Asian Journal of Technology and Applied Sciences
ISSN: 2301-xxxx (online) | IF: 10.01 | Vol: 1, issue 1
Available: http://asiansciencejournal.org

MAGICAL REALISM AS A GENRE AND ARTISTIC MODEL

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Abstract: This article examines magical realism not only as a specific literary genre but as a broader, flexible artistic model that has transcended its Latin American origins to become one of the most significant narrative strategies of contemporary world literature. The study traces the historical development of magical realism from its emergence in European visual arts through its flourishing in Latin America to its adaptation in postcolonial, post-Soviet, and Central Asian literatures. Drawing upon key theoretical contributions by Franz Roh, Alejo Carpentier, and Wendy B. Faris, the paper analyzes the core structural, aesthetic, and philosophical principles of magical realism, including the seamless integration of the miraculous into everyday reality, the disruption of linear time and space, and the fusion of myth, folklore, and history. Special emphasis is placed on how this model functions as an effective tool for expressing cultural trauma, hybrid identities, collective memory, and alternative ontologies in non-Western literary contexts. Through comparative analysis, the research demonstrates that magical realism continues to evolve as a dynamic transcultural artistic model rather than remaining a fixed genre with rigid boundaries. The findings highlight its unique capacity to bridge the rational and the irrational, the local and the universal.

Keywords: magical realism, genre theory, artistic model, mythopoetics, postcolonial literature.

Introduction

Magical realism has established itself as one of the most influential and enduring literary phenomena of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although the term was first coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe a new tendency in post-expressionist painting, it gained true international prominence through Latin American literature, particularly in the works of Miguel Ángel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, and Jorge Luis Borges.

Franz Roh characterized magical realism as “a new way of seeing” that reveals “the miracle of existence” within ordinary objects and events (Roh, 1995, p. 17). Alejo Carpentier went further, developing the concept of lo real maravilloso (the marvelous real), arguing that Latin America’s history and geography naturally produce a reality that is inherently marvelous. He wrote: “The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from a miraculous alteration of reality” (Carpentier, 1995, p. 86).

The relevance of studying magical realism today lies in its remarkable ability to cross cultural boundaries. In postcolonial and post-Soviet literatures, including those of Central Asia, magical realism has become a powerful instrument for articulating historical trauma, cultural hybridity, resistance to colonial and totalitarian narratives, and the search for new forms of identity.

This article aims to analyze magical realism simultaneously as a genre with identifiable formal features and as a broader artistic model — a flexible narrative strategy adaptable to various cultural and historical contexts.

Objectives of the study: to clarify the theoretical distinction between magical realism as a genre and as an artistic model; to identify its fundamental structural, aesthetic, and

philosophical principles; to examine mechanisms of its transformation in non-Latin American literatures; to assess its effectiveness in representing complex socio-cultural and existential realities.

Methods

The research is based on an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates genre theory, comparative-typological analysis, mythopoetic approach, and elements of narratology. Theoretical foundations rely on the classic works of Franz Roh, Alejo Carpentier, and Wendy B. Faris, as well as contemporary scholarship on magical realism in postcolonial and Eurasian contexts.

A qualitative text analysis was conducted focusing on key narrative techniques: focalization, treatment of the supernatural, temporal displacement, and the integration of myth and folklore. Comparative analysis was applied to examine both canonical Latin American texts and selected works from Russian and Central Asian prose, allowing identification of universal and culture-specific features of the model.

Results

As a literary genre, magical realism is distinguished by a unique combination of realistic narrative techniques with the presence of supernatural or extraordinary elements that are integrated into the fabric of everyday life. The most essential and defining feature is the matter-of-fact presentation of fantastic events within a predominantly realistic framework. Supernatural phenomena are neither explained through rational logic nor questioned by the characters or the narrator; they are simply accepted as an ordinary part of reality.

Wendy B. Faris, one of the leading theorists of magical realism, identifies five primary characteristics that define the genre:

1. An irreducible element of the marvelous;
2. A strong presence of the phenomenal world;
3. The merging of different realms (real and imaginary, past and present);
4. The disruption of time, space, and identity;
5. Social, political, or cultural critique (Faris, 2004, p. 7).

These features create a distinctive narrative tone in which the miraculous and the mundane coexist without conflict. A classic example is Gabriel García Márquez's masterpiece One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967). The famous scene of Remedios the Beauty ascending to heaven while hanging sheets is described with the same calm, detailed realism as everyday activities in the village of Macondo: "Remedios the Beauty was not a creature of this world… she rose up, flying, with the sheets…" (García Márquez, 1970, p. 242). The narrator presents this miraculous event without surprise or supernatural commentary, which is a hallmark of magical realist poetics.

Beyond the boundaries of a strictly defined genre, magical realism functions as a flexible artistic model — a philosophical and aesthetic approach to the representation of reality. This model fundamentally rejects the strict Cartesian dualism between the material and the spiritual, the real and the imaginary. It proposes instead a unified vision of the world where the boundaries between these spheres are permeable and often illusory. As Wendy B. Faris insightfully observes: "Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that both are fully integrated into the narrative. The marvelous is naturalized, and the natural is marvelous" (Faris, 2004, p. 1).

In Central Asian and Russian regional prose, this artistic model undergoes profound cultural and semantic transformation. Myth, folklore, and religious traditions cease to serve as exotic decorations or stylistic devices; they become organic, constitutive elements of the depicted world. The supernatural in these texts often emerges directly from the local

landscape, ancestral memory, historical trauma, or collective unconscious rather than being introduced from an external fantastic realm.

A vivid illustration of this transformation can be found in Timur Pulatov's novel The Turtle of Tarazi. The central metamorphosis — the transformation of a cruel judge into a giant turtle — is not presented as a fantastic anomaly but as a logical and inevitable consequence of moral and cosmic imbalance. The narrator describes this event with restrained calmness and philosophical detachment, typical of magical realism. Through this image, Pulatov merges Sufi ideas of spiritual transformation (tanasukh) with a critique of moral decay in society.

Similarly, in Chingiz Aitmatov's novel The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years (1980), the ancient legend of the mankurt — a person forcibly deprived of memory and turned into a slave — functions as a powerful magical-realist symbol. The mankurt motif seamlessly blends with the realistic depiction of Soviet reality, becoming a devastating metaphor for cultural amnesia, spiritual death, and the destructive impact of totalitarian systems on human consciousness and national identity. These examples clearly demonstrate that in the Central Asian literary context, magical realism is deeply rooted in local mythopoetic traditions, including Sufism, Tengrianism, shamanistic beliefs, and folk cosmology. At the same time, it successfully addresses the most urgent issues of modernity: the crisis of cultural identity, the trauma of historical ruptures, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the struggle to preserve historical and spiritual memory in a rapidly changing world.

Thus, in non-Latin American literatures, magical realism evolves from a primarily aesthetic phenomenon into a powerful epistemological and ethical tool for understanding and interpreting complex postcolonial and post-totalitarian realities.

Discussion

The dual nature of magical realism — functioning simultaneously as a distinct literary genre and as a flexible artistic model — constitutes its greatest theoretical and practical strength. As a genre, it possesses a recognizable set of formal and stylistic boundaries that allow readers and critics to identify it with relative ease. At the same time, as an artistic model, it demonstrates remarkable adaptability, openness to cultural dialogue, and the capacity to transform in accordance with local literary traditions and historical contexts.

In postcolonial and post-Soviet spaces, magical realism has proven to be an exceptionally effective instrument for representing the complex phenomenon that can be termed "the trauma of time" — the profound rupture in historical continuity, collective memory, and cultural identity. It enables writers to articulate experiences that are difficult to convey through conventional realistic or purely fantastic modes. Unlike pure fantasy, which often creates entirely separate secondary worlds detached from historical reality, or strict social realism, which sometimes proves insufficient to capture the depth of collective psychological and cultural trauma, magical realism maintains a delicate yet powerful balance between the real and the marvelous, the historical and the mythical.

As Alejo Carpentier famously emphasized, authentic magical realism does not invent the marvelous but discovers it within the very fabric of Latin American (and by extension — any deeply cultural) reality: "The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from a miraculous alteration of reality" (Carpentier, 1995, p. 88). This principle proves especially productive in Central Asian literature. Here, magical realism organically merges with ancient indigenous traditions — Sufi mysticism, Tengrian cosmology, shamanistic practices, and rich oral folklore — creating a unique hybrid aesthetic. The supernatural in these texts rarely appears as an external intrusion; instead, it grows naturally from the local

landscape, ancestral memory, family history, and the wounds of the twentieth century (collectivization, repression, cultural Russification, and the collapse of the Soviet system).

The transformation of magical realism in the Central Asian and Russian regional contexts reveals its capacity to serve not only aesthetic but also ethical and epistemological functions. It becomes a tool for cultural resistance, the restoration of historical memory, and the reconstruction of fragmented identities. By integrating myth into everyday reality, writers manage to show how the past continues to live within the present, how historical trauma manifests in the lives of ordinary people, and how the sacred and the profane constantly interact in the post-totalitarian world.

Conclusion

Magical realism has come a long way from its origins as a regional Latin American genre to become one of the most powerful, flexible, and transcultural artistic models of global contemporary literature. Its fundamental philosophical and aesthetic principle — the organic, non-hierarchical coexistence of the magical and the everyday — offers writers a unique and highly effective instrument for exploring the complexities of the modern world, including issues of cultural hybridity, historical memory, collective trauma, and existential search.

In Central Asian and Russian literatures, magical realism continues to generate new forms, meanings, and modifications. It successfully combines universal narrative strategies with deeply local mythopoetic systems, proving its vitality and continuing relevance in the twenty-first century. The model demonstrates a remarkable ability to respond to the challenges of globalization, postcolonial consciousness, and post-Soviet identity formation. The study confirms that magical realism should no longer be viewed merely as a literary genre with fixed characteristics, but rather as a dynamic artistic model capable of constant renewal and adaptation to new cultural and historical realities. Its future development appears highly promising, particularly in regions with rich mythological traditions and complex histories of modernization.

Further research could productively focus on several directions: comparative studies of magical realism across different regional literatures (African, Indian, Southeast Asian, etc.), its interaction with contemporary digital narratives and virtual realities, its role in ecological discourse and the representation of the Anthropocene, as well as its potential in the literature of authors of new generations writing in the context of globalization and transnational identities.

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