

NEW TRENDS IN MAGIC REALISM

Issue 1 & 2

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STUDIES IN FANTASTICISM ANCIENT TO MODERN

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Publisher

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, Bergstraße 27, D-54295 Trier · www.wvttrier.de
Tel.: 004965141503, Fax: 004965141504, E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de
ISSN: 1869-960X

Cover Image: Anke Eissmann · Cover Design: Brigitta Disseldorf

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Blind Peer-Review Guidelines

All articles (and, previously, all abstracts) have been subject to anonymous, external review. All required a positive judgment from the editors before being sent to reviewers, and had to receive at least one positive evaluation from an external referee to qualify for publication. In the case of articles by individuals associated with the journal in any way, each article had to receive at least two positive evaluations from two different outside reviewers. All identifying information was removed from the articles before they were sent to the reviewers, and all reviewer comments were likewise anonymously conveyed to the authors of the articles.

Introduction: Recent Trends in Magic Realism

Ever since the publication of the first magic realist novels and stories, the genre has flourished, finding its way into the literatures of the world and raising a considerable amount of critical attention. Although its origins have usually been associated with Latin American literary and cultural traditions, it has become a worldwide phenomenon, using innovative techniques and an equally surprising and persuasive symbolism or imagery in its development of new aesthetic strategies. Magic realism is commonly regarded as a genre or mode that is closely related to the peripheral or the liminal, but the works have quickly become part of the literary canon. Due to its hybrid nature, magic realist fiction has always been regarded as subversive and especially suitable for the exploration and transgression of boundaries—be they cultural, geographical, historical, epistemological or political. Magic realist texts have the potential to engage with, expose and challenge dominant discourses, and it is this capacity that has made the texts particularly, but by no means exclusively, powerful in post-colonial contexts.

Quickly following the first enthusiastic responses, however, the term became controversial and contested. Originally it was coined in 1925 by Franz Roh, who used it in the very different context of post-expressionist visual art. Some decades later it found its way into literary criticism to denote the innovative literature of authors like Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez. This act of naming, performed by western critics, soon came under attack as an attempt to systematize, describe and comprehend an initially non-European literature according to western categories, as a sort of appropriation and an attempt to gain some mastery over this form of artistic expression.

The term magic realism suggests a binary opposition between the two modes of representation, a distinction between the key concepts which has been read as indicative of a hierarchical order, favouring an empirical, rational world view over alternative and non-western traditions and forms of knowledge. However, the different ways of experiencing and explaining the world that are interwoven in magic realist texts are far from being non-controversial. The fantastic or imaginary could be defined as everything that defies post-Enlightenment empiricism but the boundaries of what is considered to be real are hard to define and often dependent on the world view of the respective cultures and belief systems.

Magic realist fiction frequently draws from myths, legends or religious convictions of marginalized peoples which can raise questions regarding the use of such motifs by mainstream authors within the dominant culture. This form of cultural and literary ap-

propriation may in one way or another reduce the subversive potential of the genre. The marvellous elements in magic realist fiction have, however, also been located in the Western tradition—in pre-Enlightenment literature and also in more recent texts.

Magic realism has become a literary fashion and a global phenomenon, and texts combining supernatural marvels with empirical reality are now an integral part of mainstream fiction. In consequence of this proliferation, critics and publishers have occasionally overused the term magic realism, thereby potentially reducing the form to a set of uncertain qualities and at the same time limiting its perceived significance.

For some time various new trends have exerted a significant impact on magic realist literature and film—e.g. the New Weird, Slipstream, Mash-ups and crossovers with other fantastic genres and horror fiction. The papers in this special issue explore such new influences and discuss the ways in which recent socio-cultural, but also aesthetic developments have instigated innovative trends in magic realism.

The paper by Sebastian Domsch, “Keep the Genre Weird: Magic Realism, Slipstream and the New Weird,” addresses a relatively recent trend in literary works. The article argues that texts presenting readers with features that are perceived as incompatible with their knowledge of the world usually engage them in strategies of normalization. However, because of its particular blend of the marvelous and the real, magic realist fiction can complicate the readers’ attempts at processing the literary information in a way that, for instance, fantasy fiction does not. With its unstable genre conventions, slipstream takes this development even further and often makes it impossible for readers to apply their usual strategies of understanding.

In his article, “It All Depends on What You Mean by Reality: US Plain Magical Realism”, Georgio Busi-Rizzi sheds some light on a corpus of contemporary North American works that can be subsumed under the labels of ‘new magic realism,’ fabulism or slipstream. The paper gives an overview of the most significant characteristics of the magic realist mode and develops a typology of the most important sub-categories. Focusing particularly on the works of Aimee Bender, Busi-Rizzi discusses how and to what extent recent North American texts belong to but also deviate from the mode of magic realism.

Dana Del George’s “Bewildering Nostalgia: Magical Realism in Recent American Short Fiction” sees magic realism as a mode that has its roots in the local-colour stories of the 19th century and it demonstrates that in particular the works of Karen Russel, Jim Krusoe and George Saunders have created a new branch of magic realism. While authors of fantastic fiction had to employ various techniques in order to suspend the disbelief of their readers, postmodern magic realist writers do not need these strategies any longer because a revaluation of beliefs in the supernatural allows readers to tolerate the antinomy of the mode. Moreover, the paper argues for a ‘bewildering nostalgia’ as the hallmark of the magic realist mode.

Jim Whitlark's contribution, "Collapsing Borders in Magic Realism: Luis Urrea", looks into the work of the Mexican-American novelist, poet and essayist which conflates elements of fantasy fiction with aspects of journalistic writing. Urrea's oeuvre revolves around the topic of the Mexican-American border; geographical and literary liminalities merge and are equally transgressed to reflect the extraordinary cultural dissolutions generated by the failures of governmental policies.

In her paper, "Magical Elements in Ali Shaw's *The Girl with the Glass Feet*", Justyna Gil is concerned with the various cultural borrowings in the 2005 novel. She discusses the complex issues raised by the adaption of magic realism by a British author and addresses a variety of problems that may result from such an appropriation. Moreover, the article offers a detailed analysis of the literary strategies used by Shaw in order to weave elements from different more or less marvellous sources into his story.

Don Tresca's paper, "'A Uniquely Portable Magic': Magic Realism in the Late Works of Stephen King", demonstrates that from the late 1990s onward the literary works of King, who is better known as an author of horror fiction, have developed into a direction that suggests a crossover to the genre of magic realism. Examining some of King's later works, the essay discusses the ways in which the texts use elements of myth and magic in order to express insights that defy a realistic representation.