friend, lizzie, makes no comment on the toy train escape but is annoyed that Fevvers has dirtied her dress: Look what a mess he’s made of your dress.”\textsuperscript{137} Firstly, she would not have fitted on the toy platform or in the toy train. Secondly, the implication is that the toy train carried her away. In other words, ‘the focalisation—the perspective from
which events are presented—is indeterminate; the kinds of perceptions it presents are indefinable and the origins of these perceptions are unlocatable.”

2.5.2 Shamanism

Faris likens the disruption of time, space and identity in magical realism to the ideology of shamanism. Shaman journey to different realms, spiritual spaces, take on different identities and manipulate time. Faris implies that the inexplicable, or ineffable, way in which this is done is similar to the way in which magical realism narrative transports the reader back and forth, manipulating time and taking on different identities. The powers of shaman are healing in the same way that magical realism attempts to articulate and heal central underlying issues in society. Shamans move in and out of reality as magical realist text does. Shamanism links us to other perceptions as magical realist text does.

According to Faris, the role of the shaman is…preserving and creating cultural or group identity by mediating between the cultural heritage of the past and the present everyday situations people find themselves in”. Faris respect for shamanism is reflected in her theory of magical realism narrative technique cited previously and again here:

Magical realism is a narrative that is imbued with a visionary power that gives witness and reports events that humans ordinarily do not and, therefore, suggests the existence of forces that are not encompassed by reference to ordinary
human perceptions of a purely material reality, or to empirical explanations.\textsuperscript{143}

2.6 Concluding the Elements

The following excerpt from Jeanette Winterson’s, \textit{The Passion},\textsuperscript{144} is provided here as an example of how these narrative building blocks of the binary opposition between realism and fantasy come together in magical realist narrative. \textit{The Passion} tells the story of the heroine, Villanelle who is in love with a married woman. In this excerpt, Villanelle’s male lover comes to fully understand the depth of Villanelle’s unrequited love:

She had stopped our boat outside an outstanding residence that rose up six floors and commanded a choice place on this clean and fashionable canal.\textsuperscript{145}

Prior to the above sentences, a great deal of additional naturalistic description, habitual realism is provided, giving the reader a false sense of familiarity about the realist form of the narrative. Then comes this unsettling dialogue:

In that house Henri, you will find my heart. You must break in Henri, and get it back for me.\textsuperscript{146}
The reader assumes analogy. Villanelle’s heart cannot in reality be separated from her body or she would be dead. In the next few sentences, Winterson directs the reader to hesitate and consider the irreducible fact of the missing heart:

Was she mad? We had been talking figuratively. Her heart was in her body like mine.  

The reader expects a logical explanation but is given one that does not follow the expected logic of cause and effect:

I tried to explain this to her, but she took my hand and placed it against her chest.

Feel for yourself.

I felt without the slightest subterfuge, moving my hand up and down. I could feel nothing.

Villanelle, you’d be dead if you had no heart.

Next Winterson provides an ‘historical bridge’, or link, the force of which compels the reader to normalize and accept the irreducible element. Furthermore, the reader links the horrendous acts carried out in the past by soldiers who must, logically in order to carry
out such acts, have no hearts – evidenced in the fact that in life and history people are heartless:

Those soldiers you lived with, do you think they had hearts?’

…now it was me shrugging my shoulders.

‘It’s a way of putting it, you know that.

I know that but I’ve told you already. [Venice], is an unusual city. They do things differently here149

With these last words, Winterson disrupts time, space and identity to effect. In fact, Henri goes inside the villa and indeed finds Villanelle’s heart in a jar. The sequence finishes:

I heard her uncork the jar...Then she began to make terrible swallowing and choking noises. There was quiet. She touched my back and when I turned around she took my hand again and placed it against her breast. Her heart was beating.150
In magical realism, the detail and description of the phenomenal, is freed from the traditional mimetic role to a greater extent than in any other mode\textsuperscript{151}. In the above passage note how, as the reader, you must adjust your preconceptions of the natural world and of what is possible. Is a ‘missing’ heart any less real than a ‘broken’ one? In reality, don’t we, in fact, say of a broken heart, ‘I feel my heart has been torn out’?

In *Ordinary Enchantments* Faris examines the narrative techniques underlying magical realism, concluding that “magical realism is characterised by five elements that form the building blocks of magical realism”: the irreducible element, unsettling doubts, the phenomenal world, merging realms and, the distortion of time, space and identity.\textsuperscript{152} In this chapter, I have examined Faris’ proposition that these elements and their variety of technical nuance: exaggerated detail, different perceptions, textually embedded allegory, literalisation of metaphor, defocalisation, make up her theoretical model of narrative techniques. I suggest, the five elements cross-fertilise and merge as a single defining characteristic of magical realism: narrative that unworldly and representative, magical and real, spiritual and temporal; narrative that “combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [the magical and the real]”.\textsuperscript{153}

Faris’ refers to the five characteristics as “Chinese boxes, ideas within ideas or ‘the magical realist rooms in the house of fiction’.”\textsuperscript{154} In the following chapter, I examine how Faris’ five elements of magical realist narrative can be applied to the case study,
*Northern Lights* and to the narrative of my creative project, *The Shell-Keeper of King Island*. 
Chapter Three: Northern Lights and The Shell-Keepers of King Island in Light of Faris’ Theory.

The story comes first before everything else. It is through stories that humans can best hope to understand themselves and others.

Philip Pullman

In this chapter I explore the following questions. How can Faris’ five elements of magical realist narrative be applied to the case study, *Northern Lights? How may these five elements inform the narrative of my creative project, *The Shell Keepers of King Island?*

*Northern Lights*, was first published in 1995, and is the first of Pullman’s three volumes, subtitled, ‘His Dark Materials’. *Northern Lights* tells the story of Lyra Belacqua who goes in search of her Uncle, Lord Asriel (really her father), to give him the alethiometer, an instrument that ‘tells the truth’ and has visionary powers. Lyra believes, Lord Asriel needs the alethiometer in order to release him from his captivity in the polar regions, in a place called Svalbard.

Underpinning Lyra’s journey, in this real but magical fictional world, is Lyra’s quest to understand ‘Dust’. Lyra learns that ‘Dust’ is the physical form of Free Will. ‘Dust’ is behind the reason for the abduction of hundreds of children who Lyra discovers are being
held in a camp in the north—near the aurora or the northern lights, in a place called Bolvangar.

Within Pullman’s story world, all children have ‘a dæmon’. At Bolvangar, these dæmons are cut away from the child in scientific experiments carried out by Mrs Coulter (who turns out to be Lyra’s mother), on behalf of The Oblation Board, a scientific, experimental arm of the one Church that inhabits the narrative. The experiments sever the child’s dæmon from their body and remove the mysterious ‘Dust’. The Oblation Board believes that by removing the dæmons the children will become adults with no Free Will. This will remove ‘man’s freedom of thought and give to The Oblation Board greater world control.

Within Pullman’s narrative world, Lord Asriel is in conflict with the Church. Asriel holds his own scientific ideas about ‘Dust’. He believes severing a child of its dæmon, enough energy will be released for him to cross from this world to another, one beyond the northern lights.

My creative project, *The Shell Keepers of King Island* is the story of three Australian children, Matt O’Leary, Claire Campbell and Larry Pratt. Matt finds an unusual shell that becomes the catalyst for an ongoing rivalry between Matt and Larry. Larry has been stalking Matt for months. When Larry steals the shell, Matt and Claire feel the full burden of their responsibility as the keepers of the shell and are prepared to do anything to retrieve it. All three protagonists must come to terms with the magic that appears to
emanate from the shell. In doing so they acquire a better understanding of the world in which they live.

3.1. The Irreducible Element and 3.2 Element of Unsettling Doubts

As discussed in the previous chapter, the irreducible element is one “in which the text contains an irreducible element of magic. The element of unsettling doubts is one where “the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events, the magical and the real”.

*Northern Lights* begins with these words:

Lyra and her dæmon walked through the darkening Hall…Her daemon’s name was Pantalaimon, and he was currently in the form of a moth, a dark brown one so as not to show up in the darkness of the Hall¹⁵⁷

The introduction of the dæmon causes “the reader to experience some unsettling doubts. Visible dæmons attached to people, surely do not exist in Western reality. The reader hesitates needing to reconcile the intrusion into a seemingly realist text that ‘can not be verified according to empirically based discourse’. Pullman’s detailed, descriptive narrative grounded in numerous historical names, dates and places, daily routine and other minutiae of everyday life, necessary to establish the irreducible within the reality,
is convincing. The reader accepts the reality of Pullman’s fictional world which is clearly a “hybrid world created by the co-existence of the magical and the real”.\textsuperscript{158} A world that, in accordance with Faris’ theoretical model, “infuses and speaks with an authority, that seems to be born of substantial worldly experience and, therefore, validates any questioning of the irreducible events.”\textsuperscript{159} According to Faris’ viewpoint this exemplifies “the realism in magical realism that distinguishes it from much fantasy”.\textsuperscript{160} This is what Faris describes as: “grounded textually in a traditionally realistic, even explicitly factual, manner”.\textsuperscript{161} The world described “grows organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [the magical and the real]”.\textsuperscript{162}

The dæmons serve to “create a space that figures a sense of the mysterious within the ordinary”.\textsuperscript{163} This occurrence mirrors the events of Villanelle’s lost heart, kept in a jar, in \textit{The Passion}\textsuperscript{164}, the old man’s wings in \textit{A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings}, and the flying laundry basket that carries Saleem across India in \textit{Midnight’s Children}. The ‘dæmons’ in \textit{Northern Lights} are ‘enmeshed within the real, so the sense of the ineffable is created within the text, not outside it.’\textsuperscript{165} The reader accepts this irreducible element as part of the narrative reality.

Pullman presents a further irreducible element: a clockwork insect. The insect appears just as Lyra’s dæmon, Pantalaimon, changes form into a seagull and is flying, “with wide wings white against the grey, [when] something black hurtled at him and struck.” When the insect is caught, “Its wing cases were erect…and the wings inside were beating so furiously that they were only a blur. Its six clawed legs were scrabbling on the grass.”
Pullman surrounds the insect with realistic and detailed description. The reader hesitates because it is ‘clockwork’ but accepts it because in all other ways it behaves like an insect. What purpose does this irreducible element serve in terms of Faris’ narrative technique?

Firstly, this insect provides an example of what Faris repeatedly refers to as, “the magical growing organically out of the real”, a major characteristic of the mode. It grows out of the detailed description of Pantalaimon who in this scene changed to the form of a seagull. Pantalaimon peacefully takes an afternoon flight in a panoramic sky. Unexpectedly this sinister creature is upon him. Not only is the reader surprised but the characters are surprised as well:

It was cold outside and although Lyra was shivering, Pantalaimon on the other hand, leapt into the air with a loud caw of delight, and wheeled and skimmed and darted now ahead of the boat, now behind the stern. Lyra exulted in it, feeling him as he flew…Heavy clouds hung without offering rain. Only Pantalaimon’s flashing elegance had anything in it of life and joy…when something hurtled…and struck.

“What is it?”

“There’s strange things aplenty in the southern wild.”
“But what is it after?”

“Spying.”

The characters’ surprise follows Faris’ theory that, “the author encourages the reader to accept the phenomenon by having characters hesitate over it”. Lyra hesitates over the clockwork insect in the same way that the local woman, in Faris example of Beloved in which the neighbours asked of Seth’s dead child returned, ‘was she a ghost or not?’ Furthermore, the naturalistic detail in this extract is evidence of Pullman ‘grounding the irreducible in realist description’.

Secondly, the insect is clockwork but not of man’s making: “Afric things…pinned to the spring of it, there’s bad spirit with a spell through its heart.” The ‘clockwork insect’ with its spiritual tail and the reference to ‘Afric’— perhaps meaning African because the description of the insect suggests something ’primitive’ rather than Western — echoes Faris: “the magic involved stems from the system of tribal legend.” According to Faris, “Because of its postcolonial origins, magical realism often contains the voice of belief systems that are not acknowledged in Western culture”. I suggest, that Pullman deliberately includes ‘primitive’ elements as a contrasting ideology to that of the Church of his text. Such inclusion suggests the power of voices from the margins.
In my own creative project, *The Shell Keepers of King Island*, the protagonist, Matt, sees an Aboriginal woman: “squatting over a circle of stones. She was making a fire. She had a big pile of periwinkles in a tin of water.” In fact, what Matt sees, is the spirit of an Aboriginal woman that lived on King, a hundred years or so ago. She is the memory that lingers of other Aboriginal women murdered and raped by the early seal hunters:

“ I think you called them forgotten footprints from the past  
like the people buried in the graves at Currie. Isn’t that what  
you said they were, forgotten people.” 174

Haunting spirits often appear to Matt and form irreducible elements in the novel. I found, as Faris’ asserts, that a conversation was often required to imbed the irreducible element as in this example. As Faris posits, “[magical realism] may include magic and folk wisdom…but real history is a weight that tethers the balloon of magic as if to warn against too great a lightness of mythical or magical being”. 175 In this way the Island’s past is tethered in the present reality.

3.3. The Phenomenal World and 3.4 Merging Realms

As outlined in the last chapter, magical realism details a strong presence of the phenomenal worlds which Faris describes as ‘the existence of the mysterious realm of
the spirit’. *Northern Lights* contains descriptions that suggest Faris’ “mysterious realm of the spirit but grounded in a world that resembles the one we live.”

From Faris’ theory we understand that the ineffable, that in-between narrative space, ‘include[s] a spirit-based element’. Roh used the words, ‘to discover objects beginning with the spirit’. In other words, magical realist narrative finds a voice that releases the essential spirit of an event: a ‘third principle that mediates between the material and the spiritual worlds…a flight of the human spirit’.

In *Northern Lights* the witches represent this third principle. Lyra is assisted, on her journey to find Lord Asriel, by a tribe of witches led by Serafina Pekkala, queen of the witches. Serafina, in fact, serves as the voice of wisdom that, whilst not being omnipotent, sees into the human world with an understanding that humans themselves don’t always have.

According to Faris: “magical realism often speaks what it cannot have perceived directly, so it loosens the narrative’s connection to the ordinary world of sense perceptions, and it makes room for readers to entertain the idea of a especially gifted perceiver.” In other words, Faris is saying, there are other ways of understanding the world and the techniques that magical realism employs allows these to be voiced through the narrative creation of magical but real worlds. Pullman, I suggest does exactly this. Pullman’s character Serafina Pekkala, serves as the voice of the spirit that rests in all of us, evoking Faris’ ‘especially gifted perceiver’. Throughout the novel, Pullman
utilises spirits, shaman and other unearthly voices. In much the same way that the ‘dæmons’ are the inner voice of the individual, Serafina is the voice of the inner spirit of mankind;

We need no means of exchange apart from mutual aid. If a witch needs something, another witch will give it to her. If there is a war to be fought, we don’t consider cost one of the factors in deciding whether or not it is right to fight'.

Here Pullman surrounds Serafina Pekkalar in detail that encourages the reader to accept that while she is magical, she is derived from reality, albeit because Serafina Pekkalar’s reality shares much with our communal desire for solutions to a troubled world and our sense of our own worth:

There is another thing…a witch would no more give up flying than give up breathing. To fly is to be perfectly ourselves.

In having a witch express these ‘human’ sentiments, Pullman tethers the irreducible element of the witch to the reality of her believable wisdom. Further, Pullman has Lyra comment that, “Serefina Pekkalar has all the qualities of the perfect mother”. In this comment we hear the voice of the author instructing us, as readers, to accept the validity of the witch.
As Faris posits, this technique enables magical realism to ask “the eternal question of how to live fruitfully on earth and in our body… and the imagination, in the sensory and the ineffable, and how to express that experience”.¹⁸⁴

In my creative project, *The Shell Keepers of King Island*, the protagonist, Matt, finds an unusual shell. I utilise the shell to create the ineffable, a space between the magic and the real. For example, at one point in the story, Matt actually finds himself inside the shell:

I drift, float inside my head, *inside* the shell; and this is no game. The humming has gone but I feel constrained and breathless. My nostrils fill with the dank salty smell of the beach. My eyes are open but I can only see a confronting dimness. My skin feels moist, clammy… I struggle and twist but movement is not possible. I’m confined inside a shell. I reach out and my fingertips come up against a solid, slippery wall. Gripped by the horror of it I push hard determined to break free. I can’t move, can’t hit out, can’t kick, so I twist and push with my back. Breathing is difficult and my head is dizzy, light, claustrophobic. I’m fainting.¹⁸⁵

According to Faris, “in magical realism, vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions.”
Matt’s description and in the panic in his voice we hear clearly that he is caught in an extra-textual world. It reflects the same confusion that we hear in Saleem’s trip in the basket in Midnight’s Children “...I was in the basket, but not in the basket” and ask ‘was he wasn’t he?’ Is Matt in the shell or isn’t he? The shell represents Matt’s own confusion, and to some extent foreboding that a spiritual force is determining his future: ‘the existence of the mysterious realm of the spirit’. Further Faris claims, “without any break in continuity, the interior subjective universe and the exterior objective universe are suspended in the same hybrid environment, half real and half imagined”. 186

Faris further writes that, “Perhaps the magical realist narrative line is analogous to the axis of the world that in many systems of thought is imagined to join the realms of the underworld, the earth and the heavens.” 187 In my creative project, I attempt to go beyond the existing world to a world that, while still belonging to the real world, is outside the normal experience of that world. Matt, Claire and Larry are dragged beneath the floor of the sea by the centrifugal force of the Bass Strait Triangle:

And we are beaching under the sea on a great expanse of bright orange sand; above, water hangs translucently splendid. Perhaps held there by the current of the whirlpool complete with sea creatures circling, drifting, swimming. 188

This is a spiritual space that merges the known world with a re-representation of that world; a realm that lies in the space between the magical and the real. I used this
technique, as described by Faris, to resolve a textual need: how to actualise the spirituality of the shell in connection to the earth and unleash that power to climax the narrative: the children travelling to the underworld provides the answers that enable the story’s resolution.

In doing this, I adhered to Faris’ notion that: What is presented in these in-between spaces is other ways of perceiving and seeing and redrafting of the actual (rather than fantasy) world.”\(^\text{189}\)

Finally, on the subject of the phenomenal world and merging realms Faris, citing Rushdie, concludes: “Realism can no longer account for the world we live in—a world which has the capability of destroying itself at any moment”\(^\text{190}\). To which Faris responds, ‘magical realism…attempts to bridge the gap between ancient divinity and modern absurdity, which often includes scientifically created atrocities…and particularise how magical realism constitutes a narrative space of the ineffable in-between…a dismantling of realism.”\(^\text{191}\) Within Pullman’s fictional world in *Northern Lights*, Dust is the subject of scientific research that involves cutting a child’s daemon from their body.\(^\text{192}\) This atrocity evokes the human atrocities, of world-wide atrocities. Pullman employs a magical realist technique in his narrative: bridging the gap between ancient divinity and modern absurdity, which often includes scientifically created atrocities; creating a narrative space of the ineffable in-between; and particularising how magical realism [technique] constitutes a dismantling of realism while still relying on it to create its magic.\(^\text{193}\)
4.0 Disruptions of Time, Space and Identity.

Faris fifth element “disrupts received ideas about time, space and identity”. According to Faris, “magical realism introduces a confusion between what exists outside the subject and what only exists as a function of it…what is truly ‘empirical’, and what is, under the appearances of the sensory world, only pseudo matter, endowed with a purely mental truth.”

I suggest Faris means that there are moments in magical realism narrative when it is difficult to know who is saying or doing what, to whom for what reason and in which realm. In my creative project I have written a passage in which Matt looks into the eye of a whale and sees the abhorrent killing of sea elephants that took place in the early history of King Island:

I look again into the eye of my whale and I realise I’m seeing right into her mind’s eye. There are men, maybe twenty or more. They don’t look like any men I’ve ever known: a dirty, wild bunch, tough, muscular. Unshaven men, bare to the waist exposing their strong, weathered bodies, bodies stained ruddy with the blood of their victims.
Minutes later, the blood of the massacre spills out of the whale’s eye onto the sand. Matt has to wash the blood from his hands in the sea. Was the blood real or imagined? Does he actually see into the eye of the whale? Are the men real or sprits from the past? In this scene I have attempted to mirror Faris’ element of disruption to time, space and identity; the literalisation of the blood disrupts the time of the event and the space in which it occurs. Where does the blood really come from? History? The whale? Does Matt identify with the historical slaughter of the sea elephants? Are the footprints of his past merging with the present conflating the history between the two? These questions are what the technique of disruption intends. In Faris’ words, the text enables us to literally “bridge[] past and present, confounding our sense of the space of the text and the times of its construction”196

Faris likens the disruption of time, space and identity in magical realism to the ideology of shamanism. Shaman journey to different realms, spiritual spaces, take on different identities and manipulate time.197 Faris dedicates considerable space in her work to the similarities between the work of a shaman and the work of magical realist technique in narrative:

A shamanic performance and magical realist fiction are both “a space where unusual and magical manifestations of physicality take place…In other words, a magical realist narrative resembles a shaman’s account of his activities…[and] walks between the natural and supernatural universes and is therefore capable of leaving them behind.”198
In the same way shamanism has healing powers the alethiometer has the ability to assist and guide.

In *Northern Lights*, Lyra is the only person who can read the alethiometer. The alethiometer is an instrument that tells the truth and is invested with visionary powers. Pullman surrounds the alethiometer with realistic detail, and in this case, scientific language: he tells us it was invented by a seventeenth-century scholar, Pavel Khunrath living in Prague, and that there are only six known alethiometers in the world. Around the dial of the alethiometer, thirty-six symbols are arranged and each gives an infinite number of readings. The user focuses on an issue while a needle points to relevant symbols. The user deciphers these to determine the alethiometer’s meaning.\(^{199}\) Surrounded by so much detail, the reader accepts the visionary, irreducible alethiometer while its functional similarity to shamanism tethers it to reality.

We are told that Lyra must discover her own interpretation of the readings from the alethiometer or they are invalid.\(^{200}\) This element of choice links the magic of the alethiometer to the central theme of the novel, *Free Will*.\(^{201}\)

Later in the Trilogy, Will’s father emerges as a shaman. Other characters, witches, bears ‘gobblers’ are also visionaries. Pullman utilises the shamanist skills of the alethiometer so Lyra, and Pullman, can solve difficult textual links between disparate events and places, and overcome issues of time and space in how Lyra acquires key information, clues and knowledge:
“[Lyra] sat still, letting her mind hold the three levels of meaning together in focus, and relaxed for the answer, which came almost at once…that Lyra’s eyes followed without hesitation.”

In this chapter have explored the application of Faris’ five elements of magical realist narrative to the case study, *Northern Lights* and reviewed the ways in which the elements have informed the narrative of my creative project, *The Shell Keepers of King Island*. In the following chapter I will summarise and discuss my key research questions.

**Chapter Four: Conclusions**

My ultimate aim in this exegesis has been to add to our knowledge on magical realism narrative techniques. My further aim has been to investigate whether Faris’ five elements may be successfully applied to contemporary young adult literary fiction. In addition, I have reviewed *Northern Lights* and my creative project, *The Shell-Keepers of King Island*, in light of Faris’ model of five primary elements.

Firstly, I have aimed to answer the key question: What, according to historical review, defines magical realism as a mode? Faris furthers our understanding of magical realism’s European and Latin American genesis from the art theory of Roh and surrealism to the renowned post-colonial literature of the mid twentieth century and into contemporary literatures across the world:
Contemporary magical realism has developed as a narrative mode that produces fictions in diverse cultural traditions, its continuing popularity ensuring those productions a growing international audience…which may encourage toleration of the dissonance caused by radically different voices, is being integrated into cultural consciousness, and not only in postcolonial situations.”

Historically, I suggest, Faris’ proposition that the mode is changing as the world changes strengthens her argument that magical realism “constitute[s] the single most important mode in contemporary international fiction.”

Magical realism is defined by Faris as a mode that ‘takes the narrative beyond mimesis’ (reproduction) ‘to a re-representation (new perception) of reality’. Furthermore as Faris claims, magical realism is defined by ‘the anchoring in concrete reality created by…an established system of representation based on scientific fact’ but ‘dislodged by the ‘interruption of magic’; ‘yet nothing like a complete rhetoric of fantasy takes its place’. Faris summary definition is “Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically (not synthetically) within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [the magical and the real]”.

60
Secondly, I have aimed to answer the question: How does Faris’ theoretical model of narrative techniques define magical realism? From Faris’ formulation of the five elements through adult literary fiction, I conclude that these elements offer a useful framework by which to better understand magical realism narrative techniques. Faris’ formulation of the five elements also furthers our understanding of the unique technical characteristics of the mode and its cross-over position between realist narrative and fantasy.

However, the novels, cited by Faris, abound in irreducibility that grows out of an adult world reality making the irreducibility, contextually, more inexplicable and profound than the introduction of ‘dæmons’ or witches in a novel written for younger readers. We are accustomed to these irreducible elements in children’s and young adult fiction. The way in which the magical realism experience differs, in literature for any age, is the way in which the magic is grounded in reality. In concluding, I suggest, Faris’ argument may have benefited from some comparative study of literary fantasy to better highlight this narrative technique of grounding the magic in reality.

In concluding, I suggest the five elements: the irreducible element, unsettling doubts, the phenomenal world, merging realms and the distortion of time, space and identity combine to define the single defining characteristic of magical realism, that of a narrative that is both unworldly and mimetic; spiritual and temporal, fractured and whole, magical and real. Faris five elements successfully function as the narrative building blocks for
this binary opposition between magical and real renowned over eight decades as magical realism.  

Thirdly, I have aimed to answer the question: How can Faris’ five elements of magical realist narrative be applied to the case study, *Northern Lights* and inform the narrative of my creative project, *The Shell-Keepers of King Island*? Faris’ theory of the irreducible element and element of unsettling doubts, contribute to our understanding of technique that particularises the mode. I conclude that both elements are useful towards identifying characteristics of magical realist narratives which I have shown are evident in *Northern Lights*, and *The Shell-Keepers of King Island*. The elements are also useful applied technique: Pullman employs the irreducible element as dæmons, and clockwork insects. In my own creative project, I employ a spiritual shell and a journey under the sea. According to Faris’ formulation, both Pullman and my project have created narratives “nothing like a…rhetoric of fantasy” that “grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them [the magical and the real]”.

Faris’ theory of the phenomenal element and the element of merging realms contribute to our understanding of technique that particularises the mode. In particular, Faris’ extratextual worlds and literalisation of metaphors are useful, accessible and applicable. The elements are useful as applied technique: Pullman employs the phenomenal element specifically as witches but more broadly, as well, in the spiritual underpinning of the text. In my own creative project, I employ a spiritual the ghosts from the past. Faris’ explanation of the phenomenal world lacks clarity making it difficult to differentiate
from the irreducible element. I suggest that the latter applies to the individual incidents of the fantastic and the former to the irreducible as it sits within the narrative as a whole.

Faris theory of the fifth element of disruptions of time, space and identity contains the theory of defocalisation: perceptions are indefinable and their origins unlocatable.” Faris’ formulation is useful in differentiating realism from magical realism or focalized narrative from defocalised narrative. In my own words, one is reporting what the eye sees the other is reporting what the eye feels. In particular, Faris’ comparison of shamanism technique and magical realist technique was illuminating. This is applied by Pullman in the alethiometer and in my own project in the shell.

This exegesis concludes that Faris’ theory of narrative technique that forms the building blocks of magical realism, the irreducible element, unsettling doubts, the phenomenal world, merging realms and the distortion of time, space and identity can be successfully applied to a work of contemporary young adult literary fiction. Faris’ theory of five elements has application to Northern Lights and to my own project the Shell-Keepers of King Island.

The successful application of Faris’ theory to these case studies is important in expanding the historical perspective of magical realism into young adult fiction. It suggests the need for further study on how Faris’ theory might be used to differentiate fantasy and magical realism within young adult fiction.
The knowledge gained and conclusions drawn in this exegesis fulfil my aim to add to our knowledge on magical realism narrative techniques in the light of both adult and young adult fictions.

Finally, I suggest, magical realism takes the reader into a textual world that is both magic and real but that requires the talent and intellect of writers like García Márquez, Süskind, Morrison, or Pullman, to get us there and Faris’ theory to guide us on our way.
ENDNOTES

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81 ‘people fly’ : See *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: ‘people die and return to life;’ See also *Beloved*: ‘tears become potions; and see further, Rushdie, Salmon(1981)*Midnight’s Children*:

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82 Faris. *Ibid* 19
83 Faris. *Ibid* 19
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85 Faris *Ibid* 20
86 [www.tnellen.com/cybereng/lit_terms/allegory.html](http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/lit_terms/allegory.html) “*Allegory* is a form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative

69
itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. Thus an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.

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