ANTHROPOLOGICAL MAGICAL REALISM: THE CAPACITY TO INVADE NON-NATIVE EPISTEMOLOGIES

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Three characteristics that literary critics commonly ascribe to Magical Realism can be accorded the working titles of Deference, Defense, and Destruction. This paper argues a case for anthropologically grounded magical realism: it posits that these commonly recognized traits impose superfluous limitations on the mode. In line with Irene Guenther's sentiment that textual fictions between Dream and Reality can set off creative sparks, this paper ventures that authors can use anthropological magic-realism to altogether create new worlds that straddle logic and illogic, and can hence dismantle rationalist structures. By limiting Anthropological Magical Realism to a theoretical framework that binds it to notions of deference, defense, and destruction, critics have denied the trope its capacity to enrich the fictional worlds of any reader, not just the "native" struggling to reconcile his/her superstitious existence when faced with rationalist hegemonies.Given the contemporary focus on translation and the globalization of English, the literary mode can also address "colonizing" and "imperial" forces in a creative and correspondingly invasivecapacity.

This paper posits that while aspects of deference and defense may be initially employed in Anthropologically Magical Realist texts, they may be done so with a subversive intent, and employed todisarm "non-native" and rational readers. When the text provides markers that apologize for the irrationality of the magic, empiricists can be reassured of their relative dominance and supremacy. Once this predisposition is quenched, an Anthropologically Magically Real text can then engage in incursions and sorties into the realm of Realism. No longer merely 'Defending' itself, the text can engage in an assault up on the bastions that support rationalist institutional archés. This Invasion may be destructive and disabling in nature, but can subsequently be creative and enabling if desired so by the author. The Anthropologically Magical Real text can employ a trickster's ruse to, as GayatriSpivak might phrase, "uncoercively rearrange" the manner in which rationalist readers are trained to think. The adjective "uncoercive" is appropriate as there is no force applied to the rational archés, rather, its standard bearers are gradually exposed to its flaws and limitations. In exchange, readers may be gifted with a capacity to read larger, and less blinkered, worlds. (On a side note, the rather circuitous trajectory by which this Liberation is effected, raises the valid question if such a project can be achieved in short works of fiction).

In Eva Aldea's words, Realism is the key to a consideration of Magical Realism not because the genre departs from Realism, but because Realism integrates magic "into the rationality and materiality of literary realism" (2011, p. 50). Rather than tend to the epistemological wounds of the native victim, this paper advances that this form of magical-realism can re-structure the foundations of the rationalist hegemon. However, this will only be the case if the text is written in English, or translated into the master-tongue, and then secures an audience with bearers of the master institution (the colonizers/imperialists).

While Eva Aldea's quote reflects that the magical must accede to the real, in the case of Anthropologically Magically Real texts,magic when grounded in anthropological tapestriesretains a closer link to Realist concerns with politics, history, culture, and local mythos. In order to commence the process of rearranging non-native rationalists epistemologies, it is important thatthe supernatural does not initially overwhelm, or disconnect itself from its anthropological origins. The moment it does so, it runs the risk of becoming entertainment. While the focus remains on Realism, the use of anthropologically propelled magical-realism is to steadily wear away at the "imposed" and"Western" separation between rational and superstitious traditions.

Cooper, while exploring Magical Realism in West African fiction, emphasizes that "magic realist writers are no exception to disillusionment, that is they are crucially linked to the nationalist project, in its preoccupation with the sickness of the state...The urge towards national solutions tends to call on unities, which fall back on tradition, rather than on diversity that links to change" (1998, p. 161).Shannin Schroeder (2004) indicates to this phenomenon of "a return to traditions" as resistances forming the crux of Toni Morrison's counter-hierarchical work. The technique of Magical Realism has been adopted by Morrison to explore cultural frameworks that have been profoundly transformed by colonizing invasions (by the Americans and the Europeans in their respective cases) (2004, p.40). The writer aims to

challenge the dominance that both America and Europe have enjoyed over the years by giving a comprehensive account of their respective cultural histories, with a view to establishing their own peculiar socio-cultural identity.

All this makes evident how notions of deference, defense, and destruction of master narratives (those overpowering native victims) permeate the discourse around magical-realism. The novel Babu Bangladesh!demonstrateshow the use of anthropological magic-realism can accomplish much, much more. Babu Bangladesh!negotiates the tightrope between Deference and suspension of disbelief by constantly referring to superstitions and mystical archetypes as shared across cultural borders. Examples are even taken from rationalist and imperialist frames of reference.

For example, from the very first chapter of Babu Bangladesh!, "Building," the narrative biographer directs our attention to how mankind across the continents has similarly employs meta-themes into his understanding of what the act of building signifies. These crossovers are then examined in minute specificities; the reader sees "whispering dolmens" (Babu Bangladesh!, p. 82) appearing the world over. Furthermore, readers are provided scientific insight into the myth's most probably origination: "A member of Kahn's firm in Chicago published a paper on the common resonance frequency that existed at various stone monuments from England to East Timor. Ranging between 95 and 120 Hz, these frequencies are also found in the human voice; carefully assembled stones would sing back to those who gathered to chant under them. Special stones also emit electromagnetic vibrations to which the Homo sapiens temporal lobe responds orally" (Babu Bangladesh!, p. 82).

This mixture and focus on how much of what we perceived as rationally aberrant and magical is indeed common to those far flung geographically. By scientifically and empirically tracing the anthropological origins of these myths, Babu Bangladesh! shields its "otherworldly" content from ridicule. The material woven in by the narrator makes it very difficult not to recognize the history and humanity palpitating behind the "supernatural".

Another instance of this confounding of magical capriciousness may be found in the chapter "Island" where the biographer deals with mankind's fascination with mermaids and aquatic-humanoids. The narrator of Babu Bangladesh!underlines the deification of water creatures as ancient and ubiquitous:

The worship of water ("hydrolatry") and of fish ("ichthyolatry"), on a global scale, go far back into the human journey and are often inseparable from one another. In the vast continent of Africa, there is the veneration of Mimi Wata in West, Central, and Southern Africa, as well as among their diaspora in the Caribbean, and North and South America. There is the Nommos in Mali, the MbóiTu'I from Paraguay and Argentina, the Chilean "sea-horse,"…The Syrian fish deity Atargatis is said to have had sacred fish at Askelon, a seaport now in Israel. Certain Jewish scholars posit that the Canaanite god, Dagon, was a fish god: recently recovered reliefs suggest a fish-god with human head and hands was worshipped by people who wore fish-skins. There were allegedly sacred fish in the temples of Apollo and Aphrodite in Greece, harkening to a fish cult. We have already encountered their Hindu and Buddhist counterparts." (Babu Bangladesh!, p. 326)

Having exposed the reader to the "fictive" roles that human imaginings worldwide have designated to water and its inhabitants, the chapter proceeds to discuss scientific bases for the aquatic superstitions that consider mermaids as real:

Another explanation involves the Aquatic Ape Theory (AAT). The AAT proposes that during such an aquatic phase, our ancestral hominids settled in a water-filled habitat, explaining our mechanism of sweating (a waste of water for savanna dwelling creatures), our rapid loss of fur, and our relatively thick layer of subcutaneous fat. The controversial notion proposes that it makes more sense that humans developed hairlessness and their unique glandular system for an environment where water was both plentiful and continuously available. (Babu Bangladesh!, p. 303)

This admixture of cultural memory and mythos alongside science allows the reader to understand how many a "nonsensical" superstition is steeped in backstories based on collective human experiences. The narrator greets the reader with a firm handshake. He makes sure to mention his erudition and his awareness of universally shared cultural traditions. It is clear he has no need to be apologetic for his magical content. Yet, he repeatedly and duplicitously questions the validity and meaning of the superstitions he encounters. It is critical to note that these acts of self-questioning are not solely directed toward Bangladeshi and regional magical traditions ("the natives"), but also at the intra-continental difficulty of extrapolating man's ethereal imagination (informed by historical experiences) from the "real" (this speaks to the imperial rationalist). The international focus on shared superstitions keeps things on an even keel: even when in doubt and most unsure of the authenticity of his homeland narrative, the biographer makes sure to emphasize the panhuman nature of the origins of this confusion.

By triggering the reader's own attachments to universal magic, either acknowledged or latent,Babu Bangladesh!entertains the reader with Bengali magic, and "trains" the reader to listen to "other" stories. The Bengali narrative does not proceed to obstruct doorways the text has opened, but permits the reader

to visit other strange lands, and to eschew totalitarian discourses. This type of Anthropological Magical Realism does not pander to "essentialist" sentiments and their proclivity to reduce native belief systems, in the case of Babu Bangladesh!the integrity and complexity of Bengali psyches and aesthetics are safeguarded. In showing that magic and superstition is universal, the Bengali story co-opts the reader's mind. It is therefore able to avoid re-inscribing "pre-existing Western forms" of illogic over the other. As readers are brought around to the fact that magic is already codified in most institutions (including those which are scientifically based), the divisions between First-Third, East-West, North-South, and Center-Periphery collapse. In the process of diving into Bengali magic and immersing readers in uncanny worlds, only to resurface to the empirically rational world, the book makes sure to mention that there are many other similar stories already written, already existent under the skin, both here and there.

In line with Hegerfeldt, all this suggests that cultures cannot be neatly divided into rational vs. irrational, scientific vs. magical, but that certain patterns of meaning-making are anthropological constraints which will persist even if they are incompatible with the dominant (i.e. scientific) world view. Narrative, magical and metaphorical modes of thought are shown to influence people's perceptions and decisions just as much as do objective "facts"; they too decisively shape psychological and sociological reality. In this sense, the magic realist 'argument,' fiction and metaphors, beliefs and dreams are just as 'real' as the material world, and must be taken into account in trying to understand human thought and behavior. (2006, p. 65)

Babu Bangladesh!is a Magically Real text with a strong interest in striking-down-the-Empirical-paradigm. This can be Invasive in nature. The contents of the book can unmoor formerly centered readers from fixed positions, resulting in a type of horror vacui over the "hesitation" and the "gaps" that are encountered. This moment of vulnerability and the consequent disabling can be taken advantage of by the text as a point of entry via which revisionary world accounts may be established. Once old grand theories display the chinks in their armor, there is space for new concepts, including those that oppose recently discarded concepts, to gain entryway. Hence, the coinage of the term "Invasion." The words implies, in this context, a "taking down" of Realist agendas from regal thrones, not a comprehensive dismissal of their possible values.

In summation, Magical Realism in its most enabling forms encompasses moments of hesitation and possibility, which "defamiliarize" the known, but do not merely destroy old constructs or replace them with new ones. Requisite for empowering the reader is the agency to speculate and explore narrative trajectories with the author maintaining a distant and light hand in the privileging of accounts ("uncoercively"). When a narrative is conducive toward the exponential proliferation of prospects, and allows the magical to jostle alongside the real, it succeeds in relinquishing a degree of authority to the reader. As becomes evident, Magically Real techniques are oftentimes used in conjunction with one another. They can confound literary critics, becoming so inter-related and abstract that decades of effort cannot unravel their locks.

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