



RESEARCH PAPER

Magical Doors in *Exit West*: Threshold of Transformation of Major Characters

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformative role played by magic doors in the fictional work, *Exit West* by Hamid. It illustrates how the doors play a crucial role in the development of the major characters, in particular, the development of Saeed and Nadia, as the protagonists of the novel. This current investigation explores the ways in which the characters' encounters with these doors shape their self-awareness and contribute to the transformation of their personalities. By employing a qualitative research approach and purposive sampling technique, the chosen extracts from the text are subjected to close text-based examination to analyze the narrative and symbolic elements of the magical doors. The study delves into the characters' relationships with these doors to demonstrate the tremendous effects they have on Saeed and Nadia, both independently and united. By examining these perspectives, this analysis hopes to give a more profound understanding of the meaning of magical doors in the novel and their impact on the characters' journeys providing scholarly insights into the significance of magic realism in fiction and also delving into the broader social implications contained in *Exit West*.

KEYWORDS *Exit West*, Magic Doors, Magic Realism, Nadia, Saeed, Transformation

Introduction

Literature has a miraculous ability to transport readers into imaginative worlds and allow them to follow adventurous explorations of fascinating characters. The interweaving of the ordinary with the extraordinary is the hallmark of magic realism. The literary endeavors of the authors keep the readers captivated through the fusion of the fantastic and the mundane. The current research embarks on the enchanting world of magic doors created by Hamid in his fictional work, *Exit West*. The novel blurs the boundaries between the supernatural and the contemporary world providing a unique lens to delve into the postmodern reality, identity issues, and the human experiences of the postcolonial subjects.

An acclaimed writer with multicultural exposure, Hamid has made a mark on 21st-century literature through his insightful themes of globalization, identity, diaspora, and their impact. His fiction stands unique with the blend of carefully crafted narrative and thought-provoking social issues of the contemporary world. His fiction, like that of Dickens, blends the personal and the political, often weaving the intimate private stories into broader politico-cultural contexts. The ability of his works to fit into the personal and the global makes them popular transcending borders and cultures.

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* explores the identity crisis of Changez in the context of the 9/11 incident engaging readers in a fascinating tale of shifting allegiances and cultural conflicts in the new world order.

His novel, *Exit West* not only unfolds the tale of Nadia and Saeed navigating and steering their identities amidst the challenges of migration and displacement at an individual level but also explores the global refugee crisis and its implications.

Hamid's works form a valuable part of contemporary world literature because they engage readers in empathy to come to terms with the pressing societal issues through a compelling character portrayal and thought-provoking narrative techniques.

The existence of magical doors serves as a frequent subject in Hamid's acclaimed book *Exit West*, which also catalyzes considerable growth and self-discovery for its central characters, Saeed and Nadia. These magical doors serve as guides for characters as they go through real settings and reach the emotional and psychological limits of their surroundings. Saeed and Nadia, the main characters, are propelled into new spheres of involvement by the entryways, which put their judgment to the test and changed their personalities.

Many recent researchers have already shared their analyses on the different dimensions of magic realism. Although this research sheds light on the application of magical realism in *Exit West* from different perspectives, its primary objective concentrates on the relevance of the heavenly portals in the novel as thresholds of transformation for the important characters. It is a textual exploration of the complex layers of significance buried inside Saeed and Nadia's amazing journeys through a careful examination of their experiences and encounters as they travel through these paranormal entrances. The study pays special attention to the function of magical doors as transformational agents or symbols, which has not been explored in previous research on the subject. A qualitative research approach is chosen for the study, and a purposive sampling method is used to pick out particular text sections, to provide textual analysis related to magical doorways in relation to the theme of transformation of major characters. So, studying the relationship between transformation and magic doors in Hamid's fiction will contribute richly to understanding magic realism as a genre and its impactful role in shaping perceptions of reality.

Literature Review

The genre of writing known as magical realism combines the ordinary and the mundane with the dreamy, the charmed, and the strange (Nichols, 2021). Striking elements typically have an iconic quality and are used to make statements about things like identity, race, and class. They suggest potential real aspects that go beyond what we now know or seem to be relevant. Works on magical realism demonstrate the characters going about their daily lives in a normal world but coping with supernatural elements like ghosts, demons, fairies, and sphinx (and magical doors as presented in *Exit West*).

Founded by the Cuban essayist Carpentier, and elaborated by many other scholars—including Marquez, Amado, Borges, Asturias, Cortazar, and Isabel Allende—magic realism has been instrumental and effective in bridging the natural and the supernatural in arts. Although magic realism has a strong historical tradition in the literary canon, it was popularized in Latin American literary works in the middle of the 20th century. The narratives of Marquez are evidential tapestries of reality and enchantment. Flores (1995) makes his argument for the origins and significance of magical realism by

defining it as a blend of authenticity and dream. According to him, authenticity served as a hidden black alley causing the writers of the First World War, such as Kafka and Proust to turn to imagery and supernaturalism and merge them with the realities of the times. In particular, for Flores (1995), Kafka's works make him a celebrated mysterious pragmatist since his writing style combines dream and reality, a significant departure point of magical realism. As stated by Faris (2004), magical realism is a fusion of the authentic and the fabulous and the sublime unquestionably becomes the natural component of the standard and the distinction between the former two is blurred.

The novel *Exit West* by Hamid is replete with complexities of migration identities, death, war, mimicry, and loss. The novel comprehensively addresses these difficulties and provides a global network of magical doors that may take anyone anywhere in the globe in a moment. The world has witnessed relocation and massive cultural transformation at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Within these shifting times, Hamid's magic doors imply a boundless universe that offers and protects the individual's right to move as a basic freedom (Babo & Hamad, 2020)

One need for magical realism has been elaborated by Hamid in an interview with Leyshon (2016) where he explains how the use of magic doors offered a thread of falsehood. In a subsequent interview with Inskip (2017), he acknowledged that his desire to understand the motivations behind people's movement and the conditions they encountered abroad prompted him to take into mind the doors as sources of link as well as aids of exit (Bukhari & Jajja, 2021).

"The doors seem to have developed the ability to mock the foolish people's escape aspirations from their starting point. People believe that these doors are their best option for escaping after initially having doubts and trembling. When the inland courses are closed, people rush to the choice of doors because they are desperate to go. When the attackers threaten to hang the people who utilize or maintain any of these doors, they become a more tangible reality. They are being investigated globally as a serious global emergency (Hamid, 2017, p. 83).

The simultaneous resistance between realism and dream in *Common Magic* is presented by Faris (2004), who suggests five key elements of magical realism. The first is the irreducible element, which cannot be understood through precise data or logic. The phenomenal or the marvellous world (Faris, 2004, p. 14), is realism within otherworldly realism as authentic sounds, things, and locations. The third is the element of 'unsettling doubts' or disturbing questions (2004, p. 17) that arise when determining if a particular event is a dream, a visualization, or a supernatural experience. The fourth is the 'merging realms' or the joining domains (2004, p. 21), which entail that the two separate universes are linked to one another, creating a space in the middle of the space. The disruption of time, space, and character, which undermines conventional wisdom about time, space, and personality, is the fifth trademark according to Faris (2004). In *Exit West*, when the city was surrounded by cruelty, the narrator presents magical doorways as a reducible component of magic. The unchangeable element of mystical realism defies logic and calls on the audience to energetically suspend disbelief. The novel is analyzed from the perspective of Faris (2004) by Bukhari and Jajja (2021) to connect the significance of magic realism to unearth the refugee crisis.

Such concepts take the study back to Aristotle who talked about impossible probabilities to be preferred over possible probabilities. The phrase *willing suspension of disbelief* was devised by Coleridge to justify the use of fantastic elements in fiction in his 1817 publication, *Biographia Literaria*. In the 20th century, this phrase started to be used

more frequently. It may very well be used to suggest that the audience is willing to overlook a medium's limitations to promote acceptance of those principles. In the real world, it is illogical to believe the magical doors but the author has presented it in such a way that we accept it (Wolff, 2006).

In a general sense, doors are amazing. They swiftly and mysteriously transport people to far locations. There is no reason for the doors based on circumstances or logical outcomes. They simply exist, and one must accept them without questioning their veracity. A key requirement of magical realism is that such strange doors cannot exist in reality and cannot be denied acceptance in the fictional world (Bukhari & Jajja, 2021). These doors are being used from east to west, which is why Sulter (2017) refers to them as a way of connecting the local to the global and the known to the uncharted world.

As magically realistic works deal with two contradictory circumstances, they demonstrate character identities as fluid, transcultural, contentious, and changing. The recent study *Transnationalism in Theory and Fiction: Liquid Character and Otherworldly Realism in Contemporary Traveller Fiction from the US*, Brouwer (2015) focuses on the outsider's liquid and transcultural personality in Dáz's 2007 novel *The Short Wondrous Existence of Oscar Wao* and uses magical realism as an extension to limit the distance between workers' various universes. According to Collins Word reference (2019), a person's personality is what distinguishes them from others. The characteristics of the two protagonists in *Exit West* are fluid and constantly changing. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is also applied to the shifting personas of Nadia and Saeed. For instance, Saeed and Nadia discover that they have undergone slight changes when they depart from their home and enter another nation through a magical door. Saeed, who was formerly a quiet and religiously devout man, starts to become more interested and open-minded. Nadia, who was formerly self-sufficient and independent, gradually became weaker and reliant on Saeed (Javaid et. al, 2021). The novel's use of magical realism also emphasizes how identity may be molded by external forces and how it is flexible. The protagonists' concept of self changes and develops as they travel to various nations and interact with various cultures. Saeed and Nadia, for instance, encounter new societal norms and expectations when they go to London, which challenges their notions about both themselves and the outside world (Brauer, 2019). In this way, both characters are portrayed as doing the mimicry of the next culture they encounter during their journey.

The review of the literature shows that Hamid's magic doors serve as metaphors for movement across borders, the fluid nature of identity, escape from violence and hope for better lands, and the interconnectedness of the global world. The present study contributes to the already existing literature by focusing on the function of magical doors as transformational agents or symbols, an area that needs further elaboration because of its enduring relevance in contemporary discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Magical realism as a framework for analysis is adopted for the current study to investigate the impact of magical doors on the character transformation of the fictional persona of Saeed and Nadia. The literary concept of magical realism was first developed in Latin America, most notably by authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende. It seamlessly combines fantastical elements with everyday reality, joining elements of the supernatural and the real. The theory of magical realism questions accepted notions of the truth and invites readers to examine how they see reality. It creates a unique narrative environment where the magical and the real coexist while providing insights into everyday interactions, emotions, and the complexities of the world. The magical realism theory

considers a more thorough analysis of social, and human factors in writing by embracing the exceptional inside the normal. This research explores the use of magical realism through the portrayal of the coexistence of magical and real elements. The doors are used as magical realism, like any contemporary science fiction or classic yet mythical tales. At the point when considered with reference to magical realism, the postmodern novel gives sufficient chances to be utilized which might be relevant to the old fantasies but would function admirably in the advanced 21st-century world as science has given vast conceivable outcomes. *Exit West* by Hamid, a tale of migration and displacement, uses magic doors to represent travel and lends a touch of fantasy and allegory to the fictional arena of Hamid. These doors appear to be how different parts of the world are connected. Nadia and Saeed, two major characters in Hamid's novel *Exit West*, enter new locations through doors. Although Hamid doesn't explicitly state that these doors are magical, the environment frequently leads the reader to believe they are.

Material and Methods

The researcher adopted the qualitative approach based on the textual analysis of *Exit West* with a focus on major characters; Nadia and Saeed. The researchers individually analyzed the major characters and explored how the transformative power of magical doors affects their lives. The study examined the symbolic significance and imagery of the magical doors as they relate to the development of one's self-awareness, personality, and interpersonal relationships. The purposive sampling technique was used for selecting textual lines related to magical doors and the transformation of characters. The data for the study is the text of *Exit West* purposefully selected concerning the theoretical framework. The textual extracts connected with the major characters contribute to the analysis to reveal and interpret the text to answer the research questions. Lexical items and textual extracts have been selected from the text. Besides, the concept of magical realism serves as the theoretical framework for the critique of *Exit West* in the current research.

Results and Discussion

Magical Doors: Their Symbolic Significance

The fantastical use of magic realism in *Exit West* is demonstrated through the use of magic doors in the text that disperses characters from the familiar to the unfamiliar leaving them in a challenging world of fluidity to negotiate their identities. In the novel *Exit West*, Hamid uses doors as a metaphor for crossing boundaries that keep people in one place, as well as the freedom, chance, and fear that accompany line-crossing.

Firstly, the magical doors serve as a symbol of hope for people fleeing war-torn countries. Hamid continues to use examples to demonstrate how people from all developing nations require equal access to chances for growth. Through doors, Nadia and Saeed move to new locations. Although Hamid doesn't explicitly state that these doors are magical, the environment frequently leads the reader to believe they are. Doors served as a route of escape for the citizens of the collapsed cities. Rumors spoke about magical doors that could transport a person to another part of the planet.

"Most people thought these rumors to be nonsense, the superstitions of the feeble-minded. But most people began to gaze at their doors a little differently nonetheless." (P.42)

Except for the fact that they are consistently black in variation, they resemble ordinary doors in look. Hamid himself called them *"a portal of complete blackness, as though no light were on inside, almost as though no light could penetrate inside"*. Every door has a

destination, which can be determined (it is possible to return and tell others where it leads), but the travelers using the entrances frequently have no idea what they are trying to achieve because the section is frequently organized through intermediaries and the darkness of the entrances prevents travelers from seeing through to the opposite side. In one of his interviews with Leyshon (2016), Hamid elaborated on how he used magic doors to incorporate unreality into reality. He further elaborated in another interview with Inskip (2017) that the use of magic doors opened avenues of exploration of migrant conditions, their motives, and post-migration plight in foreign lands.

Secondly, from an otherworldly standpoint, Hamid's doors frequently offer deadly and illegal means of action. The news in the novel makes it clear that there are many methods by which people can smuggle others away from dangerous situations and into more secure locations. For instance, a vehicle was discovered in England with 39 dead Vietnamese people inside it that was believed to be a truck packed with experienced travelers. So Hamid portrayed magical doors in a sense to focus on what lies on the other side of the world.

Thirdly, the magical doors are used paradoxically to serve as a boundary between the East and the West. This novel juxtaposes the two different worlds; the West a utopia, civilized, logical, and developed, while the East is a dystopia, uncivilized, illogical, and underdeveloped. Moreover, in *Exit West*, technological progression is addressed by magical doors. They offer temptations to the people from the underprivileged regions to go across the borders of the developed countries through deliberate choices. Thus, doors are a source of negotiating choices and futures for the characters. They connect the East and the West, the local and the global, and, the known and the unknown (Sulter, 2017). In doing so, Hamid decolonizes cultural spaces creating room for accommodation and acceptance by using doors as a mockery of the differences, gaps, and borders. They link and join, rather than, divide and rule.

Initial Portrayals of Major Characters

Nadia

Nadia, one of the major characters of the novel, is initially projected to be a fiercely independent woman. By choosing to live alone, dressed in a style that expresses her individuality, and riding a bike, she defies traditional norms. According to textual lines, her personality is described in this way: "It is a self-customized emblem of her personality, one which also grants her operational Integrity in public contexts." (pp. 5-6)

Her appearance questions cultural norms and gender identity expectations. Based on the circumstances of the novel, it is unexpected that she typically wears black robes and a flowing cape, which distinguishes her from other people. Her attire reflects her rejection of consistency and desire to affirm her character. Additionally, despite what she seems like, Nadia's reality is unexpected. Throughout the novel, it becomes obvious that her action to wear black robes makes her "resist the claims and expectations of the world" (p. 45). In another place in the text, her daring personality is portrayed as "She learned how to dress for self-protection, how best to deal with aggressive men and with the [aggressive] police [...] and always to trust her instincts about situations to avoid or to exit immediately." (pp. 18-19). Overall, her cyclical personality arc demonstrates how she has evolved and changed in a society marked by conflict and displacement.

Saeed

Saeed's character is initially distinguished by his restrained behavior and devout mindset, but as the narrative progressed, these qualities started to reduce and his religious identity became uncertain. Nadia gets the feeling that Saeed is a devout man who might pray regularly based on his beard. But when Nadia questions him, he admits to having an artificial religious identity as "you don't say your evening prayer?" and he replies: "Not always. Sadly" (p. 2). "They were dressed in accordance with the rules on dress and he was bearded in accordance with the rules on beards and her hair was hidden by the Rules on hair, trying not to be seen while trying not to look like they were trying not to be seen." (Hamid, 2017, p. 83)

Saeed demonstrates a strong sense of empathy and compassion for other people. He pays close attention to the feelings and difficulties of others around him and offers consolation and assistance. His personality develops and transforms further as the story progresses in light of the challenges and changes he faces.

Transformational Role of Magic Doors

Mysterious black doors transport the major characters from one country to another, from one culture to another. The magical doors serve as a metaphorical tool that shapes Nadia and Saeed's personalities as they traverse a world marked by widespread war. As they move from one country to another as refugees, Nadia grows more and more excited by the changes they encounter and eventually embraces the new setting with the multicultural world of transient networks. On the other hand, Saeed takes refuge in himself and looks for ways to while Saeed withdraws into himself and tries to search for the journey back to his native culture. Nadia and Saeed travel to Mykonos first before leaving their country, and during this experience, Nadia comes across the "passage" as a feeling "both like dying and like being born" (pg.104). This allegory of resurrection, or the death and the renewal depicts the transformation resulting from migration.

Nadia's Character Transformation

Nadia begins the narrative as a person who defies convention and goes against cultural expectations. She has evolved into a rebel who isn't scared to explore the unknown. These qualities inside her are emphasized by the doors. Nadia's bold personality enables her to quickly adapt to the unpredictable world created by the doors. She moves smoothly through diverse environments and social situations, involving the doors to freedom. The doors stimulate her desire for freedom and opportunity, enabling her to redefine her identity outside the bounds of her moderate society.

"Together in this group they conversed in a language that was built in large part from English, but not solely from English, and some of them were in any case more familiar with English than were others. Also, they spoke different variations of English, different Englishes, and so when Nadia gave voice to an idea or opinion among them, she did not need to fear that her views could not be comprehended, for her English was like theirs, one among many." (pg.148)

This is a representation of the committee that Nadia is a member of while she is residing at the exiles' mansion in London. The council comprises many people from the region of Nigeria or from outside this region. She also learns that these people are a mix of cultures and that English becomes a language they can use to communicate with each other. Being "one among many" appeals to Nadia because it embodies the energizing feeling of development and change she has always sought throughout her life.

Saeed's Character Transformation

On the other hand, Saeed begins as a disciplined and thoughtful person who has a solid foundation from his upbringing. Saeed's character changes as he passes through the doors. He reveals himself to be more adaptable, accepting change and the weaknesses that come along with it. He is exposed to other societies, people, and interactions as a result of using the doors more than once, which forces him to challenge his prejudices and presumptions. Through these encounters, Saeed develops into a more liberal and compassionate person, letting go of his underlying insecurities and embracing the chances that lay beyond the doors. Their relationship changed a lot while staying in London and working in a refugee work campus.

Saeed and Nadia's Mutual Relationship

Nadia and Saeed's relationship is shaped and transformed by the magic doors because they place them in unfamiliar and challenging circumstances, forcing them to face the realities of their new lives and make adjustments for the developments that take place both within them and between one another. As it is obvious from the textual lines:

"So it was with Saeed and Nadia, who found themselves changed in each other's eyes in this new place. 9pg.186)"

Nadia and Saeed discover that they can now see one another despite spending their days apart and seldom speaking at night. Migration seems to affect their intimacy. Saeed adjusts to his new surroundings through prayers and Nadia does so through acceptance of the many changes that have taken place in their lives. Such changes may not be judged on the scale of right and wrong. They are a part of the fluidity of identity in the postcolonial and postmodern world. Nadia and Saeed set for Marin, a city in California after their months-long stay in London. This is a crucial turn in the relationship between Nadia and Saeed. Nadia's desire for Saeed starts to wither away due to her instantaneous attraction to the Mykonian girl. In general, magical doors in *Exit West* serve as catalysts for self-awareness and growth in both Saeed and Nadia. They investigate the challenges, setbacks, and incredible opportunities presented by the doors, developing their personalities.

Conclusion

The text-based analysis of *Exit West* reveals the significant role of magical doors in shaping the course of the plot and the actions of the characters. The magical doors serve as a metaphorical tool for addressing the discussion point of real and imagined boundaries. They stand for compassion for individuals leaving countries with wars by providing a chance for opportunity and a better life. The doors also discuss the difficulties of moving and the dangers of using illegal means of transportation. Additionally, the mysterious doors serve as a boundary between East and West, contrasting multiple territories and testing ideas of a just and oppressed community. They discuss an approach for fostering societal connections and resolving any local and global problems. The innovative imitations of cutting-edge borders, according to pundits, highlight their disruptive character and the need for greater understanding and cooperation.

The analysis also looks into the research question of transformation and fundamental representations of the major characters, Nadia and Saeed. Nadia is described as a fiercely independent woman who rejects social norms, whereas Saeed initially exhibits restrained behavior and passionately tight convictions. Whatever the case, their interactions with the enchanted doors cause profound changes in both their relationships

and personalities. The mysterious doors play a crucial role in the development of Nadia's personality providing her the ability to accept the strange, respond to various situations, and redefine her identity outside the confines of her traditional home and surroundings. On the other hand, the doors force Saeed to confront his prejudices and expose him to fresh social structures and ways of communicating, leading to a transformation into a more forgiving and adaptable person. The second research question focused on the relationship between the characters and the symbolic function of the magic doors in the narrative. Their interactions with the doors have a significant impact on Nadia and Saeed's relationship. The entryways put them in unfamiliar and challenging situations, forcing them to face the realities of their new homes and to adapt themselves accordingly. The doors serve as catalysts for development and consciousness, shaping each person's relationship and propelling them down their paths. This analysis highlights the significance of the supernatural doors in the narrative. They stand for confidence, boundaries, and the revolutionary power of transfer. The last research question sought the views of the characters about the doors and their conformity with the social norms. The protagonists discover the complexities of a world divided by conflict and exclusion through the doors as they go through a process of self-awareness. Instead of merely serving as enchanting doors to the developed realms, the magic doors help the protagonists readjust their notions and identities in relation to their changing contexts.

The witty writing of Hamid challenges readers to reflect on the impact of boundaries, the fluidity of personality, and the value of association and compassion in a society affected by migration and change. The current paper adds to the scholarly debate on Hamid's narrative techniques and invites future researchers to explore contemporary fiction through the lens of magic realism.

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