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# The Use of Magical Realism to Explore the Concepts of Post-Colonialism and Otherness in Literature

Magical Realism is perhaps one of the most misunderstood concepts in literature, because the genre is very specific, while also being intentionally ambiguous. So what is magical realism? It is not straight fantasy or even urban fantasy, but is also not completely realistic either. Magical realism does not fit within any one category, which makes it hard to label. Essentially, magical realism is a combination of a real-world setting and fantastical elements. Magical Realism focuses on ordinary people going about their everyday lives. Everything is normal, except for one or two elements that go beyond the realm of possibility, whether it be magic or a physical connection with the earth and the creatures that inhabit it, but always in a way that celebrates the mundane.

What is Magical Realism?

So how do we use the genre of Magical Realism as a field in which to explore relevant concepts of post-colonialism and stories of the “other”, and “strangeness” in a multicultural world? Looking at Sara Ahmed’s book, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, she draws a critical eye on topical themes such as ‘strangers’ and ‘otherness’. Ahmed explores the ways embodiment and community are produced through the figure of the ‘stranger’ and she argues that we always recognise somebody as a stranger, rather than simply failing to recognise them, and this act differentiates us from the stranger, producing who ‘we’ are critical of the frequent valorisation (or refusal) of difference within much feminist and post colonial theory, in the absence of a necessary analysis of the specificity of those differences. For instance, acknowledging the body as differentiated through sex or gender, Ahmed contends that there is not necessarily any analysis of the particularity of that difference and how it may intersect with and be informed by other differences, such as race, class, sexuality and disability.

Through a discussion of multicultural food, ethnography and global feminism, Ahmed analyses the ways in which Western institutions construct the stranger as fetish, or as the origin of difference which the white subject can appropriate, or consume. This can be identified within a “multicultural” nation such as Australia, where the cultural identity of strangers is reduced to a homogenous and fixed outward appearance of difference that conceals a ‘typical’ Australian being (sameness). The book ends by exploring the possibility of a more ethical encounter with the other: one that does not seek absolute proximity or absolute distance but acknowledges responsibility in relations of labour and knowledge. Ahmed (2000) *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality*.

Through Magical Realism, we can explore the concepts of postcolonialism and topics such as ‘strangers’ and ‘otherness’ that Ahmed writes about in her book through films such as *Bright* (2017), directed by David Ayer. The film touches on the topics of ‘otherness’ and the ‘strangers’, these real-world topics, as written by Ahmed, however it does so in a fantastical and magical way. The film takes place in a world where Orcs and Elves live alongside humans. Orcs are the underclass- deprived and discriminated against – seen as the ‘stranger’ and the ‘other’, as written about in Ahmed’s book. Elves are the elite, the rich and famous and humans are somewhere in the middle. Rose (2017) *Bright* review – Will Smith's sci-fi is a true original for

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better or worse.

In conclusion, Magical Realism can be a very important tool in exploring relevant narrative concepts, as it can be used to discuss important social topics in a new and fun way. It draws people in with its fantastical elements and is able to shine a light on important topics and issues that need to be addressed by society today.

“Magical realism can reveal the magic that is in the world around us and convince us of what we have always hoped for: that magic exists and wishes do come true, that beyond science exists a reality that defies rational explanation. We want magic to be real, and so we look for it in the most unassuming places, in the ordinary events of our day-to-day lives.” - Michelle Witte, Literary agent, Mansion Street Literary Management.

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