Magical realism and Metafiction in the novels of Susan Sontag

The dissertation examines, *The Benefactor*, *Death Kit*, *The Volcano lover* and *In America* the novels written by prolific American author Susan Sontag. Susan Sontag has been a major figure in the intellectual life of United States. Her writings are engaged with a wide range of political, aesthetic and cultural issues. The most widely read intellectual of her generation, Susan Sontag’s trajectory from the early 1960s to today has been a highly public one. Susan Sontag's literary career began and ended with works of fiction but it was as an essayist that Sontag gained early fame. She wrote four novels in the experimental narrative style. Combining all genres, Sontag has in fact adopted the styles of Magical realism and metafiction.

Magical realism is an aesthetic style of fiction in which magic elements are combined with the real to encompass the political cultural and other untold realities. With the combination of ordinary and extraordinary events to co-exist, Magical realism allows multiple realities to exist, which would not have been possible otherwise. The present research project investigates the novels of Susan Sontag, who has presented the extra ordinary events of life as ordinary, to depict a higher state of self using images and metaphors. Sontag tries to capture the mystery that exists behind things. Magical realism and metafiction share some of the common elements and concerns such as, the textualization of the reader discussing theory of fiction while practicing it, using irony, metaphor etc.

The novels combine real and imaginary and blur the boundary between the two. More than that, the novels of Susan Sontag also include real life personages from history and actual historical events. But Sontag does not depict history as it is; she has combined history with fiction to suggest that even writing of history is a fictional act. This combination of history and fiction is called historiographic metafiction, the term coined by Linda Hutcheon. Thus, while employing Magical realism and metafictional strategies, Sontag has tried to familiarize the unfamiliar. As Magical realism and metafiction are postmodern styles so we can conclude that the novels of Susan Sontag also exemplify some of the popular elements of postmodernism such as magic realism, metafiction and historiographic metafiction. The first chapter of the thesis analyzes the terms of magic realism, metafiction and historiographic metafiction taking into consideration the historical background and
the cultural influences the terms have undergone. Working from that basis, the chapter two of the thesis discusses *The Benefactor* written by Susan Sontag. The novel uses dreams, self-reflexivity, imagery and intertextuality as well. As these are the features common in Magical realism and metafiction

The third chapter of the project investigates the blurring of the real and the imaginary in *Death Kit*, the second novel written by Susan Sontag. The fantastic events occur exactly at the same level which are convincing in real life.

The fourth Chapter examines Susan Sontag’s next novel *The Volcano Lover*. The novel is a wonderful fusion of concrete and the conceptual. Part history, part fiction, the novel is perfect example of historiographic metafiction.

The fifth Chapter of the thesis examines, *In America* the last novel written by Sontag. The novel is an exhilarating journey into the past. The novel depicts the story of Poles who migrate to America to experience the New World. Combining Magical realism and metafictional strategies, the novel also depicts political upheaval of Poland at that time.

In the sixth chapter of the thesis, I conclude that Magical realism and metafiction have become highly popularized styles in the postmodern literature. Using Magical realism and metafiction, Susan Sontag has tried to open up the hidden realities, the untold and unexplored past and she has been very successful in doing that.