CHAPTER V
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Limitation of the World of Magic: As If By Magic (1973)

As If By Magic (1973) is Wilson's seventh and second-longest novel and it marks a return to his earlier style after the vastly experimental one of No Laughing Matter. The focus is, once again, on the family, but this time it is on two individuals only.

The first storyline revolves round Hamo Langmuir, a scientist of repute—a geneticist who has developed a magic rice hybrid which is supposed to bring about an agricultural revolution, especially in the Asian countries. He travels to the East to see for himself the result of his experiment. He is accompanied by his laboratory assistant, Erroll Watlon, who has been drawn along the lines of Sam Weller and Sancho Panza whereas Hamo is Frodo and Don Quixote. A homosexual, this visit to the East also marks Hamo's search for the dream youth. The East is also an eye-opener to him as the humanist in him is shocked to recognise some inherent evil in himself. Ironically, he meets his death at the hands of a mob in Goa while trying to explain to them the limits of his experiment.

The other part of the story concerns Alexandra Grant, Hamo's god-daughter, and a student of English Literature at the University. Like Hamo, she also goes off to the East in search of a hero and a 'magical' solution to life's problems. Having a child out of wedlock after indulging in sexual 'tripling' with her two student lovers—the awkward, intuitive Ned and the elegant, mocking Rodrigo, she joins a hippie commune in India but cannot find the elusive peace.

These two stories are made to overlap each other rather abruptly when, towards the end, Hamo and Alexandra are made to face each other. In a scene reminiscent of Dostoevsky's The Idiot, she runs to Hamo and proposes marriage. Significantly, in
their attempt to 'belong', both these outsiders, Hamo and Alexandra, learn from their experiences that there is no magic potion to happiness and success. 'Magic' can offer no solution whether it be scientifically, sexually, or otherwise. Alexandra wisely learns that the world of literature is fictive and life cannot be judged from this angle.

The book is written in long, carefully constructed set pieces and divided into two chapters with an epilogue, each moving at its own leisurely pace marked by climaxes and farces.

In Book One, Hamo prepares for his visit to the East to see for himself the fertility yield of his 'magic' hybridized rice. Only here, at the beginning, Wilson brings Hamo and Alexandra together at the home of the latter's parents – a scene which sets off the first of many parodies concerning the Idiot motif.

Alexandra and Hamo do not get off well. She tears up the £100 notes he gives her and presents him with a handsome pair of binoculars saying, 'Frodo had the ring on his journey, but Hamo's eyes aren't quite upto that. Magic glasses will have to do. So that you'll be able to see things more clearly wherever you go'. (86) [emphasis added]

Ironically, the magic glasses do not help Hamo to see things 'more clearly' in the East. As will be seen, these glasses, instead of helping him, bring him disillusionment and cause the death of a Sudra boy to whom he presents them. As the boy attempts to see an American girl in meditation at the beach through his glasses, he is killed pathetically by other peeping toms. Hamo's clumsiness on the lines of The Idiot is apparent here as he falls down and breaks the Nymphenburg Harlequin of Zoe, Alexandra's mother:
But Hamo had caught his foot in the long folds of Alexandra's coat that swept the ground, he tottered, fell full-length, and clutching at a small Louis Quinzelable, brought it to the ground with him and, with it, Zoe's Nymphenburg Harlequin .... (84)

Alexandra Grant and her friends at the University come across as representatives of the contemporary youth - the youth of the sixties attracted towards life's bright lights and yet beset with the doubts and dilemmas of the period. Her great fault is that she lives in the world of literature all the time. As she herself says,

'You see I live all the time with a little game inside myself'. (83)

Trying to bring the fictitive into the real world is her bane. 'The Angry Young Men' typified by Perry, father of Alexandra, and a novelist by profession, are also mocked at by Wilson. Perry professes to be writing a novel 'that's something to do with real life and real people ...' but, ironically, he fails to appreciate Alexandra's need at the time. Lack of understanding about their daughter's impending motherhood drive her to run away from her home. She tries to find a solution to her problems by rejecting her moneved background first through sexual, then maternal, and meditative means.

Book Two titled 'The Journeys' encompasses the journey of Alexandra in search of a hero and that of Hamo in search of a dream - youth. The maternal instincts aroused in her at this time is admirable. This desire to escape from 'their beastly conventional bourgeois abortion' (104) makes her seek out the privacy of a hotel in a Northern Town. This escape along with the growth of the embryo in her womb symbolises for her 'shedding the three centuries of blind rationalism, of empty
humanism, she was experiencing a new way of feeling ...' (106). Confusion at this time is natural, and rampant and calls forth the marshalling of all her wit and 'animal senses'. Desiring to live her own life, and looking for outside mental support, she moves about among relatives but her expectations are belied. With Martin, the friend of her uncle Leslie Grant, she seems to have bridged the generation-gap. But he, too, leaves her with a cheque for £100 appreciating her though, on standing up for herself. The tearing up of the cheque is only expected and it reminds us of Alexandra's first meeting with Hamo when she had torn up the same amount he had gifted to her. We sympathise with Alexandra as she laments,

'... But where to go next? And this bloody cheque for £100. Always bloody cheques! And there was no one, no one to go to, no one to talk to about all her plans for the baby and how she would care for it and how it would grow up (as she had hoped to do with Leslie) ...' (118)

Thus, it is no wonder that she feels more alienated. The generation gap is once again all too apparent especially as Alexandra prefers to call her parents 'Him and Her'.

In Hamo's travels around the world with his 'population saving new miracle', Wilson presents, in illuminating ways, the interaction of several cultures. Even as he moves from Tokyo to the Phillipines, to Ceylon and finally, to India where he attains true enlightenment, the distances bridged are not only geographical but also generational. This is also reflected in Alexandra's story.

Hamo's stay in Tokyo also gives us a fine glimpse into the traditions and ways of the Japanese. His search for the dream-youth sometimes gets too tedious and disgusting coming as it is from a scientist of repute. In the Tokyo bar, he sees three of the Most Beautiful Youths in the world and after his 'meeting' with one of them, he
deserts him but not before 'tucking a pile of yen under the boy's shoulder'. Leaving money as compensation seems to be Hamo's forte and it re-inforces the suggestion that sometimes, money is not adequate to solve human problems. He learns of the evil inherent in acts of benevolence. Bernard Sands in Hemlock And After stood aghast at the discovery of 'evil' in his character after seeing a man arrested for soliciting. Likewise, Langmuir discovers 'evil' in the geisha party at a Tokyo brothel in the way the distinguished persons conduct themselves and at the 'pederastic orgy' of the elderly, distinguished European 'Uncles'. These 'Uncles' hide the true homosexual nature of their club through acts of benevolence towards native boys. All of them are caricatures of persons inhabiting a Peter Pan World, and are so very different from Hamo who, though a homosexual, stands out for his dedication to the alleviation of human suffering through his scientific discovery. The scene where the chief 'Uncle', a Dutch Jonkheer, inaugurates the birthday proceedings of a boy with 'a cannonade of farts like a ceremonial salute', is farcical to the extreme and the comment of the French 'Uncle' who treats this act of grotesque vulgarity with an air of utmost seriousness, speaks well for Wilson's adroitness with the comic-pedantic vein:

'... No. But really. This is quite extraordinary. One so easily forgets the deeply traditional quality of the Dutch noblesse. The cheap Paris-Match image of the house of Orange has obscured it. Something of this kind must have been the customary honouring of a favourite page by the Jonkheer's ancestors of the fifteenth or even, one may venture, the fourteenth century ... completely delightful!' (Book 2, 162)

Something of this complacent pederasty of the 'Uncles' is also reflected in Hemlock and After where Eric, former lover of the novelist Sands, is picked up by a clergymen
whose crudity gets more pronounced when set off against Sands' distinguished bearing.
In the face of such complacency, it is no wonder that Hamo feels claustrophobic:

Looking about him, Hamo was conscious of real dislike, almost hostility in the eyes of his hosts; and indeed, they practised their own precepts, for in their worship of the truly boyish they had rid themselves of every conceivable trace of vestigial youth - skins were leathery, necks bulging, stomachs vast, everything aimed towards a geriatric magnificence; even Mr. Derek Lacey's thirty-five-year-old face and body were disguised under layers and layers of carefully acquired corpulence. In this company, Hamo was aware that his disciplined, lean figure was an ephebic insult. (Book 2, 168)

Hamo's search for his dream youth is marked by a series of farces and parodies. Like Prince Myshkin in The Idiot, his search is set off by a series of comic falls. The more Hamo tries to look and act dignified, the more pathetic is his fall. Unable to bring himself to participate in the 'games' the party was playing, Hamo tries to escape into the shrubbery of the bungalow and into the jungle but stumbles and falls:

... he stumbled on a half-buried rock and fell, arse over tip, deep into a stone hollow. Then, with his breath for a moment beaten from him, he rolled over painfully two or three times, suddenly, strangely to feel the firmness, the smoothness of another human body beside him. He opened his eyes to see two wide frightened dark eyes turned towards him with jungle alertness. There beside him on the sun-baked rock lay what seemed to him the most
perfect, the most desirable youth he had ever encountered, chest 30, hips 35. The measurements and lineaments of Hamo's ideal are sufficiently well known ... (173)

The humanitarian scientist in him gets worked up at the amount of work still to be done, '... The stillness, above all made him remember, with a desperation that shocked him, how much work he still had to do, how much of that work needed now rethinking, and surely, too, there must be some hopes of pleasure, undiscovered before death closed in ...' (172) But for much of Book 2, Hamo's eminence as a scientist is unbalanced by his erratic pursuit which is at once both idealistic and physical, of the elusive 'Dream Youth' who will exactly conform to his specifications of age and physique. His next 'misadventure' with this dream-youth is also parodied and our sympathy towards hin is eroded even as he is described as Hamo 'the Chap who's Always on a Charge, the Clumsy Idiot of the Remove'. (178)

Alexandra who has given birth to Oliver at Tangier seems to have achieved her 'nirvana':

She certainly had no thought of its being the Garden of the Golden Age – all the golden ages were inside herself or in the movements and cries of little Oliver as she watched him sleep and yawn, feed and sleep, cry and play. Surrounded by those still seeking her nirvana and utopia, ecstasy and bliss, she alone seemed to have arrived. (183)

Revelling in her newly acquired status of motherhood helps her to relieve herself of her moments of confusion and chaos, helps in fact, the three of them (Rodrigo,
Ned and herself) to 'escape from the dilemma into which their frivolous, happy, ironic adventure into half-magic had led them'. (193)

Alexandra's feeling towards the small Moroccan children whom she feeds along with Oliver is humanitarian. When Rodrigo cautions her against feeding Oliver with the same spoon, she says, 'But Roddy, you don't object to that pinchy faced Louise's baby or those Swiss children with the scabby legs'. (194)

Incidents like these which appear to be superficial are, nevertheless, important for their insight into Alexandra's character. As is evident, she is 'growing' up to the gradual realization that 'we aren't protected by magic'. In the commune where she lives with Ned, Rodrigo, and Elinor, an American student, whose ambition is to rise above the body through Eastern techniques of meditation, Alexandra's increasing normalcy is signalled by her declaration in the face of the others' quarrel, that 'I won't have my baby mixed up with all this emotional rubbish'. (189) Warning her about the commune being a 'treacle well' and that mere reaction against 'middle-class taste and awfulness' isn't enough, Rodrigo, 'an uptight misfit' among the hippies returns to England to work for Hamo's great-uncle, the tycoon Sir James Langmuir. Alexandra moves on to Goa, Ned joins her as his much appreciated mime troupe is wanted there by the hippie community, and Elinor's earnest desire is to learn from a much revered influential guru, know as the 'Austrian Swami'. This highly grotesque and enigmatic physical figure also represents another aspect of the 1960's - a confused age's search for 'magic': the pursuit of occult knowledge, 'Lemurian' or 'Athantean' wisdom, associated with prehistoric sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury in England and Msura in Morocco. Often, in that age, the adolescent's search for self-identity led him into such pursuits. But Alexandra's views of the Swami as 'at least three quarters charlatan' stands as opposed to the more tolerant view of him taken by Wilson. In the Epilogue the Swami refuses to be overpowered by the power-hungry Sir James
Langmuir into letting his gifts be exploited. The Swami 'could doubt at times how much he knew, but he always believed that he had these powers in trust'. (406)

Alexandra's perception of the world is divided into 'bullies' (such as Sir James Langmuir and even Rodrigo) and 'scroungers' (the Swami, to some extent and the members of the hippie community in Morocco who kill three goats for their skin which unfortunately, are the livelihood of the local people). Hamo's 'Magic' is highly successful in all the Third World Countries he visits. It has been a phenomenal success in Ceylon where 'Hamo saw it all and it was very good'. In the Ceylon fields magic had worked '... where H₄ had only partially succeeded, Langmuir's brainchild had conquered. The house that Hamo built stood firm...' (278) No wonder 'he was conscious of a lordship, of his tall figure (the Lodger, let them call him) who had brought to these small people the sturdy dwarf rice that they needed ...' (278) But detecting in his travels, 'a high, distant overtone of perpetual, desperate woe. Could it be the natural noise of the world, as he began to fancy ?', Hamo realises that even 'magic produces its own problems of prosperity ...' (227) Hamo's sound disturbance recalls the echo Mrs. Moore hears in the Marabar caves. Getting distracted from the technicalities of his work which was his first concern, Hamo becomes obsessed with 'living conditions, starving poor, exploited masses' and his critical comments in newspapers on the evil effects of landlordism in India stir a hornet's nest. The unfortunate result is that the newspapers carry the shrewdly misprinted report :

'Go home, Homo, we don't need your homilies or your
homespun theories'. (299)

Ironically, Hamo's search for the dream-youth continues even in Borneo, Ceylon, and India leaving behind casualties of 'magic'. His misadventure in Ceylon with 'the Fairest Youth he had Ever seen : 5'9" in height, waist 24, hips 35, chest 30...' (230-
31) ends in the dislocation of the Youth from his 'home', and Hamo having to leave the Jayasekeres' house in disgrace. He had deceived the latter with a mistaken identity of Dr. Malcolm. The pro-British Jayasekeres see in Dr. Malcolm the excellent 'magical' opportunity of revisiting England. As Hamo is swimming in the Sea, he is in danger of being pulled under by poisonous seaweed but is saved by one of the dispossessed young men from 'hopeless lands', impervious to Hamo's, 'magic'. Ironically, Hamo's clumsy struggles leads to the drowning of the boy. Another youth, 'not fair' but thin and ill, to whom Hamo gifts his binoculars as 'part of a necessary redemption from his past self', (338) is killed by; 'jealous peeping toms and anti-western vigilantes' when he misuses the 'magic' glasses to spy on the naked hippies on the beach at Goa. The East-West misunderstanding syndrome is stressed when the boy mistakes Elinor's meditation exercises for the sensual movements of lust. Sadly, this syndrome is further stretched when she undergoes multiple rape. The scene is all set for the climax as a storm is brewing among the Catholics, the Muslims, and the Hindus over all these unnatural events darkly attributed to the Swami and his followers. In the agricultural field, the poor people who had all awaited the arrival of their rice god to deliver them from poverty are up in arms against the authority who, they feel, are holding 'Him'.

Influenced by the boy's death, Hamo, meanwhile decides not to submit a bland report on his tour that his superiors would prefer. Instead, what he proposes is a 'change of programme': the postponement of research on sorghum (for Africa) in favour of the production of new hybrids suitable for the 'hopeless lands' - a long term effect which would benefit more people and which would, definitely be a demonstration of humanity and goodwill superior to large-scale profits. Overhearing a conversation in a hotel in Mysore, he decides to undertake the risk-laden return to Goa, to face the rioting people and tell them of his failed experiment and of his proposed plans for the future. In his action, Hamo recalls both Bernard Sands and Gerald Middleton who also try to redeem themselves towards the end. But whereas Bernard is successful,
mostly through his wife's efforts, and Gerald is also re-involved in his professional life, Hamo's efforts to bring his magic home to the poor of the undeveloped countries are not successful in the least. His binoculars are returned to him after the death of the youth which fills him with disillusionment that both as an individual and a scientist, he has failed. In trying to explain to the crowd whose language he does not speak, he meets a violent death which, in some ways, is akin to a ritualistic sacrifice also having an element of atonement.

Just before his death, he meets Alexandra who seeing him banging furiously on the reception desk with the inkwell breaking into pieces, once again presents him like Myshkin. Espying Hamo standing there looking angry, she 'knew at once that he was the piece that she had been unconsciously seeking all those months in order to make sense of everything. And yet he remained, totally ridiculous ...' (362) Like Aglaia Ypanchin, she proposes marriage to Hamo, for a moment heterosexualising him. Her thin urchin, waif-like appearance for a moment, weakens Hamo but he rejects the thought of marriage with her as another muddle. His words to Alexandra show the tremendous change in him, for the better:

've all been my fault. Magic, that's the rice I hybridised, has put a lot of people out of work and others can't grow it on their poor lands and so they've been ruined ...' (363)

We realise that Hamo has come a long way from being the undivine clown to being the divine idiot. At this point, all our sympathies are for him even as we mark the absence of parody in these scenes of Hamo's remorse. Like Prince Myshkin who is all grace even in his idiocy, and with remorse, asks for forgiveness from Burdovsky, Hamo also, in his final moments, rises above the ordinary.
As Jai Dev says, "... whether adapted for suggesting a contrast or comparison, the Idiot motifs in As If By Magic serve Wilson well in his characterization of Hamo Langmuir. Remaining amenable to both a negative and a positive interpretation as they do, these motifs also serve as an integrating device in the novel. To the extent that the novel is Alexandra's story, the motifs enable Wilson to first calmly describe and then ironically deflate her tendency to fictionalize life and people. In playing up the thin identification which she establishes between Hamo and Myshkin, the narrator mimics her tendency, while at the same time stressing the inversion and contrast Hamo presents vis-a-vis Prince Myshkin ...!

Alexandra's absurd rescue of the Swami from the fanatically religious crowd on the lines of Toad and Pancks once again reveals her dependance on English literature. The Swami is in danger of being mauled by the angry crowd. Alexandra, acting on Elinor's behest to come out of her cocoon of non-involvement, mercifully remembers the stories of Toad and Pancks at this moment. She asks Ned to engage the crowd in dancing and then dresses up the Swami in a woman's garb transforming him through make-up into a garishly dressed, ridiculous figure. Just as the crowd is temporarily engaged in laughing at the sight, Alexandra slips away with the Swami.

For her, it is a long journey from a university graduate whose cult lies in Tolkein, Dostoevsky and Dickens to a mature, confident woman of the world who can declare to herself: '... enough of superstitious imagining. A story is a story, even a good one like The Lord of the Rings'. (377) Elinor had rightly charged her with a 'sort of false calm', a 'kind of animal peace, the detachment of the cow concentrating on its udder', (357) which is akin to a malaise of the self. After her brave rescue of the Swami and subsequent actions to fulfill Hamo's request to the authorities in London for a more benevolent policy towards the Third World, she more than substantiates her re-involvement with the world. Hamo's thought for 'the desperate poverty of the Indian
farm labourers' (387) has left its deep impact on her. Ironically, all his cheques of £100 to the Youths come back unopened. She destroyed them thinking '... his ships come home with a vengeance. She saw him as Mrs. Edgerton had described him, singing and splashing in the bath, surrounded by floating paper ships. And they had all sunk ...' (390) After the sudden death of Sir James Langmuir of a heart attack, Alexandra becomes Shaw's millionairess, 'a fictive device'. But in her new-found resolve to reach out to people, she decides on pulling down Langmuir House and build in its place a number of apartment blocks to be leased out to people who live and work in that area. She tells Rodrigo,

'... But, at least, I shan't stand away from them and call them ordinary. And they won't be cadgers either. I've seen enough of that on beaches, cadging and violence. But don't you see, Roddy, it's all I can to fight the Sir Judases, the bullies. Just to use their weapons, their market prices against them and all the wicked rubbish. I haven't any creative gifts like Hamo, and I don't want to create utopias or chaos, and I can't grasp the helpless of Asia, that's beyond me. But this is where I do have power and I am going to use it'. (412)

But what Alexandra and Hamo have understood finally is that no magic spell can solve life's problems. Literature is just a fill-in for reality. It can never be reality or an interpretation of life. Rejecting the world of stories in favour of the practical and the real, she exclaims, 'Damn English Literature! Damn the past and the future! I have enough to do making something of the present'. (415) Thus, the title of the book As If By Magic stands justified.
As A.S. Byatt opines, the novel is a 'collapsed myth' wherein all the characters try to redeem the Waste land with fertility magic "but Hamo's death at the hands of an incensed mob is neither Dionysian nor Orphic, his body is simply a 'marionette', and the sex – magic of Ned, Rodrigo and Alexandra, designed to redeem the aridity of Birkin's failure to love both Gerald and Ursula, produces a child who is explicitly not allowed to represent harvest or fulfilment".2

Towards the end of the novel, Alexandra rejecting her son as a symbol, says,

'We've had enough of Forster's harvest predictions. Things may have turned sour for all of us, but we must not heap it all on him'. (415)

Reconciling neither opposites, nor inheriting the earth or playing with the grain, he is diametrically opposite to Helen's child in Howard's End. Ironically, Wilson's 'moral nostalgia' for Forster is strangely blurred and is rejected by Alexandra. These blurrings and confusions galore are symptomatic of our times.

Alexandra's portrait is meant to be 'the final panel of a triptych of major female characters, each at a different stage of the life cycle'.3

The lives of each one of them – Meg, Slyvia and Alexandra have been drawn along similar lines. Dislocation of a fixed pattern of life leads inevitably to a change of venue in search of a solution, but then it is followed by a period of intense confusion before balance is properly restored and the return to the world is effected. Thus, their pattern of life is similar. The only difference between Meg, Slyvia, and Alexandra lies in the author's more sympathetic presentation of the more serious and deeply felt crises of Meg and Slyvia. Alexandra's presentation is marked by a certain lack of 'felt' life.

As Kerry McSweeney comments, the ending of As If By Magic is abrupt and
hurriedly brought about with much of 'slapdash happenings'. The last meeting of Alexandra with Hamo is forced and leaves us with little doubt about the strength of the individual parts rather than the whole. The scene where Alexandra requests her godfather to marry her, influenced to a large extent by his Myshkin-like image, stresses the point that the alternating stories of Alexandra and Hamo do not reinforce each other, they would best be left to themselves. A glaring contrast is the scene in The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot where Meg and David spend their last evening together at David's home and Meg tells him her decision to move on. The reader is left with a lasting impression here as this is the climactic scene which brings to a head all that has gone before.

Though not his first work delineating youth, As If By Magic is Wilson's first novel where the entire book has been devoted exclusively to the young. The sixties as marking an age of adolescent crisis has also been revealed here. This is well reflected in what Zoe says to Alexandra, '... but then there is this feeling that the sixties have been rather disastrous and that we're glad to turn our back on them'. (381) Even failed marriages are taken 'as a sort of symbol of the fruitlessness of the sixties' (383)

The mixture of the serious and the absurd add to the uncertain tone of As If By Magic, which the Times Literary Supplement described as Wilson's 'noisiest performance so far and his least assured'. The uncertainty arises in part from the wide range of cultures and subcultures (youths, homosexuals, angry young men) and the confusions of the hero and the heroine whose moral, and hysterical quandaries stretch the readers' sympathy a bit too far. At the same time, this presentation of Alexandra's self-discovery and Langmuir's discovery of evil in the garments of farce and parody becomes essential for Wilson as he intended for them 'some kind of sense of sympathy ... a little sympathy for someone who might otherwise be rather repulsive to a number of people who might be reading the book'.

Delineation of the different cultures - Japanese, Ceylonese, and Indian has been done ably. Alexandra's experience of walking amongst an Indian crowd towards the Swami has echoes in Adela's experience in an Indian bazaar in A Passage to India. Also Elinor's dissolution of self is apparent in her speech to Ned:

'... It's probably all charlatan rubbish or it may not be. It doesn't matter. That's all meaning. Meaning doesn't matter. Only being ...' (308).

This is finely done.

The word 'muddle' mostly associated with Forster's A Passage to India, occurs in Book 2 here and refers to the novel's 'noise', consisting of long conversations and farcical scenes which again suggest the author's view of life which is that life is not only an individual's search for money, but a search for love and consequently, for communication with others.

As A.S. Byatt says, 'As If By Magic is nihilistic but it does not, like Nietzsche and Mann, open windows on blackness with a grim delight in reversals of meaning. It works by reducing everything to the ridiculous, in an intensely, inexorably, exclusively literary way. And it is not the absurd it indicates, it is simply the ridiculous. It is like an Onion consisting of allusion, parody, interpretation, imitative plot and trumped-up analogy, but an onion encasing no green growing point and putting out no roots ...'.

Though the opening fog in Book I is reminiscent of Dickens' Bleak House and symbolic of human confusion, and the closing pages ending on a note of 'commonsensical humanism' suggest a degree of authorial control and judgement, the feeling one gets after a reading of As If By Magic is that the many matters and
manners, from the topicality to the apocalyptic, have not been creditably united. There is no doubt that the ridiculous and the absurd have been taken too far in this novel which is akin to a travelogue and a fable which, in turn, make the whole world of *As If By Magic* messy.

In retrospect, *As If By Magic* is a document of our times – our concern for charity, compassion, humanity, and the like being all shams. The stories of Hamo and Alexandra and the attitudes of Sir James Langmuir and the 'Uncles' running the homosexual club behind a banner of philanthropy fully re-inforce this. In fact, our philanthropy, scientific research etc. are muddling up the basic human urge for love and sympathy. The novel is thus, representative of the vulgarities and degradation of our times, at the same time upholding false standards and suppressing all feelings.
Notes and References:


