While in Wonderland, the Mad Hatter wisely told Alice that something is 'impossible' only if she believed it to be so. That is the essence of this week's page: the endless possibilities of reality. We take a quick peek into the world of magic realism, some must-reads that will make readers appreciate the genre and a critical analysis of how the genre is embodied in certain women's literature. We also welcome regular columnist Nupu Press and embark with her on a journey through the beautiful, topsy-turvy world of creation. Aspiring writers: don't miss out on the writing competition details! Comments, viewpoints and contributions are welcome at: DSLitEditor@gmail.com

MUNIZE MANZUR

Defining Works of Magical Realism

HEN the iconic Columbian writer Gabriel García Márquez died on April 17 of this year at the age of 87, it renewed an interest in magical realism because he was frequently credited with propagating this genre on a global level. Since then, authors from around

One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel García Márquez It is difficult to choose only one book

by Marquez for this list! However, One Hundred Years of Solitude must surely feature. This is the multi-generational story of the Buendía family in the fic-

ecy, that is fulfilled the moment it is deciphered. Jose Arcadio Buendía is the patriarch of the family who creates Macondo through his own delusions. His wife Úrsula Iguarán lives to be 130 years old and presides over the family for that many years.

The Master and Margarita, Mikhail Bulgakov

This novel works as a satire of the Soviet Union by contrasting the story of a literary circle in Soviet Russia to the Jerusalem of Pontius Pilate, who is struggling over his legal workload. In the Russian part of the book, the Devil visits a prestigious literary organization in the form of a professor and proceeds to wreck havoc on the writers with the help of his giant, gun-toting black cat named Behemoth and other curious characters. An uncensored version wasn't published until 1962, but The Master and Margarita stands as one of the great works of satire as well as magical realism

The House of the Spirits, Isabel Allende Considered to be the first book to give magical realism a female voice, The House of the Spirits was published in 1982. It made a literary star of the Chilean Isabel Allende. It explores the tumultuous political climate of Allende's native Chile, something that she can speak about with authority, as the ousted Communist Chilean president Salvador Allende was her cousin. Salvador Allende was murdered during the military coup by Augusto Pinochet in 1973 even though he had been democratically elected. The House of the Spirits looks at Chile through the eyes of four generations of the de Valle and Trueba families, particularly focusing

on the women and engages themes of

Magical Realism in Women's Literature

magical realism, including the character Clara who has psychic powers.

Beloved, Toni Morrison

African-American writer Toni Morrison, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, sets this novel in post-Civil War Ohio, where a former slave named Sethe escapes before the war ends. Under the Fugitive Slave Act, Sethe's owners come after her and her children before slavery is abolished. Rather than allow her children to be captured and taken back to the horrifying plantation in Kentucky that owns her, Sethe kills her two-year-old daughter and attempts to kill her three other children. In the present time of the novel, which is years after the end of the war, Sethe is still haunted by the murder of her baby

- Beloved. When a young girl around the age Beloved would have been shows up on the family's doorstep, Sethe delusionally believes her daughter has returned and increasingly has her life force sucked out by the girl's ghostly presence. A haunting examination of slavery and motherhood, Beloved is considered to be one of the greatest American novels of all time.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, Haruki

Murakami Japanese writer Haruki Murakami is a popular contemporary writer influenced by magical realism, and The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle is one of Murakami's most widely-known books. It follows the unemployed and lost Toru Okada, who lives in suburban Japan with his bread-winning wife. Shortly after their pet cat runs away, his wife too mysteriously disappears and Okada is forced out of his inaction to decipher what has happened to his family. The book becomes more and more magical as

Okada emerges from his passivity.

Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie examines British colonial rule of India and India's transition into independence in his most famous work, Midnight's Children. The book's main character and narrator, Saleem, is born at the exact moment that India becomes an independent nation, possesses psychic abilities, and has an incredibly sensitive sense of smell. Saleem figures out that all of the children in India born between midnight and 1 a.m. on the day the country became independent have varying types of special powers. He organizes the group and refers to them as "Midnight's children." Like Márquez and Bulgakov, Rushdie uses magical realism to explore an oppressive regime.

Like Water for Chocolate, Laura Esquivel

In a style that is epic in scope yet intensely personal in focus, Laura Esquivel's Like Water For Chocolate tells the story of Tita De La Garza, the youngest daughter in a family living in Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century. Through twelve chapters, each marked as a "monthly installment", we learn of Tita's struggle to pursue true love and claim her independence. Earthy, magical, and utterly charming, this tale of family life became a bestselling phenomenon with its winning blend of poignant romance and bittersweet wit. Esquivel features a recipe at the beginning of each chapter. The main episodes of each chapter generally involve the preparation or consumption of the dishes that these recipes yield. This novel will titillate the foodie in you from the very first page and leave you satisfied as a reader till the



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the world have embraced the style.

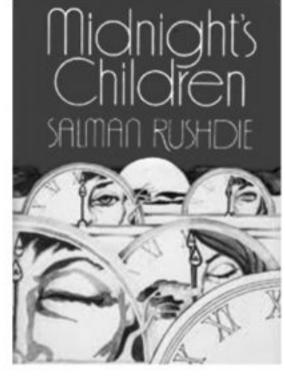
some must-reads that are sure to

expand your literary horizons:

While one would be hard put to make

'the ultimate list' of its most influential

books, here are, in no particular order,



tional Columbian utopia of Macondo, but it can also be read as an allegory of the history of South America. It is about love and war, is full of visions, ghosts, languid women who live under clouds of butterflies and a secret proph-

Dead Fish and a New Story

NUPU PRESS

In her monthly column, Nupu Press shares her personal path of writing a first novel:

The story of my book begins with another book: one I had started for a writing class in college.

The narrator of my story was a young Indian man who heads off to boarding school where he meets his Bangladeshi roommate. I was not a man, nor Indian (I had at that point only visited India on a cursory basis) nor had I ever attended boarding school. However, the confidence of youth meant I could pick up any persona and scribble down tall tales.

The professor and students - generally a tough crowd seemed enthusiastic in their response. What started as a short story grew to become a novel. I titled it Dead Fish Float Downstream for reasons I thought terribly clever at the time.

Only how could I write about boarding school or India with any propriety when I was familiar with neither? My knowledge of both came from books and films. It would be like a photocopy of a photocopy, a faint imprint of something that didn't quite belong to me. So, I re-set the novel to some years later, when the narrator visits his boarding school friend, Rafi, in Dhaka one summer.

While not as familiar with Dhaka as people who had grown up here, I at least had a relationship with the city that could ground the story in a milieu I could comfortably explore. I gave Rafi a cousin, Pippa, and the book evolved to how the three friends spent the summer in Bangladesh.

Six years later, with the novel complete, I contacted my writing professor and asked if he could read my manuscript. Not wanting to be distracted by others' works-inprogress while busy with his own book (a stance I now whole-heartedly adopt) he very generously put me in touch with an agent friend in London.

I sent it to the agent (who later became the head of Bloomsbury) and she read it over that weekend. She called me to say it wasn't right for her, but she hoped I kept writing.

My later experiences with agents proved to be dramatically different, even when introduced by friends: they could ask for the full manuscript and still disappear into a black hole, never to be heard from again; most never acknowledged the manuscript and it would be unthinkable one would agree to meet if the manuscript had been rejected. But I get ahead of myself.

I met the agent to thank her for being so prompt and gracious. I told her another story had been forming in my mind: that of Pippa. The agent kindly said with enthusiasm Pippa was her favourite character, and she would indeed be interested in reading about her.

And so, without a pause, I set aside my six years' work behind Dead Fish, and started on a new novel. I was still young-ish - twenty-six - and I claimed that this new book would have everything I wanted to say about everything: love, death, loyalty, betrayal, redemption, truth and art.

Nupu Press is a writer and film producer. Her blog is at

www.nupupress.com

RAINA MOINUDDIN ABU ZAFAR 'Magical Realism' acquired new direc-

tions in Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier's, "real maravilloso", making it intimately connected with places where the technique was practiced with local myths and folklore. A further derivation of this approach to Magical Realism from Angel Flores' description of magic realism as 'an amalgamation of realism and fantasy ' led to 'a rather indiscriminate use of the term for two very different offshoots from the same stem: an intellectual one derived from Borges and the surreal one of Marquez. A closer approach to the spirit of the marvelous, accommodates the supernat ural, relies heavily on superstitious faith and has its source in popular folklore.

In the light of these descriptions of Magical Realism, the trend in most 'ethnic' and 'migrant' literature present bizarre situations as acts of fate or the unknown. This technique depicts the existence of ethnic beliefs as a protective mantle over unfamiliar and daunting experiences resulting from change and the constraints of alien societies and relationships.

Many female writers adapted this technique to explain such situations as off shoots of ethnic beliefs, traditional folklore, and superstition. This trend is often found in the work of both non-European writers depicting controver-

sial lives. Kate Chopin's use of Magical Realism in the story, An Egyptian Cigarette, depicts the protagonist as one who smokes an Egyptian cigarette, goes into a stupor and enters the 'body of an Egyptian woman who had rejected her gods because of her lover and is then rejected by her own lover. This incident is explained as the consequence of rejecting one's traditions and how experimenting with such magical experiences lead to similar 'experiences'. Chopin's knowledge of local folklore, superstition and supernatural beliefs of the bayou and creole cultures, influence Magical Realism in her 'real life' stories.

Ana Costillo's novella, So Far From God, depicts migrant communities in America where patriarchal structures dominate and older people retain their faith in beliefs and customs of their native land; but the younger generation strive to go beyond the biases of traditional lifestyle to adapt to the new society in an attempt to get rid of the label of migrants. Whatever goes wrong

at this juncture is justified as 'metamorphosis' that occurs as a result of the 'unreal experiences' unexplained by universal laws or logic. The emphasis is on the influence of age-old beliefs to explain tragedies of life which could well be realistic but 'magical' with reference to the frightening nature of the occurrence itself.

Magical Realism reflects transgressing boundaries and multiple worlds as a means to change. However, the so called extraordinary incidents in perfectly 'ordinary' lives of the ethnic community of migrants are used in the story to facilitate the characters' transition to another kind of life - to escape the realities or tragedies they encounter. Two female protagonists of So Far From God make the transition after suffering debilitating attacks as a means to escape from their real world.

Toni Morrison in her work, Beloved, makes use of Magical Realism to define a society of social opposites. She borrows from the oral traditions of African folklore to write about supernatural themes that continue to dominate the African-American community. Sethe, a young slave, murders her baby girl in order to save her daughter from a life of

slavery. Her grief manifests itself to the body of a young girl. The 'magical' element used here exemplifies contrasting political views that create real life tensions between the colonized and the colonizer, slave and master.

last page.

Arab feminist writers and poets like Elmaz Abinader project the element of 'magical' in the traditions and images that magnify the reality of a 'hybrid' existence which is termed 'magical' for its mystique. The poetry magnifies the 'magic' of something 'exotic' in the realistic world of a migrant existence. Elmaz, a third-generation Lebanese-American, weaves the 'magic' mystique of her native land while based in the mechanized world of middle-class America.

Asian feminist writing carry elements of the Magical to not only identify the Magic in its traditions but the realistic lifestyle of a Bengali, a Punjabi or a Gujarati in the western atmosphere of an European society, in the sights, smells and décor of a realistic 'brick lane' or any ethnic area of some multicultural corner of the world. Raina Moinuddin Abu Zafar freelances as an English lecturer at NSU and IUB. However, her 'first love' is writing.

SLR WRITING COMPETITION

Aspiring writers are invited to send in a Short Story or poem using the theme of "Possibility" as a starting point.

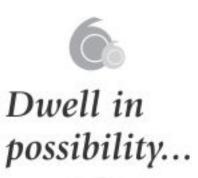
You must be over 18 years old.

Only ONE entry per person. Word Limit: 500 words.

Deadline: 26th July, 5pm.

The top three winning entries will be printed in the SLR page.

Send your entries to DSLitEditor@gmail.com



Emily Dickinson