

QUEST FOR ETHNIC IDENTITY THROUGH MAGICAL REALISM AS SEEN IN CHICANA AND AFRICAN AMERICAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this dissertation is to explore the significance and use of magical realism by feminist writers in mainstream Mexican American and African American fiction. The term is authentically related with the configurations of Latin American male writers. It could be argued that, properly marked, it could well be considered an acceptable term and an Artistic class, quite different from Surrealism or Fantastic writing. In addition, this study aims to prove that magic realism is more practical as a global modern style and ideally suitable for ethnic female writers. The current review plans to analyze and draw relevant relative information on the use of magical realism in the written works, trying to establish a multicultural and diversified structure and focusing on the composition of African American and Chicano American writers. To that end the research investigates the applicability and relevance of the Magic Realism approach to ethnic American literature in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Ana Castillo's *So Far of God*.

KEYWORDS: magic realism, Castillo, supernatural, Morrison, Chicano

Introduction:

In the 1940s magical realism in Latin America was used as a strategy for transmitting a realistic American frame of mind and creating an independent writing style. Magical realism, on the other hand, is not just limited to Latin American writing since it has affected global integration into its creative endeavors. Magic realists employ numerous methods associated with post-colonialism which are essential for pluralism. Contrasting fields of alternatives such as urban- rural, west -indigenous, etc are characterized in particular through this technique. The magical realistic projects cover problems relating to boundaries, infusing identity and change. Authors are trying to develop these plots to reveal the significant purpose behind the use of magical realism. In contrast to traditional realistic procedures, a more profound and authentic reality is revealed at the culmination of the narrative. It can ideally be defined better as a union of contradictions because it contests polar opposites such as death and life, the post- colonial present versus the pre-colonial past, presenting contradictory findings based on reality and the other view being an acceptance of fantasy as a mundane reality.

Objective:

Using the chosen texts by Mexican American and African American novelists, this article attempts to research magical realism as a tool for innovation and wants to investigate how it continues to remain relevant in the world of modern literature.

Origins:

In 1925 the German art critic and expert Franz Roh first used the expression "magical reality" to depict a unique European painting style. Unlike Surrealistic fine arts, these artworks were not fascinated by the phenomenal. Instead, it represented empty cityscapes from Europe, creating an unusual sense of mystery through stylized strengths and a sanitized atmosphere now commonly known as hyper-realistic or metaphysical paintings. Gradually, the concept of magical realism became associated with literature. The word was first used in Latin America to describe the commonplace, worldly, and philosophical dreams of academicians such as Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's fantastic works, including his finest novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude," are archetypal instances of literary "magic realism," interweaving allusions in otherwise regular stories. This tale is set in a Latin American settlement where magic tapestries fly, spirits torment the people, and blood drips from the slain as they mount the stairs. The Guatemalan Nobel laureate Miguel Angel Asturias' "Men of Maize" and the French-Cuban Alejo Carpentier's "This Kingdom of This World," both published in 1949, are important examples of magic realist tactics. The authors here portray historical persecution by frontier-colonial forces of the Indian, African people in Latin America and also their mythological convictions. Although subsequent magical reality authors employed magic more critically or satirically, these works exploit the magic trope to assert an autonomous Latin American identity.

By the 1980s and subsequently, this success had led to international growth of magically realistic novelists leading to numerous awards. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) are a few examples. As the list suggests, magical realistic novels come from several corners of the world, offering readers a magnificent picture of the wonderful imaginary worlds where exceptional things take place.

Mexican American Magic Realism:

Mexican American Literature was neither highly published nor educated in many schools until the 1960s, nor was this literature extremely noticeable. In 1910, the social consciousness of virtually all Hispanic writers was "recognized," culminating in the so-called Latin American literature boom as stated by Englekirk. (Englekirk, 135) Although there is considerable controversy regarding what the boom is and when it happened, most academics think that it began around and was caused by the Mexican Revolution. In this period, the literature which was written in an otherwise realistic narrative, that expressed almost unthinkable and extraordinary events, was named the Magical Realism, a term initially employed by German art critic Franz Roh. This writing method is based on the "judgmental perception of the world" versus the "attainment of the supernatural."

(Moore). Magical realism may also be found in the works of authors from a variety of nations, but it is most usually linked with contemporary Latin American fiction. (Lodge, 114).

Ana Castillo's *So Far from God: A Novel of Magical Realism.*

The story illustrates the cultural clash of Mexico, a land controlled by the United States, deprived of its heritage and language; re-enunciating a bitter history of present and past persecution, firstly through Spanish colonization, and then through the Anglo incursion (US victory in the war against Mexico, 1846-48) that led to an effectively destroyed Native Chicano culture and religion.

The novel highlights the potential that the supernatural can replace common events in the life of a person, so as to increase their relevance. The technique of enchanted legitimacy improves the effect and is used to create conflicts and realities. It is utilized for explaining idealism and changing conditions in the existence of the characters in the novel. Via magical realism, a regular event is turned into one of deep and worldly emancipation, raised with regard to disturbed and oppressed protagonists, such as Esperanza, Caridad, Fe, La Loca and Sofi, who are the migrant, women characters trapped in the fancy universe of a self-centered modern America.

Magic Realism being a hybrid mode, tries to bridge the gap between two extreme worlds, investigates edges of reference from various societies and is exceptionally helpful to contemporary Chicano writers. The novel commences with an otherworldly occasion, the restoration of Sofi's most youthful little girl, nicknamed 'La Loca'. The narrative begins on a magical pragmatic tone, where the real and the supernatural collide as the residents of the borderlands express their perspective about the actual world. This epic clearly modifies a religious theme; that of Sofia and her saintly little girls who later become martyrs. Historically, Saint Sofia had three small children, Faith, Hope, and Charity, who all died as saints and became holy beings, according to Catholic tradition. *So Far from God* re-authorizes such sainthood in modern times, with a clear sociopolitical objective in mind. In Castillo's tale, Sofi likewise sees her little girls experiencing various types of torment, near to martyrdom, while she continues to implore and keeps up her confidence. They are subjected to modern forms of pain that have come to embody the world's evils, such as war, AIDS, assault, inebriation, and chemical poisoning. Altogether, nothing remains of the young ladies' bodies; consistently, they disappear or die. Loca doesn't relate to any of the three saints, albeit, Charity, in the previously mentioned account, gets away safe from a fire accident. La Loca appears to be more like a combination of the other three sisters and the only one who attains sainthood.

In this novel, the mystical talk and incidents arise from the characters of Sofi's little girls who deal with natural/supernatural duality and orchestrate them in different ways. The oldest, Esperanza (Hope), represents the politically conscious Chicano who studies Chicano studies at college, researches Indigenous Culture, and engages in shamanic conduct. (in particular in relation to her boyfriend Rubin). Her employment as a reporter takes her to the Gulf War, where she vanishes and reappears as a ghost. The second girl, the lovely Caridad (Charity), experiences a typical adolescent upbringing before embarking on a low-paying career and an unproductive marriage to her high school sweetheart. She underwent a miraculous recovery after being cruelly

raped, threatened, and disfigured, and transformed into a spiritual healer. Her death, as a result of a fall from a cliff, elevates her to the realm of the extraordinary world. Fe (Faith), the third daughter, is the most materialistic and hands-on character. She works at a bank and wants to marry a gorgeous girl in a white marriage. Fe believes in living the American dream, having a lovely house, a vehicle, work, a loving spouse. She gets into a frenzy after the rejection of her lover. Moreover, Fe dies to the end of the story because of the corporatist society she so unequivocally recommended fitting into. The fourth little girl, La Loca, has shown that her early life has been continually divine. She is surrounded by wonders and premonitions. Although her healing abilities and forces are socially dysfunctional, her mysterious death from AIDS is an unexplained event and she becomes a Holy Saint after that. She is an individual with no personal interaction, therefore Castillo's choice of La Loca's disease is another symbolic indictment of modern society.

Castillo uses parody ideally to depict the Mexico American experience, the plight of people who are fighting their suppression by a dominant philosophy. The exaggerated language, plot deviations and shocking tone are intentional systems used to underline the unexpected distance between the substance and the scenes. Castillo's sense of humor plays an important role in her re-creation of well-known genres. Chicana innovators use comedy and strong linguistic control to break down suffocating societal preconceptions. Here the narrator distances herself from the events depicted by taking a surprising attitude that contrasts with their nature. This juxtaposition of incongruity and tragedy accurately depicts Latin American magical realism, as does the use of rhetorical exaggeration in Castillo's epic. The entertaining third-person narrator is not only omniscient, but also effectively present in the representation.

Through political and social situations in *So Far from God*, magical realistic techniques are emphasized. Specific stress is placed on women's position on various issues regarding race, gender and the socioeconomic status. After the Mexican-American war, the subject of land and its illegal utilization by the United States Government consumes the focus of attention. The focus of the plot is on the descendants of landowners (Sofi and her acquaintances) who were progressively misled and deprived of their property and privileges by the oppressing majority. Land represents the indigenous relationship with nature and its Mexican roots. Ana Castillo's female characters act as intermediaries between the two different worlds and cultures, discovering an ideal model of endurance and solidarity.

African American Magic Realism:

By means of the current approach, this study hopes to display how magical realism can achieve for the African American culture, what it previously accomplished for the Latin American culture as a statement of indigenous individuality. The main principle of this approach is that, in contemporary African/American fiction, magically realistic writing strategies have been deliberately used to reassess and reconsider the modern Afro-American identity. There is a strong belief behind this concept that magical realism is deeply affiliated with the view to having lived on the margins of the literary conventions as a cultural practice. The social circumstances of African Americans are in many ways similar to that of the Mexican society, so we can say that core issues and narrative strategies of many literary works are also similar.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was selected for review as it seemed to underline cultural specificities, cultural differences and the meaningful bridge between the understanding of the true essence of African American culture and the threats to the well-being of African American people posed by the prevalent Euro-American doctrine. Through this analysis I claim that the use of magical realism by American minority writers has been an effective strategy to highlight the Euro-American culture, which is dominant and oppressive.

Magic Realism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*:

The famous African American writer Toni Morrison has managed to use magic realism as a clear genre of writing in her novel "Beloved" where she creates an association between the realistic tradition of literature and also the unordinary components in a work of art. Toni Morrison, through the technique of magic realism aims to fill the realistic world of her African American characters in a literary work with imaginary, extraordinary and supernatural elements. On one hand, the realistic part of a piece of art exposes the details of everyday life. On the opposite hand, it uses magic as a tool for depicting reality more real. Several writers exercise this mode in their writing in a manner that questioned the true world, surfaces the fears or needs of the characters and examines the history of the realistic world.

The use of *Beloved's* ghost by Morrison raises a sensitive question concerning readers' interpretation of the legitimacy of the story. Many may debate the ghost's status as a supernatural creature while also being a legitimate historical figure who returns to harass the humans. That is, the ghost doubts Morrison's ability to combine the two norms of reading the novel's superstition by basing their tale on historical truths and the significance of portraying it as a historical truth.

Beloved's spirit blurs the lines between reality and fiction, history and the present, between birth and death. On the one hand, *Beloved* is both a ghost and Sethe's deceased infant, addressing the issue of the duality of reality and fiction. Morrison believes that the ghost of *Beloved* has the qualities of a newborn, but with the shape and size of a mature person, which means that there was something wrong that defies perceptual explanation. [Lobozadiec]

Morrison in her novel *Beloved* narrates the fascinating tale of her central protagonist Sethe, a colored woman, a slave and a mother of four children. She manages to escape her master's house, running away from slavery, seeking freedom for her young children. To avoid her young daughter's cruel exploitation at her master's hand, she kills *Beloved* before he could take them back, preferring her death to her life as a slave. Eight years later the ghost of *Beloved* comes back to haunt the house. Sethe's sons Howard and Buglar manage to leave the house after frightening encounters with the ghost but Sethe strongly holds on to the belief that it was none other than her lost dead daughter *Beloved*. Morrison feels that the ghost of *Beloved* could be a projection of Sethe's past memories as a slave and her illustration of her worry and guilt of losing her female offspring by murdering her with her own hands. Thus, Sethe learns a lesson of living in conjunction with her past mutely and looking out forward towards the future.

In the world of Sethe, slavery is very common and usual, and the hunger for liberty leads her to consider taking drastic steps. One of the resulting deeds was the murder of her daughter, *Beloved*, in order to keep her from having to live as a slave. The setting reveals another classic element of magic realism that is the objects and settings featuring within the story may become life like, which may seem ordinary and commonplace to the

rest of the characters in the story. This feature can be further defined as a method of incorporating the supernatural. (Lobodaziec). In *Beloved*, the characters manage to deal with this supernatural phenomena in an ordinary manner. In many discourses, this incorporating and acceptance is revealed, as if the ghost is a real person who can eat, drink and even sleep, also socialize with normal people. (Lobodaziec)

Another essential aspect of magical realism is that, as the story advances, it makes the reader feel like he's in a puzzle. In general, the audience is confused with the event sequence and the character's bizarre behavior, to prevent further developments from being anticipated, as the narrator reveals more details. In addition, a future understanding of what would happen reveals an understanding into the fantastic component of the literary plot. Infant Suggs, for example, predicted that Dark would come. She couldn't get anything at it because the other smell hid it. This conviction is realized when Sethe and her children are sought by the Slave Master, yet she refuses to go back into slavery by trying to kill her kids.

The ghost of the slain Beloved, as a supernatural existence, is regarded in Morrison's novel to be the main element of magical realism, a reincarnated past experience. For the African American characters, the complete experience of slavery and exploitation is utterly painful, but the rebirth of the ghost brings back the past nightmares to life. Dr. N. Seraman believes firmly that in her return, Beloved as a ghost is again present, without the past slavery. Morrison addresses the bloody heritage of slavery by bringing the fantasy back to life. [Seraman]

Morrison connects Beloved's ghost to the Sixty Million slaves who had died earlier. [Lobodaziec] Beloved goes on to tell the reader that she had to battle until the end and contrasted her experience of enslavement with her grave while describing her experience on a slave ship. She says that she was always shrieking, while the rest of the slaves were cold and dead around her on the slave ship travelling from her home in Africa to America. (Lobodaziec)

To summarize, we can rightfully say that Morrison's *Beloved* can be considered to be one of the best examples of magic realistic works in the fields of African American literature. She manages to blend the legitimate with myth, to return to the Gothic traditions and recuperate a myriad history of pain and misery of the African American people. The conventional setting, with familiar cultural and common place characters are incorporated into supernatural and magical elements in the novel, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary and unexpected. Remarkable events happen, as the plot unfolds, revealing the ghost of Beloved, which leads authenticity to Morrison's use of the theory of magical realism in her book.

Both Castillo and Morrison embrace parody to amend this mainstream genre, adding a new dimension to the magic realism style. Though of different ethnic backgrounds, they succeed in adapting and subverting a number of women's discourse accounts, traditionally diminished by social structure, in order to recover a strong female voice. The novels use oral traditional techniques and recreate unwritten literature using language in subversive ways. Morrison used Black English phrases, implying that Black folklore is a genuine source of academic origin and Castillo emphasizes the dual Chicano identity and heritage by adding various Spanish terms and phrases within the English language. These linguistic negotiations call to attention the encroachment in a colonized community of a foreign language (English) and on strategies designed to keep the indigenous language alive. They highlight the difficulties of dialect and translation, as well as the cultural and psychological devastation caused by the loss of one's language.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can rightfully say that both writers assert that magical realism is crucial to Postmodernism because it blurs the lines between certainty and fiction. Both works adhere to the essential premise of magical realism, namely the coexistence of magical and realistic discourses without one overwhelming the other. Despite the presence of fantastical happenings that defy natural principles as we know them, the narratives always include social, historical, and political connections as a foundation in the "real" world. We may thus infer that magical realism is a hybrid mode for investigating and transgressing limits, allowing for the fusion or cohabitation of conceivable worlds in other possible forms. Unfortunately, traditional textual studies merely highlight the novels' vast range of socio-historical concerns addressed and ideological and political acts supported, while the current study contradicts the widely held belief that magic-realistic fiction is escapist reading. Because generic descriptions are not neutral but cultural, we must apply our objections to all categories. The current study helps to establish the relevance and validity of magic realism as a category in contemporary criticism.

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