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ENG 560: Magical Realism

10 November 2021

Magical Realism(s), Histories, Meanings, and Otherness:

An Annotated Bibliography

Faris, Wendy B. “The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism.” *Janus Head*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2002, pp. 101-119. In this complex and highly theoretical article, Faris argues for broad, inclusive, generous criteria for what belongs under the umbrella of “magical realism,” what she calls the most significant and extremely popular global genre that is anything but homogenous and is most certainly valid, especially in postcolonial conversations. In contrast to those who define “magical realism” in part by its painting modernism as bleaker and worse than the past, Faris points to examples and shows that magical realist works can and do force readers to negotiate with the horrors of the past. Further, she argues that there are complex relationships between multiple components found in magical realist fictions, citing examples from works such as *So Farm from God* and *The House of the Spirits*, that are tied together with magic and that often help both blur conventional boundaries and destabilize expectations: agency, the Other, colonizer, realism, and History, for example.¹ Such intertextual relationships are further

¹ A long-standing practice of mine has been to capitalize the “h” in “history” when “history” refers to what people know and understand about the past, among other reasons not relevant here. This practice helps emphasize that “History” and “the past” are different. Given Faris’s arguments about how magical realism in works such as *Beloved* forces readers to reconsider the past and recreates magical realist versions of the past, this practice is especially important here. I have some more details my methodological justification in my dissertation (“If You Do Not Like The Past, Change It”: The Reel Civil Rights Revolution, Historical Memory, and the Making of Utopian Pasts), as well as in other publications, especially in my video essay (“The Big Idea History Syllabus”).

complicated by magical realism being both a mode initially spread by those with power and a mode adapted by those without such privilege.

Upstone, Sara. "Magical Realism and Postcolonial Studies: Twenty-First Century Perspectives."

Journal of Commonwealth & Postcolonial Studies, vol. 17, no. 1, 2011, pp. 153-163.

Upstone concisely traces the historiography of how scholars have connected the treads of magical realism and postcolonialism and looks at recent uses of magical realism, concluding that magical realism has become an important and influential mode ("mode" instead of "genre" is key to her argument) used in mediums far beyond the novel and that address more than issues related to colonialism. In particular, she argues that the pressures of and oppressions from imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy impact everyone across the globe, and this impact frequently has valid and significant expressions in recent literature ("literature" defined broadly to encompass autobiography, canvas painting, and film, for example).² "Postcolonial fiction" and "magical realism" can no longer be used interchangeably, Upstone says. She also argues that there continue to be gaps in scholarly literature, especially when it comes to basic accessible material about what magical realism itself is and when it comes to the dearth of scholarship that grapples with religion and its relationships to magical realism versus realism. Upstone also argues that critics of magical realism need to abandon the gaze that (still) exoticizes and privileges certain types of magical realism by Othered authors.

Warnes, Christopher. "Magic and Otherness." *Magical Realism and Literature*, edited by

Warnes and Kim Anderson Sasser, Cambridge UP, 2020, pp. 13-29. In this fascinating

² My ordering of the oppressions, paraphrased and synthesized from Upstone's article, outlined earlier in this sentence is a nod to bell hooks (née Gloria Jean Watkins) and her concept of Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy, which I have expanded to Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist (Heteronormative Ableist Theistic) Patriarchy in my publications.

and well-written article, Warnes places the genre of magical realism in the trajectory of global History, arguing that while magic itself has always been Othered to differing degrees, magic is anything but a recent development. Warnes maintains that magic is a constant among all societies, despite efforts at times by elites, by (Western) religious leaders, or by colonizers. He explains that magic is deviant: People are fascinated by what magic is and what it can be, as such always involves subverting and challenging mores and always involves messy, overlapping concerns about what is “real” and not, about science, about religion, and about the arbitrary, often imperialist differences between religion and magic. Warnes places surrealism in this “Big History” analysis of magic and argues that the brief decline in European literary magic comes from experiments with “scientific objectivity.” He also argues that Lucien Lévy-Bruhl helped establish standards for studying magical realism, specifically, and for cultural relativism, more generally. Collectively, Warnes wants artistic expressions of magic to be legitimized and normalized, while still retaining what makes them subversive, and reminds readers that “realism” is also a social construction.