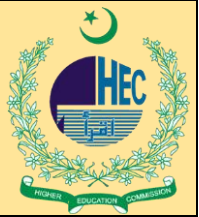




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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16931341>**Negotiating Reality and Fantasy through Magical Realism in Suleikha Snyder's *Big Bad Wolf*****Yashfa Karamat**

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zainabliaqat6469@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The current research aims to study how Suleikha Snyder's Big Bad Wolf uses magical realism to tell a story that's both deeply imaginative and powerfully political. By blending the real world with the supernatural think werewolves, psychic powers, and shadowy government forces Snyder doesn't just entertain; she exposes the harsh realities faced by those on the margins of society. Through the lens of magical realism, the novel transforms the figure of the 'Big Bad Wolf' into something far more complex: not just a monster, but a symbol of resistance, trauma, and survival. Drawing on theories of magical realism, as well as postcolonial and feminist thought, this thesis explores how the novel challenges our ideas of identity, justice, and power in a world shaped by U.S.-led global dynamics. Snyder's use of the fantastic isn't about escape it's about seeing the world more clearly, and imagining new ways to live and fight back. Ultimately, this study argues that magical realism in Big Bad Wolf is a tool for truth-telling, giving voice to those often silenced and reimagining what it means to be monstrous in a broken world.

Keywords: Magical Realism, Suleikha Snyder, Big Bad Wolf, Political Allegory, Postcolonial Criticism, Feminist Theory, Identity, Resistance, Trauma, Monstrosity, U.S. Hegemony, Speculative Fiction.

Introduction

Magical realism has always fascinated readers and scholars alike because of its unique ability to make the impossible feel intimately real. It creates a space where everyday life meets the extraordinary, offering not only storytelling beauty but also a powerful way to explore deeper social, cultural, and political truths. Two key figures in shaping this genre are Franz Roh and Salman Rushdie, whose contributions still influence how we understand magical realism today.

Franz Roh first coined the term "magischer Realismus" in 1925 to describe a movement in German art that blended grounded, realistic scenes with a strange and often unsettling twist. His

work was about more than visual aesthetics it invited audiences to question what lies beneath the surface of ordinary life.

On the literary front, Salman Rushdie transformed magical realism with his groundbreaking novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), using myth and fantasy not only to tell a story but to challenge historical narratives, explore identity, and critique political systems. Rushdie once described the genre as "a literary style that combines myth and reality," highlighting how it helps reveal the complexities of identity and the blurred boundaries between what is real and what is imagined. This study steps into that same space the tension between reality and magic and uses it as a lens to explore Suleikha Snyder's novel *Big Bad Wolf*. Snyder's work takes place in a dystopian version of the United States, shaped by authoritarian rule and constant surveillance an unsettling but believable reflection of real-world fears. Yet at the heart of this hyperreal setting stands a werewolf, a character straight out of folklore. This bold combination of the real and the unreal invites us to think critically about how stories can mirror our world while bending its rules.

Though Snyder is best known for her contemporary and erotic romance novels, *Big Bad Wolf* marks a significant shift. She holds onto her signature themes of inclusivity and representation but steps into new narrative territory, merging political commentary with fantasy. Her use of magical realism doesn't just serve the story it makes a statement. It allows her to speak about race, power, oppression, and identity in ways that are vivid, engaging, and deeply resonant. That's the space this research aims to explore.

Background of the Study

Suleikha Snyder's voice as a writer is shaped by her experiences as an immigrant living in the United States, and that perspective gives her a distinct lens through which she sees and portrays the world. In *Big Bad Wolf*, we see how she channels that lens to imagine a version of America that's not so far from our own one dominated by fear, control, and deep-rooted inequality. But she doesn't stop there. Instead of sticking strictly to realism, she brings in elements of the fantastical, like her werewolf protagonist, to create a layered metaphor for what it means to be "othered," hunted, and feared in today's political climate.

Snyder's background in film and television is evident in the cinematic quality of her storytelling. Her world-building is immersive, her characters complex, and her narrative pacing gripping. But more than just storytelling flair, these tools help her reveal the emotional and psychological truths of her characters how they fight, survive, and push back against systems that want to erase them.

While most of Snyder's earlier work revolves around themes of love and self-discovery, *Big Bad Wolf* takes a darker, more politically charged turn. Yet even in this new space, she stays true to her commitment to writing stories that reflect marginalized voices and lived realities. The novel doesn't use magical realism as a way to escape real it uses it to sharpen our understanding of it. The magic isn't a distraction; it's a spotlight.

This study places Snyder's novel within the broader tradition of magical realism, especially as it has evolved into a tool for political resistance. By blending fantasy with truth, Snyder follows in the footsteps of other writers who use the genre to speak out against injustice and bring hidden tensions to the surface. Her story, while fictional, resonates with very real fears and hopes especially for communities that have felt the weight of exclusion, surveillance, and systemic violence.

In exploring *Big Bad Wolf*, this research aims not only to unpack the layers of magical realism in the novel but also to show why those layers matter. It's about understanding how fiction can reflect and challenge the world we live in and perhaps help us imagine a better one.

Statement of the Problem

Wolves have mostly been considered a sign of cruelty, power, and a show of strength to the weaker ones. While in some cultures, wolf is considered a sacred animals, playing the roles of protection and defense for them. But recent works have proven that the original notion of wolves as being “big” and “bad” has not changed a lot i.e. in the filming of “Secret Life of Pets 2” and “Frozen”.

Mainly as a stereotype, wolves are used in scenarios where there is oppression and bloodshed. But in here the title suggests literal as well as symbolic meanings of itself. The researcher is trying to address the significance of the title being magically realistic itself. As the “Big Bad Wolf” is concerned with the character of Joe being a werewolf, who is a soldier and another perspective of the title is that the adjectives of “big” and “bad” are referring to the authoritarian regime in the United States.

The researcher is trying to address the significance of the title and the story being a duet of magic and reality; where both are conveying a strong message. Another aspect of this theory is to explain the complexities of political oppression and featuring the politics indirectly in order to save the image of the writer and saving himself from falling into complex circumstances. A similar example to this is Mohsin Hamid's book “The Last White Man” where he has explained the concept of political oppression in a hidden and at the same time open way, as the audience understood the concept and he was not held accountable directly for it.

Significance of the Problem

This research matters not just because it's exploring something new, but because it offers a deeper way of understanding *Big Bad Wolf* a novel that has more to say than meets the eye. While some discussions have touched on the story's political symbolism, very few have looked at how the magical and the literal work together in the narrative. That's where this study comes in. By focusing on magical realism and how it functions within the story, this research opens up a fresh, more complete way of reading the novel.

Looking at both the literal and symbolic aspects side by side is important because they work hand-in-hand. The presence of a werewolf, for example, isn't just there to create drama or fantasy it serves a purpose. It represents something deeper: fear, power, otherness, and how people who are seen as “different” are treated in society. If we only focus on the fantasy, we miss the message. And if we only read it symbolically, we ignore the creative choices that bring the story to life. This study treats both sides with equal weight, allowing the novel's layered meanings to shine through.

Magical realism itself is a genre that doesn't like to be boxed in. Although it's most commonly linked with Latin American literature, its roots go back to early 20th-century Germany, where Franz Roh first described it as a way of seeing the world that mixes the ordinary with the strange. It's also a genre that's often misunderstood or lumped together with others like fantasy or surrealism. Here, the concept of family resemblance from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein can help us see why. Genres often overlap, sharing similar traits, even if they aren't exactly the same. That's part of what makes magical realism so complex and so interesting to study.

By placing *Big Bad Wolf* within this broader conversation, the research does more than just interpret one novel it also contributes to ongoing debates about how genres are defined and how they evolve. More importantly, it shows how magical realism can be a powerful tool for critique. It gives authors like Snyder a way to talk about real-world issues like authoritarianism, systemic racism, and the fear of the “other” in ways that are imaginative but also sharply relevant.

So, this research isn’t just about unpacking a genre or interpreting a story it’s about understanding how fiction can help us process reality. It highlights how magical realism can be used as a form of resistance, giving voice to those who are often silenced and shedding light on the forces that shape our world. In that way, it makes *Big Bad Wolf* not just a compelling novel, but a vital part of today’s political and literary conversation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore, understand and prove the theme of magical realism and the combination of magic and reality, both being supposed under the same title and in the same plot in this novel.
2. To study the depiction of the proverb “*Big Bad Wolf*” and the need to put in the character of an actual werewolf in the story, presenting the supposed surveillance in the United States.

Research Questions

1. The researcher tends to investigate how the author has explained the theme of magical realism in the novel?
2. The researcher tends to investigate what might be the possible depiction of “*Big Bag Wolf*” from the ongoing political crisis in the “US-led” world?

The first research question focuses on how the author employs magical realism, blending fantasy with reality to highlight deeper meanings in the novel. The second question explores the symbolic role of the “*Big Bad Wolf*” as a metaphor for fear, power, and dominance. Together, both questions link literary techniques and symbolism to contemporary political crises shaped by a US-led global order

Scope and Limitations

The theme of magical realism is rather contemporary and has emerged in the late 20th century and onset of 21st century, but the scope of this theme seems to have a greater possibility as more controversial issues are arising and people are trying to find ways in order to express themselves but are quite frightened to boldly present such themes regarding politics, leadership, imperialism and authoritarian regimes around the world, keeping in view, the audience’s interest in the genres of fantasy but a staunch need to educate them on the steaming political issues and leadership defects in the world nowadays.

The touch of magical realism in a topic, which can be originally bizarre and ordinary, becomes more interesting and eye-catching. As to most readers, the theme of politics is not very catchy and does not get them indulged into reading, so blending it with a juicy theme of magic and fantasy really helps indulging the readers and making the story more appealing to the readers. This is limited to people having a taste for fantasy thrillers and readers who enjoy reading content such as magic presented in order to express criticism on contemporary rule and rulers, rather supposed or depicted from real life scenarios.

Literature Review

Suleikha Snyder is an Indian-American author known for her contemporary and erotic romance novels, who later expanded into speculative fiction with *Big Bad Wolf* (2018, Carina Press; 2021, Sourcebooks Casablanca). Her career reflects a commitment to inclusivity and representation, especially of marginalized identities, both in love stories and in politically charged narratives. Snyder's background in film and television contributes to her cinematic writing style, where strong characterization and vivid world-building are central. With *Big Bad Wolf*, she took a decisive step into paranormal romance and magical realism, weaving in commentary on state violence, surveillance, and identity politics. The novel has gained popularity among diverse readerships, especially within romance and speculative fiction circles, for its ability to reimagine the werewolf archetype not as a predator but as a victim of systemic oppression and trauma. Readers and critics alike have praised the novel's bold fusion of romance, fantasy, and political allegory, positioning Snyder as a distinctive voice in contemporary magical realism (Jürgens & Hackett, 2017).

At its core, *Big Bad Wolf* engages with themes of identity, resistance, trauma, and love. Joe Peluso, a werewolf created through state experimentation, symbolizes the marginalized subject who is both feared and hunted by authoritarian systems. His "monstrosity" becomes a metaphor for racialized otherness and the way societies manufacture threats to justify control. Neha Ahluwalia, a psychologist and lawyer, provides a human perspective that bridges the rational and the supernatural, embodying the feminist ethic of care and resistance. Through their relationship, Snyder explores how love functions as political resistance, echoing Audre Lorde's notion that care itself can be a radical act. Thematically, the novel critiques surveillance and state violence, with agencies like the Supernatural Regulation Bureau standing in for real-world institutions such as ICE or Homeland Security. It also challenges myths and archetypes, subverting the traditional "Big Bad Wolf" into a figure of survival and resilience. Snyder's narrative blends postcolonial, feminist, and psychoanalytic concerns, revealing how magical realism can be used to critique authoritarianism and to reframe monstrosity as a site of empowerment. Ultimately, the novel highlights that survival, community, and love remain possible even under systemic oppression, making *Big Bad Wolf* a powerful contribution to contemporary speculative fiction.

Theoretical Framework

Magical Realism and Postcolonial Theory

The literary category of magical realism accommodates extraordinary elements that appear fully integrated within the normal reality to provide extensive thematic opportunities. The framework showcases ten important authors together with their literary contributions which have molded and defined the features of magical realism. Each writer's approach to magical realism will be analyzed regarding their thematic elements along with their combination of fictional and realistic elements and their impact on wider discussion about the genre.

Postcolonial literature bonds closely with the concept of magical realism because this literary style directly opposes conventional historical explanations and understanding of national identity together with dominance systems. Magical realism serves postcolonial theory as an alternative method to recreate colonial history through fantasy-realism fusion which establishes areas for unheard marginalized voices to speak and develop new identity representations. The paranormal components in *Big Bad Wolf* function to dismantle conventional societal rules while

changing relationships among both characters and between the characters and the supernatural world.

The werewolf functions as a marginalized creature that faces social ostracism from human populations and supernatural groups thus representing postcolonial themes about identity crises along with displacement. Through their magical properties the novel upsets conventional social systems which enables characters to face their social roles for redefinition. Through its incorporation of magic the book challenges ordinary reality because it questions hegemonic norms which attempt to confine their understanding of reality.

Feminist Theory and Magical Realism

Feminist theory demonstrates how magical realism represents gender through its analysis and understanding. The female lead in *Big Bad Wolf* usefully demonstrates how the novel dismantles social norms regarding gender roles while she survives the dangerous yet male dominated werewolf society. Magical realism receives feminist analysis which examines women's paths toward power while protecting their agency through situations that try to push them into marginalization. This werewolf-female relationship transforms romantic dynamics because women demonstrate independence instead of being passive objects during relationships.

As per feminist readings of magical realism the dominant boundary between reality and fantasy transforms into something new. Through its magical realism *Big Bad Wolf* enables the female lead character to break free from societal expectations which then demands her to question both her notions of empowerment as well as her sense of self. Through magical elements intersecting with the real world the protagonist acquires the power needed to overcome gender stereotypes that enable her to determine her destiny.

Psychoanalytic Theory

The psychological examination within psychoanalysis provides both statements about unconscious behaviors of story characters and insights into hidden desires and fears that magical realism reveals. The wolf form of the protagonist functions metaphorically to show the internal battle between primal desires and cultural rules within his unconscious mind. The dual nature of werewolves between human and animal state represents the fundamental opposition between the id and superego elements of human personality structure according to psychoanalytic principles.

The mirror stage theory from Lacan demonstrates how identity formation happens when people interact with the external world according to his perspective. The main character uses her connection with the werewolf to undergo self-discovery through which she identifies her hidden wants along with her growing apprehensions and boundaries. Magic realism enables us to study psychological depths by connecting extraneous changes with psychological transformations in the mind.

Empirical Studies on Magical Realism

Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981) are often regarded as quintessential examples of magical realism, seamlessly blending supernatural events with Latin American socio-political realities. In contrast, Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982) and *Of Love and Shadows* (1984) emphasize the intersections of personal and political histories in Chile, where magical devices such as ghosts, clairvoyance, and telepathic powers underscore themes of love, revolution, and social upheaval. Jorge Luis Borges, with works such as *Ficciones* (1944) and *Labyrinths* (1962), introduced a more philosophical and

metaphysical brand of magical realism, presenting paradoxes, endless libraries, and shifting dimensions that question the boundaries between illusion and reality. Laura Esquivel in *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989) and *The Law of Love* (1995) employed magical realism to portray Mexican community life, uniquely conveying emotions through culinary enchantments that affect those who consume the food prepared by her characters. Toni Morrison, in *Beloved* (1987) and *Song of Solomon* (1977), deployed ghosts and supernatural forces to capture African American memory, trauma, and the haunting legacies of slavery, while Haruki Murakami, through novels such as *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) and *1Q84* (2009), interwove Japanese tradition with Western narrative styles to depict surreal parallel worlds, dreamscapes, and miraculous events. Michael Ende, in *The Neverending Story* (1979) and *Momo* (1973), blurred the lines between the ordinary and the fantastical, while Miguel Ángel Asturias pioneered Latin American magical realism with *El Señor Presidente* (1946) and *Men of Maize* (1949), drawing upon indigenous myths to critique corruption and injustice. Similarly, V. S. Naipaul in *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) merged magical and mythological elements with realism to navigate the complexities of postcolonial identity and cultural dislocation.

Building on these diverse traditions, contemporary fiction continues to use magical realism as a vehicle for interrogating identity, power, and resistance. Suleikha Snyder's *Big Bad Wolf* embodies this continuity while recontextualizing the genre in a global, postcolonial, and feminist framework. Snyder integrates supernatural motifs with everyday struggles, casting her werewolf protagonist as a metaphor for marginalization and systemic violence, while weaving themes of love, trauma, and identity formation into the narrative. Unlike the classic Latin American or African American traditions of magical realism, Snyder's text introduces a unique fusion of romance, political allegory, and speculative fiction. This extension illustrates that magical realism remains dynamic, evolving beyond regional origins to articulate new anxieties of globalization, authoritarianism, and representation. Yet, despite the breadth of scholarship on canonical figures like Márquez, Allende, and Morrison, there is a notable research gap concerning how magical realism operates within contemporary romance fiction and speculative narratives such as Snyder's. The limited critical attention to her work highlights the need to examine *Big Bad Wolf* not only as a popular romance but as a significant text that broadens the scope of magical realism, integrating feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic dimensions into its thematic core.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research has been widely defined as an approach that seeks to understand human experiences, meanings, and social realities through non-numerical data. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." Similarly, Creswell and Poth (2018) describe qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions that explore a social or human problem, building a complex, holistic picture by analyzing words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the study in a natural setting. Flick (2018) further emphasizes that qualitative research focuses on the "meanings, interpretations, symbols, and processes" through which individuals and groups construct reality, privileging depth and contextual insight over generalizability.

In this study, the adoption of a qualitative and interpretive approach is justified because the central aim is not to measure variables numerically but to examine how texts, symbols, and

political discourse convey meaning. Quantitative designs would be insufficient to capture the nuanced ways in which magical realism, symbolism, and political allegories are embedded in literary works such as Suleikha Snyder's *Big Bad Wolf*. By working interpretively, the researcher engages with texts as cultural artifacts, uncovering layers of meaning that reflect identity, trauma, resistance, and power. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of how narratives function within broader socio-political and historical contexts, making qualitative research the most suitable method for analyzing the intersection of literature, politics, and culture in this study. The methodology is divided into two parts. The first focuses on literature specifically how magical realism is used in the novel under study. The second looks beyond literature, exploring how a symbolic figure like the "Big Bad Wolf" operates within modern global politics, especially as it relates to the power and influence of the United States. Each part is explained in detail, from how the data will be collected to the specific tools used to interpret it.

Part I – Magical Realism in the Novel

Research Question 1: How has the author explained the theme of magical realism in the novel?

Research Design

To understand how magical realism works in the novel the research relied on qualitative literary analysis. This means reading the text closely not just for what it says, but for how it says it. The researcher looked at the language, structure, and imagery the author uses to blend the real and the magical.

The approach is hermeneutic, a methodology of interpretation. The goal isn't just to describe what happens in the novel, but to understand what it *means*, especially in its cultural and political context.

This method is well suited to exploring how:

1. Magical elements are integrated into otherwise realistic settings.
2. The narrative structure helps communicate deeper social or historical meanings.
3. Characters and settings reflect the real-world struggles of postcolonial identity.

Data Collection

The main text is selected because of its strong use of magical realism. The analysis is supported with secondary materials, including:

1. Scholarly articles on magical realism.
2. Books and essays on literary theory.
3. Interviews with the author (if available).
4. Historical or cultural background relevant to the novel's setting.

Academic databases like JSTOR, Project MUSE, and Google Scholar are used to access peer-reviewed resources.

Analytical Tools

The study explored the theme of magical realism from three main angles:

Narrative Techniques

I look at how the author tells the story what kinds of language, imagery, and structure they use.

Magical realism often involves:

1. Describing supernatural events in a completely normal, matter-of-fact way.
2. Combining myth, legend, and folklore with daily life.
3. Using non-linear time or cyclical storytelling.

Thematic Analysis

I focus on the deeper messages and recurring ideas within the novel, such as:

1. The legacy of colonialism.
2. The tension between tradition and modernity.
3. Cultural survival and resistance.

Postcolonial Literary Theory

The research used ideas from postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak to understand how magical realism serves as a form of resistance how it pushes back against Western ideas of what is “real” or “true,” and gives voice to marginalized perspectives.

Why This Approach Works

Magical realism isn't just a storytelling style it's a political act. It questions dominant ideas about logic and history by presenting an alternative worldview. To truly understand what the author is doing, we need to consider both the textual features of the novel and the context in which it was written. This combination of close reading and cultural analysis is essential for grasping the power and purpose of magical realism.

Part II – The “Big Bad Wolf” as a Political Metaphor

Research Question 2: What might the figure of the ‘Big Bad Wolf’ reveal about the ongoing political crisis in a US-led world?

Research Design

This part of the research shifts from literature to politics, asking how a cultural figure like the “*Big Bad Wolf*” becomes part of political storytelling. This research use critical discourse analysis and symbolic interpretation to study how the image of the wolf is used especially by or against the United States to create fear, justify military action, or reinforce global power structures. The focus is on how language and imagery work together to shape public perception of threat, power, and morality.

Data Collection

The study used a wide variety of sources, including:

1. Political speeches, especially those from U.S. presidents post-9/11.
2. Media coverage of global conflicts from outlets like CNN, Al Jazeera, and BBC.
3. Political cartoons, films, and popular culture.
4. Academic texts on propaganda, ideology, and American exceptionalism.

This gives me a broad view of how the “wolf” metaphor operates across platforms and contexts.

Analytical Tools

This analysis draws on three key methods:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA helps me explore how power and ideology are embedded in language. This research use frameworks from scholars like Norman Fairclough to look at:

1. How threats are framed (e.g., “evil”, “uncivilized”, “monstrous”).
2. How certain countries or groups are constructed as dangerous.
3. How political leaders use simplified stories like heroes and villains to justify action.

Symbolic and Semiotic Analysis

This paper look at the “*Big Bad Wolf*” not as a character, but as a symbol. What does the wolf represent? Using theories from Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, it examine:

1. How the wolf signifies danger, deception, and savagery.

2. How the metaphor is adapted for different political needs (e.g., to label terrorists, rogue states, or dissenters).

Psychoanalytic and Myth Criticism

The wolf has deep roots in human storytelling. From fairy tales to horror films, it often plays the villain. Drawing on ideas from Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, it explore how this archetype taps into our fears and how those fears are manipulated in political rhetoric.

Why This Approach Works?

In today's media saturated world, symbols carry as much weight as facts. The "*Big Bad Wolf*" metaphor simplifies complex global issues into moral dramas, making it easier to justify foreign policy decisions. By studying how this figure is used in political discourse, we can understand how power maintains itself not just through weapons or laws, but through stories.

Ethical Considerations

This study uses only publicly accessible materials speeches, books, news reports, and so on. This study approach each source respectfully and critically, aiming to understand the structure of argument, not attack individuals or ideologies. The researcher tried to avoid speculative or conspiratorial interpretations, and all analyses are backed by credible academic theory. Where possible, it present multiple viewpoints to keep the study balanced and fair.

Validity and Reliability

Since this is a qualitative study, its strength lies in depth rather than generalization. The validity was ensured by:

1. Using a wide range of sources.
2. Clearly explaining my theoretical and analytical choices.
3. Cross-referencing themes that appear in both literary and political contexts.

While my interpretations are subjective, they are always grounded in theory and supported by evidence.

Limitations

Every research project has limits, and this one is no different:

1. Cultural interpretations may vary what one reader sees as satire, another may take literally.
2. The study focuses on specific texts and examples, which means it doesn't claim to represent all uses of magical realism or political metaphors.
3. As the researcher perspective influences how to read the material. But by being transparent about my methods and frameworks, the author work to maintain academic integrity.

To conclude, this methodology is designed to explore how stories and symbols shape both literature and politics. On one hand, it looks at how magical realism challenges dominant worldviews through fiction. On the other, it examines how metaphors like the "*Big Bad Wolf*" are used in real-world political narratives to justify power and control. By combining literary analysis with political discourse study, this thesis shows how narrative devices whether in novels or on the news play a crucial role in shaping how we understand identity, power, and danger in a globalized world.

Data Analysis

Reimagining Monsters and Meaning in Suleikha Snyder's Big Bad Wolf

Introduction

When reading *Big Bad Wolf*, it quickly becomes clear that this is not just another paranormal romance. Suleikha Snyder is not merely crafting a love story; she is weaving a layered narrative that uses supernatural tropes to interrogate deeply human struggles identity, oppression, and resistance in a fractured sociopolitical landscape. This chapter addresses two guiding research questions:

1. How does the author express the theme of magical realism in the novel?
2. How might the “Big Bad Wolf” symbol reflect the current political crisis in a U.S.-led global world?

These questions allow us to examine how Snyder’s novel functions both as a literary artifact and a critique of political structures. Magical realism, as employed in the novel, is not ornamental it becomes a subversive device to expose inequality, reimagine justice, and explore the trauma of being “othered” in an authoritarian society.

Section I: Magical Realism in *Big Bad Wolf*

Making the Unreal Feel Real

Magical realism introduces fantastical or magical elements into realistic settings without disrupting the narrative logic. According to Wendy B. Faris, in such works, “the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but is often cloaked in the ordinary” (Faris 7). Snyder’s universe adheres closely to this framework. Vampires, shifters, witches, and werewolves exist not as anomalies but as parts of society though frequently relegated to its margins.

Joe Peluso, the central character and a werewolf, embodies this magical realistic paradigm. He is not mystical in a folkloric sense but is a product of state experimentation and military violence. Snyder writes, “They made him a monster, then punished him for becoming one” (*Big Bad Wolf* 22). Joe’s identity reflects Frantz Fanon’s theorization of the colonized subject as “constructed through violence” (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*). His werewolf nature is a metaphor for the state’s racialized constructions of threat.

Setting and Atmosphere: The World as It Could Be

The world Snyder constructs mirrors post-9/11 America, steeped in surveillance, militarization, and systemic control. Supernatural beings or “paras” exist under a state regime that polices their existence through bureaucratic violence. The Supernatural Regulation Bureau (SRB) and the Emergency Service Unit Watch (ESUW) are uncanny stand-ins for agencies such as ICE or the Department of Homeland Security.

Here, Snyder’s use of magical realism serves to amplify political realism. As Homi K. Bhabha argues, colonial systems depend on the “fixing” of identities as different or dangerous (Bhabha 66). In Snyder’s world, the presence of magic does not obscure the real it lays bare the institutional fear and marginalization of otherness.

Neha Ahluwalia: Rationality Meets Magic

Neha, a human psychologist and lawyer, functions as the reader’s conduit between the ordinary and the magical. Her profession signifies logic, legality, and order, yet her relationship with Joe leads her into the heart of the supernatural. Her perspective reveals the social construction of monstrosity. As she observes, “He wasn’t a beast. He was a man-made monstrous by circumstance” (*Big Bad Wolf*). This reflects Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s assertion that “the subaltern cannot speak” unless given language by those in power (Spivak 271). Neha’s voice, then, becomes a medium for re-humanizing Joe.

Neha's layered identity as a woman of color, a professional, and a lover positions her at multiple intersections of power and vulnerability. Bell hooks, in *Feminism is for everybody*, notes that "feminism is for everybody who is oppressed," including men dehumanized by militarization (hooks 54). Neha's capacity to love Joe not in spite of his trauma, but in recognition of it highlights the feminist ethic of care as political resistance.

Narrative Style and Literary Devices

Snyder's prose weaves lush description with internal monologue, alternating between Joe's visceral voice and Neha's grounded rationality. The dual perspective not only enhances character development but supports the magical realist texture of the narrative.

Recurring motifs from fairy tales, particularly the "*Big Bad Wolf*," are central to Snyder's project. These inter-textual references perform a semiotic inversion. As Umberto Eco explains, "myths work through codes that a culture establishes" (Eco 14). Snyder re-signifies the wolf: he is not a predator but a protector, not a villain but a veteran. This subversion destabilizes dominant narratives of criminality and violence.

Section II: The Big Bad Wolf as a Political Metaphor

Deconstructing the Wolf Myth

Western mythologies have long cast the wolf as a symbol of predation from Little Red Riding Hood to The Three Little Pigs. Snyder draws on this archetype only to radically reinterpret it. Joe is the "*Big Bad Wolf*," but Snyder interrogates the source of his "badness." As Neha questions: "Who made him big and bad?" (*Big Bad Wolf*). The answer is systemic violence specifically, the state.

Joe's transformation from soldier to shifter is not heroic; it is traumatic. He becomes, to borrow Judith Butler's terms, "a grievable life rendered ungrievable" by the apparatus of state power (Butler, *Frames of War* 20). He is both created and condemned by the very forces meant to protect him.

State Violence and Surveillance

Set in a post-2016 political climate, Big Bad Wolf offers a dystopian vision of a nation spiraling into authoritarianism. Snyder's depiction of the U.S. government's treatment of paras evokes real-world immigration bans, anti-Muslim legislation, and the rise of white nationalism.

Joe lives under surveillance not for what he does, but for what he is. The institutional logic follows what Norman Fairclough calls "ideological discourse" language and policy that normalizes social inequality (Fairclough 56). Snyder writes, "They didn't want to understand him. They wanted to cage him" (*Big Bad Wolf*), invoking the language of incarceration, dehumanization, and racial profiling.

Neha, as an Indian-American woman, is not exempt. Her visible difference renders her suspicious. Her love for Joe becomes a subversive act an intimate rebellion against a system designed to divide.

Third Shift and Underground Resistance

Third Shift, a clandestine resistance group, functions as the novel's moral center. The group unites various supernatural beings shifters, witches, vampires across lines of historical animosity. Their shared marginalization mirrors real-world coalitions like Black Lives Matter and pro-immigrant sanctuaries.

This alliance also reflects Antonio Gramsci's idea of the "organic intellectual" those within marginalized communities who create new ways of understanding and resisting domination

(Gramsci 10). Through Third Shift, Snyder imagines an alternative political reality based on solidarity and mutual protection.

Section III: Themes and Interpretations

Identity and Intersectionality

Identity in *Big Bad Wolf* is fluid and contested. Joe's wolf form was imposed upon him, yet it becomes the lens through which society defines and disciplines him. This echoes Stuart Hall's conception of identity as "a production, always in process" (Hall 392).

Neha's multifaceted identity immigrant, woman, professional, lover illustrates Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, wherein overlapping systems of oppression produce unique experiences of marginalization. The novel does not treat identity as static but as a battleground of public perception and private self-understanding.

Love as Resistance

Love in Snyder's novel is not apolitical. Neha's refusal to pathologize Joe's trauma or fix his brokenness is radical. Snyder writes, "She didn't want to fix him. She wanted to love him, even when he broke things" (*Big Bad Wolf*). This aligns with Audre Lorde's assertion that "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde 37). In *Big Bad Wolf*, romantic love becomes a site of political reclamation.

Trauma and Healing

Joe and Neha are survivors of different kinds of violence state, cultural, personal. Their journey is not one of redemption but survival. Snyder resists tidy resolutions. Instead, she offers what psychoanalytic theorist Cathy Caruth calls "a history that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly" (Caruth 11). Healing in *Big Bad Wolf* is slow, relational, and incomplete a realistic portrayal of trauma recovery.

Conclusion: Why This Story Matters Now

In *Big Bad Wolf*, Suleikha Snyder uses magical realism to confront, rather than escape, political reality. Through the reimagining of the "*Big Bad Wolf*," she interrogates how societies construct threats, discipline bodies, and weaponize fear. The novel subverts dominant myths, challenges authoritarian logic, and ultimately reclaims monstrosity as a site of power and love.

By blending fantasy with urgent social commentary, Snyder joins a tradition of authors like Toni Morrison and Gabriel García Márquez who have used magical realism to reframe trauma and resistance. In an era of resurgent nationalism and systemic violence, *Big Bad Wolf* reminds us that monsters are often made, not born and that even in the darkest narratives, love remains a revolutionary force.

Conclusion

"Monsters" Who Resist: Love, Power, and the Politics of Being Seen in Big Bad Wolf

While analyzing Suleikha Snyder's *Big Bad Wolf*, It is expected to find a clever twist on the paranormal romance genre. What is not anticipated was how much this book would speak to our world to the anxieties, injustices, and hopes that shape our everyday lives. This thesis set out to explore two main questions:

1. How does *Big Bad Wolf* use magical realism to express its deeper themes?
2. What does the figure of the "*Big Bad Wolf*" represent in the context of a U.S.-led global political crisis?

In the section leading up to this conclusion, the author explored how Snyder builds a world that feels both strange and eerily familiar a place where supernatural beings are surveilled,

registered, and hunted by the state, and where love itself can be a radical act. This final section brings everything together by reflecting on the key themes and characters discussed, and by considering why this story matters not just as fiction, but as a mirror to the world we live in.

Magical Realism as a Lens for Truth

Magical realism has long been a genre that blends the fantastical with the political. Think of Gabriel García Márquez's haunted banana plantations or Salman Rushdie's children born at the stroke of independence. Snyder brings this same energy into *Big Bad Wolf*, but she applies it to a world of shapeshifters, vampires, and genetically modified soldiers.

What makes her approach so powerful is that the magic never feels like an escape from reality. It feels like a deeper dive into it.

Joe Peluso, the novel's central werewolf figure, is not magical in a whimsical sense. His abilities are the result of trauma, violence, and state experimentation. He is a product of war a soldier turned fugitive, carrying the weight of what the government did to him and the monster they now claim he is. But here's where Snyder flips the script: she doesn't ask us to fear Joe. She asks us to understand him.

Neha, his love interest and moral compass, represents the everyday rational world law, psychology, structure but she too becomes swept up in this space where magic and reality blur. Her groundedness helps the reader navigate a story that refuses to draw clean lines between "real" and "unreal." And through their relationship, we begin to see that the magic isn't in the superpowers. It's in the act of choosing love and connection in a world that dehumanizes you.

The "Big Bad Wolf" Reimagined

If there's one symbol that defines this book, it's the wolf. For centuries, the "*Big Bad Wolf*" has been shorthand for danger the thing lurking in the dark, the predator that must be hunted. Snyder takes that familiar figure and turns it inside out.

Joe isn't "bad" because of what he is. He's been labeled a threat by a government that created and abandoned him. This resonates deeply with the real-world treatment of so many marginalized groups especially Black, brown, and immigrant communities who are branded as dangerous, criminal, or untrustworthy before they're even given a chance.

This wolf doesn't huff and puff to destroy innocence. He's running for his life, hunted by a system that refuses to see his humanity. When Neha chooses to help him then love him she's not "taming the beast." She's rejecting the state's narrative of fear.

In this way, the "*Big Bad Wolf*" becomes more than a fairy tale. He becomes a metaphor for anyone who has been cast as the villain simply for existing outside the rules. He's the refugee, the whistleblower, the racialized "other." And Snyder's choice to let him survive, love, and fight back is a radical rewriting of what it means to be monstrous.

Surveillance, Resistance, and the Politics of Belonging

One of the most chilling aspects of *Big Bad Wolf* is how closely its fictional world resembles our own. The surveillance systems, the mandatory registration of paranormals, the idea of "safe zones" that are anything but it's all uncomfortably familiar. You don't have to be a werewolf to feel the tension Snyder is describing. You just have to live in a world where your identity can be used against you.

Snyder draws clear parallels to real world policies: the Muslim travel ban, the targeting of immigrant communities, the surveillance of political activists. The Supernatural Regulation Bureau (SRB) might be fictional, but its tactics are ripped from today's headlines.

And yet, within all of this, Snyder offers resistance. Joe finds shelter in Third Shift, an underground network dedicated to protecting paranormals. It's a nod to sanctuary movements past and present, from the Underground Railroad to modern immigration shelters. These aren't just plot devices they're reminders that solidarity is always possible, even in the darkest moments.

Neha's decision to leave behind her structured, law abiding world to help Joe is a quiet revolution. It's a refusal to be complicit in a system that punishes vulnerability and difference. Their relationship doesn't just challenge the state it offers an alternative to it: a vision of community rooted in care, not control.

How Snyder Tells the Story: Voice, Structure, and Style

The way Snyder tells this story is just as important as the story itself. Her writing is layered with emotion, sharp political observation, and biting humor. The alternating perspectives between Joe and Neha allow us to sit with two very different experiences one shaped by violence and betrayal, the other by order and skepticism.

Snyder doesn't ask her readers to pick a side. Instead, she lets us live in the tension between perspectives, which is where real empathy happens. Her use of metaphor especially the monstrous as a metaphor for marginalization is subtle but powerful. And her incorporation of myth, folklore, and horror tropes turns familiar symbols on their heads.

There are no passive damsels or clear villains here. Everyone is complicated, shaped by systems bigger than themselves. That complexity is part of what makes the novel so rewarding to study.

Why This Story Matters Now

In a world increasingly defined by surveillance, polarization, and fear, *Big Bad Wolf* feels painfully relevant. But it's also a deeply hopeful book. It doesn't pretend that injustice doesn't exist it shows it in sharp detail. Yet it also insists that connection is possible. That love is political. That monsters can be more honest than the systems that hunt them.

For readers today, Snyder's novel is more than just entertainment. It's a reminder that stories have power to challenge dominant narratives, to humanize those who've been dehumanized, and to imagine a future where we're not defined by the worst things that have happened to us.

Where Do We Go From Here?

This thesis focused specifically on *Big Bad Wolf*, but the themes it raises power, identity, resistance, surveillance are echoed across many works of speculative and genre fiction. There's room for more research into how paranormal romance and magical realism function as spaces for political critique, especially in marginalized communities.

Questions worth exploring might include: How do queer or trans identities get coded in supernatural narratives? What do other cultures' versions of "monsters" reveal about local political anxieties? Can magical realism offer not just critique, but healing? Snyder's novel opens a door. It invites us to step through it and keep asking questions.

Suleikha Snyder's *Big Bad Wolf* isn't just a story about werewolves and secret powers it's a story about what it means to survive in a world that constantly tries to silence and erase people who don't fit into its narrow norms. By using magical realism, Snyder blends the fantastic with the painfully real, showing how people on the margins immigrants, women, people of color navigate systems built to control and dehumanize them.

The novel takes the familiar image of the "*Big Bad Wolf*" and flips it on its head. Instead of a mindless villain, Snyder's wolf is thoughtful, hurt, angry, and deeply human. He becomes a

symbol for anyone who's ever been labeled "dangerous" just for existing. This isn't just about monsters; it's about how society creates monsters out of people who resist, who don't conform, who dare to fight back.

Throughout the novel, magic isn't an escape from reality it's a way to see it more clearly. Snyder's use of the supernatural lets her tell truths that are often ignored. Her characters carry trauma, but they also carry strength. They find community, love, and moments of joy even in a broken world. And in doing so, they imagine new ways of living, loving, and surviving.

What makes *Big Bad Wolf* so powerful is that it doesn't shy away from the hard stuff violence, injustice, grief but it also doesn't lose sight of hope. Through postcolonial and feminist lenses, the novel pushes us to question who gets to tell stories, who gets to be the hero, and what it really means to be free.

In the end, Snyder reminds us that sometimes the monsters we fear aren't the ones with claws and fangs they're the systems that dehumanize. And sometimes, becoming a "monster" is the most human response to a world that refuses to see your humanity.

Final Thoughts: When Love is Resistance

In the end, *Big Bad Wolf* is a story about people who aren't supposed to exist who are hunted, feared, misunderstood and what happens when they fight back. It's about how deeply personal choices who we love, who we trust, who we protect can be acts of rebellion in a world built to suppress difference.

This novel doesn't offer easy answers. But it gives us something more valuable: a space to feel, to reflect, and to hope. And in times like these, that's its own kind of magic. At its core, *Big Bad Wolf* by Suleikha Snyder is a story about survival messy, painful, tender survival in a world that doesn't make space for people who don't fit. It's a novel that asks us to look beyond the surface, beyond the labels of "monster" or "criminal" or "other," and consider the deep, human stories behind those identities. What happens when a person is pushed so far to the margins that they become myth? What does it mean to love or be loved when the world tells you you're unworthy of it?

In *Joe and Lena*, Snyder doesn't give us perfect heroes. She gives us broken people who are still trying to heal, to trust, to fight, to live. Their connection is raw and real, born from shared pain and the small, stubborn hope that something better might still be possible. Through them, Snyder shows us that love isn't just a romantic escape. It's an act of resistance a choice to believe in someone when the world doesn't, and to find beauty in the wreckage.

What makes this novel linger is how honestly it reflects the world we live in, even while it cloaks itself in fantasy. The werewolves and psychic powers might be fictional, but the fear of being hunted, profiled, or erased is all too real. Snyder weaves those realities into her storytelling with care and fury, reminding us that monsters aren't always who we expect and that sometimes, the people we're told to fear are the ones we most need to hear from.

There's something deeply powerful about how *Big Bad Wolf* reclaims the fairy tale. Instead of the traditional narrative where the monster is slain and order is restored, Snyder lets the "monster" live. Not just live but speak, feel, and fight back. That decision alone is revolutionary. After finishing this thesis, what stays with the author is the emotional weight of that reimagining. It asks: who gets to survive the story? Who gets to be loved, even when they're scarred? And who gets to write the ending?

Snyder doesn't offer easy answers, but she does give us a new way to see through the eyes of the feared, the forgotten, the fierce. And that, perhaps, is the real magic of this novel: it makes space for voices we're too often taught to silence. It reminds us that even the "big bad wolf" has a heartbeat and a story worth telling.

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