

Magic Realism: A Genre of Fantasy and Fiction

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Abstract: *Magic Realism is identified with the genre of fantasy and magical elements in Latin American fictions. The journey of term “Magic Realism” has started from Germany travelled to Spain and then Latin America and is still continuing its journey to other parts of the world. The article is an attempt to explain the term Magic Realism and its origin, its effect on cinema and literature. The article also focuses on the strong impact of Magic Realism on Latin American Fiction.*

Key-words: *Magic Realism, Latin American Fiction*

Introduction:

“There are two friends and they are walking on the street of Manhattan in America. A red light stops them. At that time suddenly, one friend shouts and tells his friend, ‘look! Look! With pointing at the ground of the road. Other friend looks towards it but he finds nothing. Again first friend asks, “Are you seeing? Do you see?” Now this time other friend takes a good look towards it. There is nothing to look but a filthy puddle of water on the road. He goes near to this puddle and observes it. He sees a spot of oil in this puddle which is spreading in the puddle and there is a beautiful rainbow. The puddle is on the road so many people and vehicles are passing by it and these images fall in this puddle. Here person sees that the street is moving in the puddle, the people are moving in the puddle, whole world is moving in the puddle. They are in hurry. At last he speaks, “How fast they are!”

This small paragraph is the best example of magic realism. Now why? You might be thinking that where is magic realism in this paragraph? So here person has a power of vision to see something extra ordinary in small thing. Vision is the big thing and it's an element of magic realism whereas other side writer describes the reality of American society that Americans are moving here and there. They have no time for others and themselves. Here there is the fusion of magic and reality and this fusion is known as magic realism writing. Great Latin American writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez said, “My most important problem was destroying the lines demarcation that separates what seems real from what seems fantastic.” According to Gabriel Garcia Marquez the term “Magic Realism” means a narrative technique that blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality.

“Magic Realism” or “Magical Realism” is a term that has been heard by many but very few readers have a clear idea of what they may include and imply. Much of the confusion concerning their meaning has occurred due to the conflation of criticism on magic realist art and literature. In magic realism ‘magic’ refers to the mystery of life. The variety of magical occurrences in magic realist writing includes ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extra ordinary talents, vision and strange atmosphere but does not include the magic as it is found in a magic show. Conjuring

'magic' is bought about by tricks that give me illusion that something extra ordinary has happened, whereas in magic realism it is assumed that something extra ordinary really has happened. When referring to magic realism as a narrative mode, it is essential to consider the relationship of 'magical' to 'realism' as it is understood in literary terms. The term itself came into being through philosophical discussion in the mid-eighteenth century but it is related to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's concept of mimesis. Magic realism is key to the destabilization of racial and gender ideologies. Through the fusion of fantasy with realism it allows for the exploration of alternate perceptions of the world, offering different views of history and identity, and giving voice to cultural minorities. Through self-reflexivity and meta-fiction, magic realism reveals the instructive nature of language as well as its fluidity, which allows for the crucial revision of cultural ideologies. (R. Singh, 2011)

Origin of Magic Realism:

The idea of portraying real action in art was first discussed by Aristotle who claimed that the act of imitating life, or mimesis, is a natural instinct of humans. Aristotle explains the ancient Greek belief that witnessing art is an essential way to learn about the universal truth of life. For this the art itself must appear to be real to the reader or viewer in depicting something that exists. Aristotle claimed that it's better to convince the reader of the realism of something impossible rather than to be unconvincing about something that is true. The first period of magic realism is set in Germany in 1920's, the second period in Central America in 1940's and the third period beginning in 1955 in Latin America continues internationally to this day. All these periods are linked by literary and artistic figures whose work spread the influence of magic realism around Europe, from Latin America to the rest of the world. The term magic realism was first used by the German art critic Franz Roh to refer a painterly style also known as Neue Sachlichkeit. (Wikipedia)

Magic Realism in Literature:

In literature magic realism often combines the external factors of human existence with the internal ones; it is a fusion between scientific physical reality and psychological human reality. It incorporates aspects of human existence such as thought, emotions, dreams and imagination.

Magic realism is a world-wide phenomenon and because of this very fact; the geographical, historical and cultural contexts in which it has evolved are extremely diverse. There are certain features which are related with magic literature.

- The setting has a relatively specific historical, geographical and cultural context
- Post- structural style of writing
- Realty is presented as the human experience of the universe and elements such as dream and imagination are consequently present

In Magic realism literature, there is a miscellaneous use of myths, legends, fairy tales, magic, astrology, mythology, spirituality and naturally religion. Elements of the human experience of reality are often emphasized on dream, imagination, sentience, feeling and emotion.

Magic realism in Cinema:

The film “Wings of desire” is based on the lives of two angels who live over the Berlin. One of the angels Daniel, chooses to become human. The fusion of Berlin life and the magical appearance of angels produce magical realist setting.

There is also one of the fine movies titled “City of Angels” in which angel Seth falls in love with a young female surgeon, Maggie. Movie has tragic end because Seth becomes human in order to live with Maggie and same time Maggie died in road accident.

“Wonderful Life” is the best example of magic realism movie because it has all aspects of magic realistic movie. It’s a story of an ordinary man George who is struggling in a small town whereas other side there

Is an appearance of three angels named The boss, Joseph and Clarence. They decide to help George’s journey from loss of faith to belief and the acceptance of the existence of angels. In movie we can see the reality of life, American society, family, community and religion. Whereas other side the appearances of angels make movie magic realistic.

Post- modernist Magical Realism:

Two theorists Fredric Jameson and Jean Francois Lyotard provide a useful means of magic realism as postmodernist. According to Frederick Jameson postmodernism is the “attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.” A typical postmodernist view of history is that of Elizabeth Tonkin who writes that “histories are arguments created by people in particular condition.”

Salman Rushdie, one of the great Anglo-Indian writers puts his views stating that “History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as our perceptiveness and knowledge.” His “Midnight’s children” is one of the best examples of post-modernist magic realism. In this novel he retraces the Bombay and India of his own childhood not as autobiography but as cultural history. The main character Saleem, is, a child and later on adult protagonist who was born at exactly the same time that India as a nation came into being as an independent state. Therefore if we recall Jameson’s definition of postmodernist magic realism, we can see that Saleem himself is being forced to think historically through forced to think historically through the circumstances of his birth at a time when the country of India is leaving its colonial history behind and forming its own national identity.

Locations of magic realism and Latin American Fiction:

It is true to say that certain locations and countries have associated with producing magic realist writing. The Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez sets the majority of his works in a fictional town called Maconda in Colombia. The British Indian writer Salman Rushdie whose fictions are set in some of the world’s largest urban areas as London, Bombay or New York.

Magic Realism has originated in many of the post-colonial countries that are battling against the influence of their previous colonial rulers.

Magic realism in literature appeared first in early 1970s in Canada, West Africa and the United States and now spans many locations across the globe. Notable locations of magical realism are Canada, the Caribbean, West Africa, India, U.S.A. and England.

Italy became “home of Renaissance”, the same way Latin America has become “home of Magic Realism.” Magic realism is commonly associated with the geographical region of Latin America. It is a land of the great magic realist writers like Garcia Gabriel Marquez, Alejo Carpentier, Cortazar Julio, Allende Isabel whose fictions are based on the magic realism. There will be questions in our mind that what is in Latin America which encourages its writers to be magic realists? Why such an affinity for the continent’s natural landscape. The variety of terrain, from lush vegetation to high desert, its volcanos, and waterfalls are the natural elements which inspire author to write something magical.

Among all these great Latin America writers, Gabriel Jose Garcia Marquez is the greatest. He was born on March 6, 1928, is a Colombian novelist, journalist, publisher and political activist. He is widely considered to be the leading exponent of the literary style known as magical realism. His first major work was “the story of a shipwrecked sailor” which he wrote as a newspaper series in 1955. The book told the true story a shipwreck by exposing the fact that the existence of Colombian Navy vessel. His most famous magic realist novel “One hundred years of solitude” has sold more than ten million copies. It depicts the life of an isolated South American village where strange occurrences are portrayed as common place. He wrote “A very old man with Enormous wings” in 1968, and gave it the subtitle of “A Tale for Children.” This novel is the dearest and most famous example of a genre that is magic realism. There is the combination of elements of ordinary life with the elements of fantasy and magic.

The second well known Latin American writer is Mariano Azuela. His novel “The Underdogs” examines the political and historical realities in Mexico as well as the social aspects of a civil war. “War”, the main theme in this story, is supported by themes of power, social class, corruption, justice, morality and religion.

Isabel Allende is the first magic realist woman writer of Latin America. Her notable novel “The house of the spirits” is a popularization of Garcia Marquez’s style of magic realism.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that magic realism is an intimate affair between the reader and the text. As such, its future as a particular and identifiable but at the very least, discussion of magic realism during the past eighty years has opened up the debate concerning the relationship between reality and fiction, and reader’s role within that relationship.

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