

R.K. Narayan's the English Teacher: A Study of Magical Realism and Spiritualism

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Abstract

Salman Rushdie is recognised as being the primary creator of mystical realism in Indian English literature. In comparison with Rushdie, R.K. Narayan is considered to be from a bygone period. It is uncommon to investigate R.K. Narayan from an imaginary realism standpoint. This essay aims to examine the claim that Indian English writing pioneer R.K. Narayan is the author of the genre's magical realism. He is the author who created magic realism in the early 1940s. Long before the Latin American boom peaked, in 1945, he had worked on the elements of magic realism in *The English Teacher*. This essay aims to evaluate *The English Teacher's* magic realism, which is defined by its distinctive usage of legend in a contemporary .This paper proposes to trace the features of magic realism in *The English Teacher* which is marked by characteristic use of myth in a modern context and the critical rather than fabulist tone that is derived from it. The magic realism in the present novel is more easily identified through the perception of the trend as an attitude towards reality than through the later definitions of the genre.

Keywords: imaginary realism, magic realism, fabulist tone, mystical realism.

Introduction

The concept of magic realism has been written about extensively. Nowadays, it is found in a great deal of scholarly publications, dissertations, and syllabuses from universities. It also receives significant attention from the popular press. At the same time, certain critics have even proposed eliminating the term. The oxymoronic aspect of the expression, however, which refers to a transcendent aspect of everyday life and so offers to reconcile the contemporary, logical, disillusioned subject of Occidental civilization with lost but awakened spiritual truths, is what ultimately inspired this study.

Even if magic realism has historical roots, the phrase was initially used in 1925 to refer to a movement in German painting during the early 1920s by German art critic Franz Roh. But in the preface to his book *El reino de este mundo*, Alejo Carpentier gave the phrase its present meaning. He comprises:

The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state.

What followed was the so-called Latin American surge of the 1960s and 1970s, during which time a number of authors, like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Carlos Fuentes, were unmistakably magic realists. Some traits of the trend were noted, including the incorporation of dreams, mythology, fantasy, and fairy tales, as well as the merging of the natural and supernatural, realistic and fantastic, and subtle temporal changes.

This phrase has brought up conflicting opinions within the discipline of literary studies. Magic realism has been described as "the literary language of the emerging post colonial world" by one distinguished critic and as "little more than a brand name for alienation" by another. It can be regarded as "a major, possibly the major, component of postmodernist fiction" or as "a prospective substitute for the narrative logic of contemporary postmodernism." Both praise and criticism for creating "a new multicultural artistic reality" and "dangerous and superficial" have been levelled against magical realism. It has even been charged of having "harmful - even racist - principles" at its core.

The magical realism was, in a sense, a realisation that one was unable to examine non-Western civilizations from a purely Western perspective. Because exotic magic and myth are present in magic realist works, Carpenter and other post colonial interpretations of the form believe that magic realism is connected to nonwestern cultures. Thus, the employment of magic has been seen as a deliberate attempt to challenge and offer a regional substitute for the Eurocentric classification of the world. The pattern is still ingrained in reality even in the face of magic. The reputation of "post colonial" identity for magic realism was strengthened by the frequent, more-or-less direct references to history and the history of the margins.

One way to incorporate traditional mythology into the work's entirely modern setting is through the use of magic realism. Rushdie's writings incorporate this cultural aspect, as Michael Gorra observes. The multi-layered storytelling seen in Rushdie's and many other Indian writers' works is another crucial aspect of magic realism. Magic realism is frequently linked to the use of myth and magic. Of course, this is not the same as how myth is used in traditional traditions, nor is it the only way that magic is present in it. However, magic in magic realism is frequently accused of decreasing and serving as a diversion from the actual issues that the post-colonial world is facing.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, magic realism is a means of asserting the novel's existence and the conviction that it may be altered to create a real, dialogic place. As per Bakhtin's analysis, the novel illustrates several discourse levels within a language, none of which can be considered entirely representational of the entire discourse. The magic realism book can make use of Bakhtin's idea of this phenomenon. Because the many discourse forms really conflict at the level of hegemonic "discourse" rather than just the precise level of language. The magic realism novel features many different kinds of languages in a literal and metaphorical sense. However, some have also questioned such an assumption.

This article aims to examine the elements of magic realism seen in R. K. Narayan's work *The English Teacher*, after a discussion of the genre's definitions and traits. In fact, Rushdie is predominantly credited with introducing magic realism to Indian fiction written in English. In comparison to Rushdie, R.K. Narayan is considered to be from a bygone period. It is uncommon to examine R.K. Narayan from a magic realism standpoint. Part of his work, meanwhile, qualifies under some definitions of magic realism and contributes to our understanding of the mode as an attitude towards reality prior to its empirical development as a trend.

The suggestion of a spiritual realm in *The English Teacher* (1945) might be seen as magic realism. Because the story never changes from a current to a timeless setting, I identify this form with magic realism rather than a classic mythological style. Moreover, the protagonist in the narrative gains sufficient information from the magical experience to critique the system he has adhered to thus far. Because political and social critique is a key element of magic realism, the author's approach is more in line with magic realism than with classic fabulist style.

The second section of the story introduces magic realism, which makes this literature unique. In terms of style, nothing unexpected or unexpected occurs in the first part of the narrative: Krishnan is a college professor of English literature, and the story of his life follows an incredibly realistic path. The main shift that occurs in this section is the arrival of his family, which ends his "bachelor" existence in the school where he works as a teacher. A genuine account is given of the rituals his mother insists on carrying out when they get to the new residence. Krishnan's life falls apart as his wife passes away from illness, leaving him with only their daughter Leela.

He starts to have a fresh perspective on life and is more uneasy with what he believes to be the pointlessness of his teaching career in the British educational system. He learns via Susila's ghost that his daughter attended a local school, where he met the instructor and learned about a different philosophy of education. After gaining fresh knowledge into the world of spirits, Krishnan sets out to find a meeting to discuss his activities. In the end, he leaves the institution to become a teacher at his daughter's school.

As a result, the work blends the genres of magic realism and realism (especially in the first half). However, because of its binary structure, the addition of magic has been seen as a move away from realism and into the realm of myth. Elaborating on one such interpretation is Afzal-Khan. According to her, western ideals like "rationalism, materialism, industrialism, and technological innovation" are typically connected with realism. Krishnan, according to her, is one of those individuals who "choose to retreat from the pressures of social life"—a term linked to the aforementioned realism—into a realm of myth and mysticism. Put another way, they opt out of maturity and sincerity in the realist mode even though they could succeed in the myth mode in achieving sincerity and wisdom.

The protagonist's magical experience is not equated with a withdrawal from social responsibility, but is accompanied by a novel socio-national interest and wish to be useful in addition to his need to have a "harmonious existence". The character discovers another world : that of spirits and learns to communicate with his wife. The magic here does not transform the space of the narrative into a remote "pastoral" and mythical realm. The strategy is comparable here to what has since been theorized as magic realist in the sense that the magic is entrenched in a contemporary context and that is accompanied with a newly acquired critical perspective from the teacher. In parallel with this experience, he starts to explore an alternative vision of education. Thinking about his resignation letter, he has the urge to attack:

a whole century of false education. I was going to explain why I could no longer stuff Shakespeare and Elizabethan metre and Romantic poetry for the hundredth time into young minds and feed them on the dead mutton of literary analysis and theories and histories, while that they needed was lessons in the fullest use of the mind. This education had reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage.

He now reconsiders the task in relation to a whole nation, people and history. This does not usher him into activism but it does arouse a certain cultural awareness and concern. Interestingly, the change that Krishnan experiences is not characterized by the detachment often implied by the mythical mode. And what happens at the end is a mixture of the genres rather than a radical transformation of one into another, hence the magic realism in *The English Teacher*.

The idea that the trend is an attitude towards reality makes it easier to determine the magic realism in *The English Teacher* than it is to identify the genre according to later classifications. The main trait of magic realist writing is that it "does not need to justify the mysterious nature of events, as the writer of the fantastic has to." Latin American critic Luis Leal describes magic realism as a "attitude towards reality"

as opposed to a fully formed trend. There isn't any attempt in *The English Teacher* to defend magic by exposing the reader to the metaphysical realm of spirits or Hinduism, which accepts such beliefs:

[a]s is generally the case in magic realism we are not offered any explanation of events and the calm distancing of the narrative voice makes us forget the implausibility of the strange happenings.

Though the writer does not explain it, the choice made by the spirits to speak with the two men at a temple shows the connection with Hinduism.

While Narayan's portrayal of Hinduism may be combining, it is not excluding, and his books never turn into religious, ethnographic documentaries about India. As was already mentioned, *The English Teacher's* insertion of this non-Western religious element in a non-mythical setting has ideological implications that are closely related to the ethos of magic realism. Hinduism affects many facets of the story, including Krishnan's personal development, although it never causes him to fully distance himself from contemporary culture, unlike Raju in *The Guide* or the sanyasi in *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

Conclusion

Thus, Hinduism and Indian culture are presented in *The English Teacher* using a magic realist technique that at the same acts as a critique tool. At the same time, Narayan seems to be viewing the contemporary world through a mythological prism and analysing Hinduism—not overcoming it, but rather presenting a flexible, dynamic picture of it. Though distinct from the magic realist writing style of later-emerging authors such as Salman Rushdie with books like *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), and *The Satanic Verses* (1989), and Vikram Chandra with books like *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), Narayan's style exhibits characteristics that make some of his works eligible for analysis through the lens of magic realism.

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