

# Magic Realism

## Aesthetic Blend of Magical and Realistic Elements in Post Modern Fiction

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**ABSTRACT :** *Literature is generally understood as diversity in human and social experiences expressed through aesthetic mould. Imaginative literature, particularly, gives an insight into the lives and minds of people living in another ethos and beyond our reach. Just as a painter uses colour and line to create a painting, an author uses the elements of fiction to create a story. Postmodernists authors avoid the possibility of meaning in this chaotic world and Magic Realism can easily be understood because jumps in time and focus cannot really be explained with scientific but rather with magical reasoning. Magic Realism is an aesthetic style in which magical elements blend with the real world. Writers sought to present the mysterious and fantastic quality of reality. From the 1960s to the present there has been a strong doze of magic realism within the general movement of post modernism. Characteristics which both post modernism and magical realism share are intertextuality, discontinuity, metafiction, parody, the dissolution of character and narrative, post colonial discourse etc.*

**Keywords:** *Magic Realism, Intertextuality, Discontinuity, Metafiction, Parody, Discontinuity, Multiplicity, Hyperbridty, Mystery, Authorial Reticence, Collective Consciousness and Revolutionary Perspective.*

Literature is always a continuation; it always relates the new to the old. In the same way, postmodern fiction seems to be a continuation of modernism's alienated mood but at the same time, "where a modernist would try to wrest a meaning from the world through myth, symbol or formal complexity, the postmodernist artist welcomes the absurd and meaningless confusion of contemporary existence with a certain numbered or flippant indifference favouring self consciously depthless works of fabulation, pastiche, bricologe or random symmetrical disconnection."<sup>1</sup> Postmodernist fiction draws up into its own many elements of defamiliarisation, magic realism, parody, playfulness trickery, intertextuality, discontinuity, multiplicity, metafiction, erasure of boundaries and destabilization of the reader. Postmodernists authors avoid the possibility of meaning in this chaotic world and Magic Realism can easily be understood because jumps in time and focus cannot really be explained with scientific but rather with magical reasoning.

As M.H.Abrahms writes, "the term magic realism, originally applied in the 1920s to a school of painters, is used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the work of writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Columbia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Gunter Grass in Germany, Italo Calvino in Italy, and John Fowls in England. These writers interweave. In an ever shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with the materials derived from myth and fairy tales."<sup>2</sup> Magic Realism is an aesthetic style in which magical elements blend with the real world. Writers sought to present the mysterious and fantastic quality of reality. Professor Matthew Strecher defines magic realism as "...what happens when a highly detailed realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe."<sup>3</sup>

The German art critic Franz Roh used the phrase in 1925, to refer to a painterly style. Publication of Roh's book promoted the term magic realism in literary circles. Literary magic realism originated in Latin America Jorge Luis Borges inspired other Latin American writers and between 1940 and 1950, magic realism reached its peak. In their quest for the original Latin American novel, Latin American authors combined the theories of Roh and Bontempelli with surrealist concept of marvelous and myths within traditional mimetic convention. They seemed to support Henry James's view that a novelist and a painter "may learn from each other."<sup>4</sup> But in contrast with literature. Magical realism art often excludes fantastic and magical content. It looks at the realistic and ordinary subjects and reveals an interior mystery. The magic is contained in the viewer's interpretation of those mysterious, unseen and hidden parts of the image.

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### Main Characteristics of a Magic Realist Text

#### Metafiction

Robert Seholes has popularized metafiction for novels "which depart from realism and foreground the role of the author and reader in inventing and receiving the fiction."<sup>5</sup> It asserts that fiction is not about some other world out there but a self contained world in itself. One can think of *Arabian Nights* in this respect or recall reading Cervantes's *Don Quixote* where the telling stories is an integral part of the story itself. Metafiction also emphasizes reader's role in between. Metafiction is an element of postmodernism and one of the major aspect of metfictionality is intertextuality. It means that there is in all the text the presence, the suggestion, even the evocation of a plethora of other text. The closing

words of Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* are "we will start all over again." these words send us back full circle to the beginning. The whole novel is connected by a series of interlinked and intersection stories. In it the contemporary, the historical and the mythical are fused into a single circle. "Beginnings are not really beginnings, middles are unendurable, long and convoluted, nothing ever ends. The human monkey types the tale of his previous life as the poet Sanjay; this appears as the magic realist device."<sup>6</sup>

### Sense of Mystery

Magic realist text evokes a sense of mystery. It tends to read at an intensified level. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* contains a state of heightened awareness of life's connectedness. It has hidden meaning that is there is a "mystery that breathes behind things." It supports the claim that a writer must heighten his senses to the point of extreme in order to realize all levels of reality most importantly that of mystery. A text should have interior mystery rather than imposing external or magical features on to the everyday reality.

### Fantastic Elements

Magic realism is a kind of fiction in which fantastical and fabulous events are blend with the real world. Fantastical elements may be added with the help of fable, folk tale or myth. But these should be interwoven in the story in such a way so as to maintain story's contemporary social relevance. Nobel Laureate Garcia Marquez himself confessed in an interview that his most important problem was destroying the line of demarcation that separates what seems real from what seems fantastic. "The quality of art awakes and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought."<sup>7</sup>

### Hyperbridty and Authorial Reticence

Magic realism plot employs multiple planes of reality. These multiple planes of reality find their place in inharmonious arenas of such opposites as urban and rural, and western and indigenous. For example, if an individual experiences two realistic situations simultaneously in the same plane but during two different time periods, centuries apart, is an example of hybridity. His dreamlike state connects these two realities; this small bit of magic makes multiple planes of reality possible. On the whole, they create a deep and true, reality than traditional realistic techniques.

Authorial reference is the "...deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world."<sup>8</sup> Actually, the narrator is indifferent about all situations and events presented in the magic realist text. Reader's imagination itself grasps meaning. Their interpretation of those mysterious and hidden parts of the image would create a meaning for them. Explanation by author about the supernatural would reduce its connectedness to the natural world. As a result, the reader would disregard its supernatural as false testimony.

### Collective Consciousness and Revolutionary Perspective

Each writer gives expression to a reality without thinking of the concept of magic realism. This collective consciousness aims to observe reality found in the mundane subjects. Magic realism is an attitude on the part of the characters in the novel.

Magic realism contain a criticism of society. It has become a voice of the geographically, socially and economically marginalized. Magic realism is acknowledged by some critics as a significant decolonizing style, permitting new voices and traditions. San Guan describes the "almost hallucinatory spell of the United States fantasized as the land of affluence and immigrant success; while contrasting this fantasized eroticization with the bitter society that shatters the myth of American magnanimity in his enlightening text entitled *Beyond Post Colonial Theory*."<sup>9</sup> Colour, race, nationality have constantly remained the source of discrimination. These realistic issues are handled through the use of fantasy and magical elements. Magic realist texts, under this form, are revolutionary against socially dominant forces. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* becomes a voice of the Black in America.

### Major Authors and Works

Author Gunter Grass, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, Italo Calvino, John Fowles, John Banville, Angela Carter, Alejo Carpentier, Toni Morrison, Louis de Bernierers, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie are widely considered as magic realists. Carpentier in his *The Kingdom of This World* aimed to show how by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, politics, myths and beliefs-fantastic and marvelous things are made possible. His meaning is that Latin America is a land filled with marvels and novels about this automatically produce a literature of marvelous reality. Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was an instant worldwide success. This novel has its aim to translate the scope of America. The reader must let go of pre-existing ties to conventional exposition, to strive for the state of life's hidden meanings. Its characters, Aureliano, who is the fictitious reader, also the hostage use to express the writer's anxiety on this issue of who is reading the work. The ghost of Melquiades in this novel is presented by author as ordinary occurrences; therefore reader accepts the extraordinary and marvelous as common and ordinary.

Isabel Allende was the first Latin American woman who got recognition outside the continent. Her most famous novel is *The House of the Spirits*. Laura Esquivál's *Like Water for Chocolates* tells the story of the domestic life of women who spend their life living on the margins of their families and society. The novel's protagonist Tita is kept away from happiness and marriage by her mother. Her unrequited love and emotions from the family lead her to harness her extraordinary powers of imbuing her emotions to the food she makes. As a result, people who eat her food enact her emotions for her. For example, after eating a wedding cake, Tita made while suffering from the forbidden love, all guests suffer from the wave of longing, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* tells the story of a mother who is haunted by the ghost of her child. Ghost of her dead child represents the power of the past. "Magic, ghost and other supernatural elements have been inextricably blended in the culture of the blacks. For them a ghost is not superstition but a living presence which one can encounter in one's daily life. As such the presence of the ghost of the child is something which does not surprise anyone, Baby Suggs takes in calmly and though the sons of Sethe are driven out of home by it; they are not surprised at its existence. For Denver, it is a compassion, for Sethe a passion and for Paul D a nuisance to be rid of."<sup>10</sup>

Salman Rushdie's style is often classified as magic realism mixed with historical fiction. The dominant theme of his novels is the story of the many connections, disruptions and migrations between the eastern and western worlds. In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, the marginal, suppressed and peripheral are given a central place or multiple levels are invoked. His *Satanic Verses* and *The Moors Last Sigh* are also magic realist texts. Githa Haiharan's *When Dreams Travel* employ the metafictional schemata. This novel is about the woman's search for her story. It employs the old story of *Arabian Nights* as theme and intertext, and at the same time uses it to bring out the terror, oppression of the patriarchal assumption. *When Dreams Travel* is "a ragged, porous umbrella of a story, a wandering story, said to haunt travelers on the road leading to paradise."<sup>11</sup> Makrand Paranjpe's *The Narrator: A Novel* also employs metafictional practice. The novel is narrativised by adopting an indigenous

mode of story telling. Badri, the narrator says, “ A narrative for us Indians, is a structure which does not imitate life but which itself is alive and autonomous.”<sup>12</sup>

Rajkamal Jha's *The Blue Bedspread* presents the incestuous love of the unnamed author for his sister. It is spread over one night. This theme is presented by using metafictional strategies. It ends with uncertainty. “I could end the story here, but that would leave it forever trapped in the past and the purposeless.”<sup>13</sup> In his novel *If You Are Afraid of Heights*, two unlikely people, aftermath of a tram accident in Kolkata, find their lives briefly joined in a building called Paradise Park, which rises above the city and transcends into an unreal, plastic world of considerable beauty. Amitav Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome* churns historicity and metafiction. Chitra Divakaruni's works *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams*, Rakhi, an estranged daughter and wife is trying to be a caring mother. Her story is interspersed with excerpts from the dream journals of her mother who is a dream-teller.

“Divakaruni has deftly handled realistic issues through the use of fantasy and imagination. To her it seems that the only way to cope up with the immigrant predicament is to combine realism and magical elements from myths and legends in order to come with the chaos of life.”<sup>14</sup>

Wendy Faris, explaining Magic Realism as a contemporary phenomenon that shuns modernism from postmodernism says, “*Magic realist fiction do seem more youthful and popular than their modernist predecessors in that they often cater with unidirectional story lines to our basic desire to hear what happens next. Thus they may be more clearly designed for the entertainment of readers.*”<sup>15</sup>

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