Uncanny Journeys:
Magical Realism in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Omar El-Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*

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Abstract

This article presents a reading of two contemporary novels, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Omar El-Akkad's *What Strange Paradise* (2021), in the light of magical realism. The article first attempts to define magical realism as a genre loaded with potential. Bringing together two works, the first by a British-Pakistani writer and the second by an Egyptian-Canadian writer, it argues that these novels use magical realism as a global genre and infuse reality with fantasy to re-write the narrative of the refugee. Looking at the journeys in the novels not only as itineraries but also as narrative and literary modes, the article reflects on the use of certain fantastical "uncanny" (to borrow Freud's term) literary devices within those texts to unsettle the dichotomy between the world of the real and the world of imagination in which both characters and readers decipher routes of navigating the unheimlich. The article thus shows magical realism's subversive potential and its ability to engage contemporary issues.

Keywords: magical realism, narrative, journeys, refugee, unheimlich

Introduction

Coined by the German art critic Franz Roh, around a century ago, the term *magic* or *magical realism* has evolved to designate one of the most important literary genres in contemporary times. Known for its subversive potential, this mode of writing has provided venues for authors to deal with the shocking nature of the contemporary condition and express human experiences that fail to be explained by the strictly rationalizing logic of 19th Century European realism. Writing about the power of magical realism today, Bowers argues that "Magical realism is often employed by writers where the horror of actual events has exceeded what is considered to be ordinary experience" (2020, p. 579). The contemporary narrative of the refugee expresses one such condition, which despite becoming a frequent occurrence is still hard to explain as an ordinary experience.

This paper offers a reading of two contemporary novels, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Omar El-Akkad's *What Strange Paradise* (2021), focusing on how they employ magical realism; infusing reality with fantasy to re-write the narrative of the refugee. It examines how, in their construction of the bracketed temporality of the journeys they depict, they unsettle the dichotomy between the world of the real and the world of imagination in which both characters and readers decipher routes of navigating the *unheimlich* as well as the hostile spaces of today's world.

Magical Realism

In 1925, German art critic Franz Roh first used the term Magical Realism or *Magischer Realismus* in a catalogue for an exhibition on post-expressionist art organized by Gustav Hartlaub in Mannheim, Germany under the title *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity or New Realism]. The term magical realism thus first appeared in German art circles before it made its way into literature to become popular at the hands of Latin American writers, who eventually re-exported the genre to the world, fashioning it as one of the most important trends in contemporary fiction.

According to Siskind, it was through the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli's work that Roh's concept of magical realism made its way into Europe's avant-garde landscape (2020, p. 28), and it was from Paris that it started to travel overseas. Being in Paris in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Alejo Carpentier, and

Miguel Ángel Asturias picked up the term and redefined it from the perspective of their own Latin American culture.

> In essays and novels from the late 1940s, they present magical realism as a way to achieve Latin America's aesthetic emancipation, when the region first gives itself a literary identity of its own, markedly differentiated from those translated from Europe. (Siskind, 2020, p. 28-29)

Magical realism thus allowed Latin American writers space for self-expression and a departure from European forms. In fact, it was only when the term was adopted by Latin American writers that it had a new life, "opening the theoretical horizon to include its relation to marginality, subalternity, and postcolonialism" (Siskind, 2020, p. 28).

With Gabriel Garcia Marquez winning the Nobel Prize in the 1980s, magical realism as a genre gained global popularity, expanding as a literary form able to express and critique "the social and epistemological relations that give rise to hegemonic modes of symbolizing the real in the margins of global modernity" (Siskind, 2020, p. 43). Magical realism became a means to unveil the problems of inequality and underprivilege in the modern world especially as a mode of writing for the marginalized and the voiceless, which prompted it to be dubbed by Homi Bhabha in the 1990s as "the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world" (1990, p. 7).

According to Faris, this relation to postcolonialism is one of the main reasons behind the genre's popularity and importance: "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, 2004, p. 1). Moreover, due to its challenging the basis of representation within the dominant mode of realism influenced by the rigid pragmatism of 19th century Europe, "it has served as a particularly effective decolonizing agent" (Faris, 2004, p. 1).

Bowers identifies magical realism's "distinguishing feature" to be its fusion of "two opposing aspects of the oxymoron (the magical and the realist) together to form one new perspective" (2004, p. 3). Magical realism can thus be seen as a transgressive, essentially "disruptive narrative mode" (Bowers, 2004, p. 3), which Zamora and Faris define to be: "suited to exploring…and

transgressing…boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic" (1995, p. 5). In this view, magical realism is not only a means of bringing fantasy into reality and vice versa, but a way of seeing the world as a fluid, non-compartmentalized whole, within which everything is moving.

In his essay on "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real", Alejo Carpentier distinguishes between Franz Roh's magical realism which he sees as another name for expressionist and surrealist art and the "marvelous real" which he advocated for. For Carpentier, surrealism even if it "pursued the marvelous […] rarely looked for it in reality" (1995, 103). He finds the category of "the marvelous real", however, to be different and endowed with potential. He writes:

> The marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace and always was commonplace. (Carpentier, 1995, p. 104)

For Carpentier thus the distinction between reality and fantasy does not hold, because the fantastical lies within the very fabric of reality making it marvelous. According to Angel Flores too, "the unreal happens as part of reality" and therefore is not presented in the narrative with much surprise but rather as a "*fait accompli*" (1995, p.115). This to Flores allows for "the transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal" supported by "a kind of timeless fluidity" (1995, p. 114-115). Describing Gabriel Garcia Marquez's writing, Scott Simpkins expresses a similar view of reality as already inclusive of elements of magic and fantasy. For Marquez, trying to eliminate such elements from reality to fit into the straightjacket of realism limits realist writing's ability to mirror the world. Magic realism sees "[d]isproportion [as] part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself all out of proportion" (Simpkins, 1995, p. 148). In this reading, "the magic text is, paradoxically, more realistic than the realist text" (Simpkins, 1995, p. 148).

The art historian Irene Guenther relates this oxymoron of magical and real to Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny). In her essay on Roh's ideas and the arts in the Weimer Republic, she succinctly notes: "The juxtaposition of 'magic' and 'realism' reflected the monstrous and marvelous *Unheimlichkeit* [uncanniness] within human beings and inherent in their modern technological surroundings" (Guenther, 1995, p. 36). According to Freud, "the uncanny is that class of the

frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (1955, p. 220). Freud argues that while we often claim that the uncanny is fearful because of its unfamiliarity and strangeness, it is not so, rather the very feeling that it produces in us is precisely because of its familiarity, and association to what we know but have somehow repressed. Thus, it is as much part of what we know and what we have experienced.

Building on this relation between the uncanny and the past, Jack Zipes writes of reading fairytales that: "the very act of reading a fairy tale is an uncanny experience in that it separates the reader from the restrictions of reality from the outset and makes the repressed unfamiliar familiar once again" (1982, p. 309). While magic realism operates differently as a genre, it makes use of a certain defamiliarization of reality or rather re-familiarization of the fantastic to unsettle our understanding of the world. In this paper, I argue that what Mohsin Hamid and Omar El-Akkad do is use magical elements, not in order to free their readers from reality as in fairytale, but to fetch the repressed (uncanny) in order to shock their readers with the grotesqueness of our contemporary times. They point to the uncanny within contemporary reality and flag it, creating discomforting narratives of unhomely encounters at the border.

Exit West and the Uncanny

Exit West starts at the junction between the real and the fantastic, depicting contemporary turmoil in some unidentified location. The novel opens with the following lines:

> In a city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war, a young man met a young woman in a classroom and did not speak to her. For many days. His name was Saeed and her name was Nadia and he had a beard, not a full beard, more a studiously maintained stubble, and she was always clad from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch in a flowing black robe. (Hamid, 2017, p. 1)

The novel is a boy meets girl story of Saeed and Nadia who meet and fall in love, while militants take over their city and civil war breaks out. The opening is akin to the fairytale 'once upon a time in …' structure, and, unidentified, their home city is conjured as an ambiguous unnamed place. It is Nadia's dress and Saeed's beard

which give away their Muslim identity, and hint to a certain geographical location. The fact though that Hamid highlights their appearance is a matter of choice is significant:

> Back then people continued to enjoy the luxury of wearing more or less what they wanted to wear, clothing and hair wise, within certain bounds of course, and so these choices meant something. (Hamid, 2017, p. 1)

The novel thus could be set anywhere in the Muslim world, where trouble is emerging and extremism is on the rise; this fictional location could be a reference to Hamid's very own Lahore, to Syria's troubled present or any other place where the war is afoot. War in the novel soon becomes a reality and its effect is magnified. Hamid writes, "War would soon erode the facade of their building as though it had accelerated time itself, a day's toll outpacing that of a decade" (Hamid, 2017, pp. 9-10). This marks the intensity of destruction begotten by the war, and the *unhomely* reality in which the characters are forced to live, in quite literal terms.

Soon in the narrative, however, hope, coupled with the fantastic, kicks in, and magic doors start popping up throughout the city and around the globe, doors which when you walk through transport you to a new and unknown place. This could be a refugee camp in Greece or a bedroom in a deserted house in the United States. This factor of the unknown, makes the journeys frightful and full of anxiety, mixed with a thrill of a possible escape and a chance at a new life, the possibility of finding a new home.

These magic doors are the perfect metaphor in fact for the uncanny in the novel, linking migrant and refugee journeys to death and rebirth.

> It was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and like being born, and indeed Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought to exit it, and she felt cold and bruised and damp as she lay on the floor of the room at the other side, trembling and too spent at first to stand, and she thought, while she strained to fill her lungs, that this dampness must be her own sweat. (Hamid, 2017, p. 98)

While the doors seem to transport the characters instantaneously from one place to another, without making clear the perils of the journey, the comparison of the doors to "dying" and, if succeeding, "being born" points to the precarity of such migrant

journeys. In Freudian terms, the womb is the first home, and the expulsion through the door is another gesture to the loss of that first home, and the facing of the unknown. The repressed fear of separation is expressed in that moment of departure, "strain[ing] to fill her lungs" like a baby about to give her first cry, damp and wet into a world that is by no means necessarily nurturing.

Once Nadia and Saeed make the decision to migrate, the agent brings them to a door, and "drawing close [Nadia] was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the way it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end" (Hamid, 2017, p. 98). The indeterminacy of the future and the anxiety that accompanies it points once more to the uncanny experience of leaving the safety of the womb and coming into the world, emphasizing precariousness as a condition of life. As Penny Vlagopoulos suggests, "There is no linear immigrant narrative for refugees […] but rather the thickness of a journey that will never end" (2022, p. 414). In other words, while the magic doors in *Exit West* present some form of hope for safety, they do not simply transport Nadia and Saeed from war to peace, or bring them any closer to a homeliness they desire to find, but are rather trodden with danger. To escape through these doors they need to first elude the militants on one side and elude the security apparatus on the other, as well as encounter the system, the nativist anti-migrant mobs, etc.

Written in response to Brexit, the novel shrinks the time-space divide of these migrant journeys to set the refugees escaping war, famine and other dangers vis à vis the other/stranger. In Hamid's formula, Sara Ahmed's concept of 'stranger danger' is not seen as monodirectional where the migrants are seen by the local communities as threatening. Rather locals seem to pose the same if not a more serious threat for the community of migrants in the text. According to Ahmed, "strangers are those that are already recognized through techniques for differentiating between the familiar and strange in discourses" (2000, p. 37), i.e. the threat embedded in their encounter is an effect of the uncanny. This is the threat that Nadia and Saeed experience in the novel, a threat which they find recognizable in their encounter with the nativist mob rioting against migrants. Nadia recognizes the similarity between their violence and that of the militants who have taken over her home city, for example.

Moreover, throughout the novel Hamid portrays and refers to a multitude of migrants. Saeed and Nadia as migrants in the novel are not the exception but the norm, and so is their war torn city. The novel assumes that those who are displaced and those who are not are all travelers, even migrants. In the novel he writes "We are all migrants through time" (Hamid, 2017, p. 209). On the other hand, the shared experience of non-belonging among the migrants, creates a parallel community to which they can belong: "In this group, everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was" (p. 100). The fact that none of them fits creates a common ground for solidarity to emerge among them.

> […] and she found these people who were both like and unlike those she had known in her city, familiar and unfamiliar, she found them interesting, and she found their seeming acceptance of her, or at least tolerance of her, rewarding, an achievement in a way. (p. 145)

The fact that migrants are presented as a developing community in the novel allows for glimpses of homeliness to occur in the experience of the unhomely, especially as the apparatus of border control in the novel finally fails as "the sheer number of places where there were now doors had made it useless to fight in any case" while "the doors could not be closed, and new doors would continue to open" (p. 164).

The doors are examples of "border thinking" (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). In their article "Theorizing from the Border", Mignolo and Tlostanova contend that as a decolonial project, border thinking does not assume emptiness at the other end of the threshold, but rather that there are people and civilization at both sides of the border. Then it breaks down the frontier set by the metropolis by making holes – in this case the doors in *Exit West* – which allow for knowledge and bodies to pass, and hence geographies to change (2006). The push from the incoming migrants and their solidarity is what allows, for example, the squatters in the novel to overturn the security apparatus intent on evacuating them from the dwelling place they had overtaken in London.

However, experiences of homeliness, comfort or love in these spaces remain temporary and the novel's emerging love story between Saeed and Nadia keeps failing the further they go from their native city, as if the perils of being there at the brink of war was what brought them together. The novel toys with the possibility of

a reconciliation however, when half a century later Nadia and Saeed meet once more in the now 'familiar-unfamiliar' city of their birth.

> They finished their coffees. Nadia asked if Saeed had been to the deserts of Chile and seen the stars and was it all he had imagined it would be. He nodded and said if she had an evening free he would take her, it was a sight worth seeing in this life, and she shut her eyes and said she would like that very much, and they rose and embraced and parted and did not know, then, if that evening would ever come. (Hamid, 2017, p. 228-229)

The encounter between Saeed and Nadia in the end and the indeterminacy of that last sentence opens the door for perhaps more encounters between them and even the possibility of reconciliation, which in the novel could only happen after the unlikely fairytale reconstruction of their home and their rediscovery of themselves. Moreover, the ease of movement implied in this final passage hints to an imagined world where borders are open, though it seems that even this dream is only imaginable between South-South locations.

In a Guardian podcast though Hamid points to the importance of a "radically hopeful politics", describing *Exit West* as "a hopeful gesture" towards accepting that "the nature of being human is to be migrant" (Armitstead, Lea, & Cain, 2017). And on another occasion, he calls for an end to the culture of shaming associated with the term:

> A species of migrants at last comfortable being a species of migrants. That, for me, is a destination worth wandering to. It is the central challenge and opportunity every migrant offers us: to see in him, in her, the reality of ourselves. (Hamid, 2019)

The Refugee Reality

While Hamid's view carries positive sentiment, his somewhat naïve hope is coupled with the danger of banalizing the feats, throes and sorrows of the migrant subject in our contemporary times. In other words, it is important not to allow the difficulty and inequality embedded within the migrant experience to become seen as commonplace. Sellman points to the conditions of contemporary mobility and border-building practices as both global and postcolonial. "Postcolonial north–south disparities of access and resources profoundly shape migration" (Sellman, 2018, p.

754). For Hedetoft, unevenness is symptomatic of border crossing. Hedetoft calls borders "asymmetric membranes" (2003, p. 153), only allowing certain privileged groups to move while pushing others to spaces of extended limbo. According to Cathrine Brun and Anita Fábos, "Nearly two-thirds of the world's refugees are in seemingly never-ending exile, with the average length of these states of "limbo" approaching 20 years" (2015, p. 9). The question of the refugee thus is one associated not only with movement but also with access, both on the physical and abstract levels.

According to Hadji Bakara, "Modern refugee literature is about a century old" (2020, p. 289). Emerging mainly as a product of the 20th century conception of the nation state, which regulates the freedom of movement "granted" to bodies, and directly casting on home a political hue, refugee literature may be argued to cast light on what the sociologist Paolo Boccagni calls "people's claims-making for the fundamental right to have a place in the world" (Boccagni, 2023, p. 94). Home for the refugee and the migrant subject at large is thus both social and political.

An important year in which the disparities of the world we inhabit came into glaring view is 2015, often referred to as the year of the Refugee Crisis in Europe. On April 18th, over 600 people faced death in the Mediterranean as their boat sank in Libyan waters less than 200 kilometres away from Lampedusa in Italy, while only 50 of the passengers on the boat could be saved by an Italian and Maltese rescue operation. Unfortunately, this was only one of many incidents. A few months later on September 4th, the image of a young Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi shocked the world. The body of the two-year-old Syrian boy of Kurdish origin washed up on a beach in Turkey when once again the boat that carried him and many of his family members and compatriots capsized before they reached Greece (Spindler, 2015).

What Strange Paradise and the Question of Arrival

Omar El-Akkad's novel, *What Strange Paradise*, centres around Amir, an eight-year-old who like so many of his fellow compatriots, escapes his homeland. Fleeing from Homs to Damascus, through Jordan, to Alexandria in Egypt, Amir sneakily follows his uncle on board a rickety boat to find himself among hundreds of strangers trying to cross the Mediterranean. The larger than life journey brings to light the

magical in our contemporary reality, through highlighting the long and perilous journeys experienced by the refugees as they make their way to Europe.

Through a dizzying narrative, in alternating episodes between "before" and "after" we learn the story of Amir's past, and accompany him on the most unhomely of journeys on the boat, where it is cold and most unfriendly, except for Umm Ibrahim, a pregnant woman who takes care of him and shows him kindness. When he arrives, we follow his encounter with Vänna, a girl just a few years older than he is. It is Vänna who helps him escape admission into the refugee camp from which no one seems to ever get out, and where people have no clean water and life seems to be just miserable. With the help of the director of the camp, Madame Ward, the children go on a quest to find a boat via which Amir can escape the island homeward in the same way that he came. While they get on the boat, we do not know the fate of the boy, who holds on tightly to his mother's locket.

At several occasions, when asked about *What Strange Paradise*, Omar El-Akkad casts it as a Peter Pan story, so he himself makes the connection to fantasy/fairytale, establishing an analogy between the Greek island in the novel and Neverland (Volmers, 2021). While the first scene in the book cannot help but evoke the picture of Alan Kurdi, the Syrian two-year-old who was brushed ashore dead at the Turkish coast during one of those perilous journeys across the Mediterranean in 2015, Amir in *What Strange Paradise* seems to make it, or at least we are for the length of the novel convinced that he did.

> The child lies on the shore. All around him the beach is littered with the wreckage of the boat and the wreckage of its passengers: shards of decking, knapsacks cleaved and gutted, bodies frozen in unnatural contortion. Dispossessed of nightfall's temporary burial, the dead ferment indecency. There's too much spring in the day, too much light.
>
> Facedown, with his arms outstretched, the child appears from a distance as though playing at flight.
>
> […] A wave brushes gently against the child's hair. He opens his eyes. (El-Akkad, 2021, p. 1)

With extreme delicacy and no lack of empathy the novel unveils the horrid injustices of the refugee condition. It depicts the different ways in which they are *unhomed* in a harsh world of antagonism. However, the relation between Vänna and Amir gives

us a glimpse of hope that perhaps the future generation will have better answers to today's problems; that race, ethnicity, and language, stand in no way in the face of empathy, humanity, care, and kindness. In fact, the only glimpses of homeliness on the island for Amir were the moments he had witnessed Vänna's empathy.

Meanwhile, like in *Exit West*, with the exception of Vänna, the encounter between the native and the refugee/other is depicted in very violent terms. The North-South divide is already satirized on the boat, when one of the passengers advises his fellow countrymen to drop their names and adopt western ones in order to be more readily accepted in Europe. And the divide is attacked even more aggressively, when at some point for example the children are caught by the police, and while they respond with violence to Amir, who is only eight, their response to Vänna is different. El-Akkad does not find it enough to only point to the difference in terms of action, but he lets his narrator describe the incident in terms that mock the double standards of the security apparatus:

> not only because of the age and gender of their captive, but because, like all soldiers, they maintain a subconscious ledger of who they are free to hurt and who they are obliged to protect, and if they are not to protect a girl such as this one—a girl born into this place and this language and this skin—they protect no one at all. (El-Akkad, 2021, p. 221)

The narrator here sends a piercing critique to a world which privileges certain bodies over others, even certain children over others, asking the question are not all lives worth the same? All children sacred and in need of protection?

With this question the novel ends as it began, though this is the only episode in the novel titled "Now". Juxtaposed with the tourists who are waiting for the beach to be reopened so that they can once more get on with their lives and enjoy the pleasures of privilege, the episode and the novel end with:

> The child lies on the shore. But for his smallness, he looks no different from the rest of the dead whose bodies litter the beach. A man, masked and gloved to protect himself from disease, approaches. He kicks at the boy's leg and, eliciting no response, kneels down beside him. He places his hand gently into and under the sand so as to lift the boy's head. He observes the child, the lightness of him, the bell-shaped locket he wears. Somewhere farther up the road police officers gawk at the shipwrecked dead, but these people and their

concerns belong to a different world, a different ordering of the world. A fantasy. (El-Akkad, 2021, p. 235)

With great and delicate care, the masked man lifts the necklace from around the boy's neck, and we assume this to be the locket Amir was holding onto throughout his journey on the boat. Interestingly enough, the boat he was on was called the Calypso, like the goddess nymph that kept Odysseus from going home for seven years highlighting not only the duration and intensity of the journey, but also its final desired destination. The perilous Calypso represents the uncanny journey of Amir's return to his mother, whose locket he wears, but unfortunately the return is not fulfilled. Like the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth, the man breaks the bond between Amir and his mother through lifting the necklace off his neck and severing the connection between the two, ushering Amir into the world of the dead.

And while this final scene is described "A fantasy", disturbingly, we know that of all the novel's events, the death of children in the Mediterranean is the most real. This final episode is the only episode in the book titled "Now", so one is not really sure where to place it. Was all the journey on the island, and the encounter with Vänna a fantasy of an alternate reality in which the child is allowed to escape doom? Or one that presents hope for the hopeless? The shocking possibility that the boy's survival was just a dream, or that he has once more encountered the fate he first escaped on his attempted journey to return home, strikes at the very foundation of our human rights discourse and points to the systematic violence encountered by the refugee subject today.

Conclusion

While the novels are narrated through the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator who describes events and scenes with abundant detail, unreal or fantastical elements play a major part in both narratives, even making use of fairytale elements in, I would say, "uncanny" ways with the attempt to shake the world out of its slumber.

Depicting moments of departure and perilous journeys, caught up in the tension between unhomely spaces and the characters' desire for homing, these novels depict *unhomely* quests for *home*. They depict journeys from places one leaves behind because life becomes impossible and home itself has been destroyed; going through places one only passes through or stays at in limbo with the hope of

getting somewhere else but is not expected to settle; and finally those one arrives at but often still prove unhomely and unreceptive. Magical realism, manifested in the blurring of the lines between realism and fantasy, spaces and temporalities, creates an uncanny effect which works to unsettle the dichotomy between the world of the real and the world of imagination, while both characters and readers are pushed to decipher such routes of navigating the world as an unhomely place.

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رحلات غريبة:
الواقعية السحرية في روايتي "الخروج غربًا" لمحسن حامد و"تلك الجنة الغريبة" لعمر العقاد
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المستخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث قراءة نقدية لروايتين معاصرتين وهما *Exit West* "الخروج غربًا" (2017) للكاتب الباكستاني البريطاني محسن حامد و *What Strange Paradise* "تلك الجنة الغريبة" (2021) للكاتب المصري الكندي عمر العقاد في ضوء الواقعية السحرية. يبدأ البحث بمحاولة تعريف الواقعية السحرية كنوع أدبي عالمي لديه القدرة على التعليق على الواقع. فمن خلال الدراسة التي يقدمها البحث لهاتين الروايتين، يتجلى استخدام الكاتبين للواقعية السحرية كنوع أدبي يقوم على خلط الواقع بالخيال من أجل إعادة صياغة سرديات اللاجئين والتي انتشرت مؤخرا. ينظر البحث لمفهوم الرحلة في الروايتين ليس فقط من منطلق الوجهة المكانية التي تتخذها الشخصيات ولكن أيضا كمساحات سردية إبداعية، كما يركز البحث على استخدام "الغرابة" the uncanny (لسيغموند فرويد) كأداة تكسر الحاجز بين عالم الواقع والخيال في النصين بهدف خلق عالم موازي، يقوم من خلاله القراء والشخصيات بالمضي قدما لفك شفرة العيش في هذا العالم. يكشف البحث في الختام عن القدرة التحويلية للواقعية السحرية و تأثيرها على مشكلات الحياة المعاصرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الواقعية السحرية ، سرديات، الرحلات، اللجوء ، unheimlich