

RE-APPROPRIATING MAGICAL REALISM IN ARABIC NARRATIVES

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The term “magic realism,” has been coined in 1925 by the German art critic, Franz Roh. It seems like an oxymoron since “magic” lives in contradiction to what is “real.” It denotes effacing borders between paradoxical codes and elements of realism and fantasy. Peter Standish perceives magical realistic narrative as fiction in which the “supernatural, the mythical, or the implausible are assimilated to the cognitive structure of reality without a perceptible break in the narrator’s or characters’ consciousness” (156–57).

In fact, magical realist narratives are characterized by specific thematic and structural generic features such as the intersection of opposite realms, irony regarding author’s point of view, authorial reticence, metafictionality and/or self-reflexivity, use of paratextuality and rustic setting.

The ex-centric marginalized native writers embrace the mould of magical realism to enter the literary mainstream in an endeavour to deconstruct dichotomous paradigms created by the advocates of dominant culture, represent their repressed narratives, and recreate a true image of their culture and heritage. Accordingly, magical realism allows for re-visioning and re-appropriating the dominant cross-cultural influences and codes that increasingly threaten to choke the imagination of the indigenous population.

Among the revealing cases in point of such marginalized natives are the Tawariq identity in Libya for Ibrahim al-Koni, the Kurdish identity in Syria in the case of Salim Barakat, Arab Jews and Palestinians for Emile Habibi. Other examples are the Europeans and the African Caribbean and multi-racial peoples of the Latin Americas.

The trend of magical realism has inspired authors in the Arab world since their cultural and political situation resemble that of the Latin American writers. Among those writers are Naguib Mahfouz, Ibrahim al-Kūnī, Emile Habibi, Ghādah al-Sammān and Amir Tag Elsir

Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) is one of the great Egyptian novelists. In his *Arabian Nights and Days* (1979), he mingles fantasy and reality to create an imaginary realm so similar to our everyday one yet so different from it. Such a novel evokes *The Thousand and One Nights* not only in its title but also in its frame structure.

Ibrahim al-Kūnī (1948-) is a Libyan writer. His *Nazif al-*

hajar (1990) with its emphasis on animal-human juxtapositions and metamorphoses is an example of Arab magical realism. It tells the story of a multi-generational struggle of a Touareg family against a legendary animal called a waddan.

Emile Habiby (1922-1996), is an Israeli Arab (Palestinian Israeli) novelist who has made use of Arabic folk tradition in order to represent the Palestinians’ vanished reality. His *Khurafiyah: Saraya, Bint al-Ghul* (Saraya, the demon’s daughter, 1991) is typically a magical realist narrative. In this novel, he utilizes the Palestinian myth, legend, or (*usturah*).

Ghādah al-Sammān (1942-) is a Syrian novelist. She utilizes magical realism as a means of investigating reality in her collection of short stories entitled “*The Square Moon*” (1998) (*al-Qamar al-Murabba*). Each of her stories examines sundry problems which are the result of cultural, social, and economic conditions.

Amir Tag Elsir (1960-) is a Sudanese writer, born in 1960. His most important magical realist novel is *The Dowry of Cries* (2004). It is an allegory for the old fantastical Sultanate of Ansaaba which counterparts Márquez’s *Macondo*. It evinces the intersection of the supernatural and the real in its dissection of the current events, habits and norms of an African tribe in the context of something old.

Other outstanding examples of Arab magical realist writers include Ghazi Al Gosaibi (Saudi Arabia), Rachid Boudjedra (Algeria), Najibah Al Hammami (Tunisia), Ben Jelloun (Morocco), Warid Badr Salem (Iraq), and Abdelkarim Al Razeby (Yemen).

In conclusion, re-appropriation of Magical Realism in Arab narratives emerges as an example of how in adopting such a mode, the act of writing becomes an act of survival, rescuing fragments of the Arab culture from oblivion, shedding light on history, tradition, and reality. In their magical realist journey, Arab writers assert the vitality of their culture, reconcile irreducible elements and obliterate the borders between dialectic realms.

Works Cited

Standish, Peter, ed. *Dictionary of Century Culture: Hispanic Culture of South America*. Manly/Gale, 1995.