

I. Characteristics of Magic Realism (From Wendy Faris "Sheherazade's Children")

"Magical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that **magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed**" (163).

1. "The text contains an **'irreducible element' of magic**, something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them. In terms of the text, magical things 'really' do happen" (167).
2. "Descriptions detail a **strong presence of the phenomenal world**—this is the realism in magic realism, distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory...Realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, in many instances by excessive use of detail" (169).
3. "The reader may hesitate (at one point or another) between **two contradictory understandings of events**—and hence experiences some unsettling doubts," often "hallucination or miracle?" (171).
4. "We experience the **closeness or near-merging of two realms**, two worlds" (172) [life/death; real/imaginary; waking/dream; past/future; human/animal; self/other, etc.].

"The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions" (172).

5. "These fictions question **received ideas about time, space, and identity**" (173).

From Frederic Jameson on realism how Realism creates "spatial homogeneity [that] abolishes older forms of sacred space; likewise the newly measuring clock and measurable routine replace 'older forms of ritual, sacred, or cyclical time'" (173-4). [rise of industrialization – the modern world of work]

II. Secondary Characteristics (common but not defining)

1. Metafictional dimensions are common...the texts provide commentaries on themselves....Thus the magical power of fiction itself, the capacities of mind that make it possible, and the elements out of which it is made—signs, images, metaphors, narrators, narrates—may be foregrounded" (175).

Includes stories where "the reader follows a voice as it articulates fragments of a potential story and induces us to participate in its composition" (176)

2. "The reader may experience a particular kind of **verbal magic—a closing of the gap between words and the world**" (176). [remember Nietzsche!]

Example: Metaphor made real “They treat me like an insect”; “I feel for you” “To see through someone else’s eyes” “I’ve become a new person” “It was like time stood still.”

3. “The narrative appears....as **fresh, childlike, even primitive**. Wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted...as a child would accept them...they thus [appear] natural” (177).

4. “**Repetition as a narrative principle**, in conjunction with mirrors or their analogues...creates a magic of shifting references” (177)

“In Cortazar’s story ‘Axolotl’ the aquarium...is a kind of magical special mirror. Similarly, the place of Cortazar’s narrator in ‘Night Face Up,’ between modern and Aztec worlds, is a temporal double-sided mirror” (177).

5. “**Metamorphoses** are a relatively common event” (178).

6. “Many of these texts take a position that is **antibureaucratic**, and so they often use their magic against the established social order” (179).

7. “**Ancient systems of belief and local lore** often underlie the text” (182).

8. “A Jungian rather than a Freudian perspective is common...that is, the magic may be attributed to **a mysterious sense of collective relatedness** rather than to individual memories or dreams (183).

Work Cited

Faris, Wendy. “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction.” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. L. Parkinson and W. Faris. Durham: Duke UP,1995. 163-190. Print.