

Magical realism and romance in Asia: Avenues for understanding?

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The classical Greeks believed that Eros was about erotic love. When we forsake the object of our love, it becomes relegated to the dustbin of memories, which makes it difficult to recover or retrieve. This article discusses how romantic love has been celebrated in works of magical realism in Asia that have evolved to include a range of emotions, political resistance (and questioning state authority and authoritarian personalities), fantasy, delusion, illusion, and fiction. One of the most pronouncedly celebrated works on magical realism was Gabriel Garca Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) (1), which was about patience, perseverance, and emotional endurance. It is a frequent reminder of the need to preserve the memory of the object of one's love, as it appears to be the only way to ensure that the dead never die. Three years later, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) (2) analyzed censorship and religious violence in India (and Pakistan), but incurred the wrath of religious fundamentalists in Iran. Gabriel Garca Márquez's work was translated from Spanish to English and another 56 languages; it became so influential that many scholars used to believe that magical realism originated from Latin America and from the work of Gabriel Garca Márquez. Others believed that it was from several other Latin American scholars, including George Borges. Before Márquez and Borges, western European scholars said that magical realism originated in Germany between 1919 and 1933, i.e., the Neue Sachlichkeit (or Post-Expressionist) inter-war years, in the work of art critic and historian Franz Roh. Neue Sachlichkeit represented a new but unsettling depiction of a society devastated by war. But this claim is not entirely accurate, as there are other, much earlier claims. Nevertheless, for purposes of this article, magical realism began in Latin America and Mexico, most notably with the work of Gabriel Garca Márquez, who would eventually win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. This article is particularly partial to the influences of Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) (1), which pedestalizes the memory of being devoted to the object of first love and the fragility of life. In one sense, the confusion, massacres, and plagues of Márquez's narrative reveal the decadent human desire to plot, plan, and massacre fellow human beings, as we are naturally driven by a God-given desire to destroy the things that we create. Exactly as God does to man, the article asks us to think about the literature of Asian magical realism in general and of Southeast Asian magical realism in particular. What patterns can be gleaned from a brief survey of how magical realism works in Southeast Asia, and what can those patterns tell us about our strengths and desires within streams of consciousness?

Keywords: magical realism, delusion, illusion, fantasy, fiction, non-fiction, stream of consciousness, SE Asia, Southeast Asia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Márquez, Rushdie

Introduction

To qualify as magical realism, books, movies, plays, and other acts need to satisfy four main criteria: it must be based on reality; it must juxtapose reality with outlandish and unreal events, things, activities, and sequences; there is

no discernible pattern; and the plot does not follow a linear development. And as we shall see, magical realism often involves illusion, delusion, grandeur, and fantasy.

Magical realism involves works that are by definition fictional and encompasses science fiction (sci-fi) movies, cartoons, and animated films. This can be illustrated, for

example, in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1972), where a monster shark feeds on the imagination of impending doom; (3) the seminal post-feminist movie by Ridley Scott, *Alien* (1979), starring Sigourney Weaver. In that movie, everything is real, even space travel and astronauts.

The aliens, on the other hand, are unreal and out of this world. Another example would be two of James Cameron's movies, *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Aliens* (1986); and John McTiernan's brilliant *Predator* (1987). It was a remodeling of Frankenstein's monster. Cameron's animated film is a prime example of this subset. The Marvel Universe movies, for example, juxtapose ordinary human beings with superhumans. Given the fact that the concept of the superhero in magical realism is an old and relatively boring idea, it takes a lot of focus, attention, and precision to make a genuinely magical realist product.

Not surprisingly, as far as sequels go, all the sequels to these original sci-fi movies are cited as trash by reputable critics. There are only a few exceptions to this rule. I also show that magical realism as a genre did not originate in Latin America, as many scholars and film critics have claimed. There were in fact multiple points of origin.

Stream of consciousness

Related to magical realism is another concept known as "a stream of consciousness." This concept is a story written as non-dramatic fiction with the intention of creating a sensorial flow of impressions involving sight, sound, touch, and smell. The human senses that interrupt the conscious mind along with rational and logical thought and action are carried out without considering consequences or causes along the way.

Thus, a stream of unconsciousness (a kind of psychological individuation in terms of a process of forming a stable personality) helps us understand that it is possible to have a hyper-narrative technique in dramatic fiction that counters the flows of illusion, grandeur, and fantasy; impressions in waking reality; and reality itself. Both the stream of consciousness and stream of unconsciousness techniques are clearly employed by Gabriel Garca Márquez.

In *100 Years of Solitude* (1967) (4), Márquez describes a fictional Latin American country centered on the town of Macondo (geographically within modern Colombia in Latin America) as being dominated by family feuds and internal ridiculousness and stupidity, such as taking the longest way to get to the town because it was more difficult. The story ensues with inter-generational feuds within the Buendia family that are so weird that they have distinct characteristics that remain for generations.

These include naiveté (as seen in the purchase of the drum-sized magnifying glass from a gypsy) and Ursula Iguarán's fear of fornicating her husband, José Arcadio Buendia.

Márquez deliberately confuses the reader by using the same names to describe different people within the same family across several generations. Aside from insects and butterflies, there is famine, drought, war, pestilence, and a slew of other calamities. There are also millions of tiny yellow flowers that fall from the sky for no apparent reason. The narrative begins simply enough with, "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (4).

Here we see that the beginning is not as simple as it seems. The colonel is facing a firing squad (in the present), but it reminded him of his father (the past), i.e., when his father took him to discover ice (past future tense or past progressive). Therefore, in the first sentence of the book, Márquez is already talking about the present, past, and future.

This is a writing style that is not even present in Shakespeare or in other works by (authentic) magical realists. And of course, there are many texts, works, and videos that plagiarize this famous first sentence.

"*Love in the Time of Cholera*" (1985) (1) or "*El amor en los tiempos del cólera*" (1985) (1) represents several age-old themes, including love, age, and dying over half a century in South America during a cholera epidemic. The protagonists are Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza, who are reunited after living separate lives. In the second sentence of the book, the reader is treated to the same style used in *100 Years of Solitude* (1967) (4): "Dr. Juvenal Urbino noticed it as soon as he entered the still-darkened house where he had hurried on an urgent call to attend a case that for him had lost all urgency many years before" (1).

Dr. Urbino notices something in a darkened house (present tense); to hurry to return call (present continuous); where he had hurried (past) to attend to an old case (future). Márquez is again intertwining the past, present, and future. But the effect does not seem the same. And appears to have less magic than *100 Years of Solitude* (1967) (4).

Midnight's children

Closer to home, Salman Rushdie's Booker Prize-winning novel, *Midnight's Children*, caused a major upset for Ayatollah Khomeini when its sequel, *The Satanic Verses* (also nominated but did not win the Booker Prize, but did receive the much less well-known and certainly not prestigious Whitbread Novel Award), appeared on the scene. Nevertheless, the latter work did win the Annual Fatwa Award for the dangerous political consequences accorded to the author by none less than the Ayatollah himself. For example:

"One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three

*drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air, and lay before his eyes on the prayer-mat, transformed into rubies. Lurching back until he knelt with his head once more upright, he found that the tears which had sprung to his eyes had solidified, too; and at that moment, as he brushed diamonds contemptuously from his lashes, he resolved never again to kiss earth for any god or man. This decision, however, made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history. Unaware of this at first, despite his recently completed medical training, he stood up, rolled the prayer-mat into a thick cheroot, and holding it under his right arm” [Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, 1981 (5)].*

In the preceding passage, a professional Muslim man, a medical student no less, gets a nosebleed while praying and gives up Islam as a result, within his own stream of [un]consciousness. Rather than advocating an “ism” for the creation of artificial cow-like gods that humans could bow down to, worship, and offer sacrifice too.

In another example, in an on-going episode of what is no less than a peevish religious tirade by an aging Islamicist theocrat bent on protecting his spiritual powerbase, a *fatwa* was declared against Rushdie, not for his stupidity but for his wisdom. It was an uphill battle because he was dealing with a metaphorical cretin with the brain of a neanderthal:

*“On Feb 14, 1989, Iran’s spiritual and political pontiff, Ayatollah Khomeini “called for Rushdie to be killed for writing *The Satanic Verses* which the cleric said insulted Islam. In a fatwa, or religious decree, Ayatollah Khomeini urged “Muslims of the world rapidly to execute the author and the publishers of the book” so that “no one will any longer dare to offend the sacred values of Islam. . . . Rushdie gradually emerged from his underground life in 1991, but his Japanese translator was killed in July that year. His Italian translator was stabbed a few days later and a Norwegian publisher shot two years later, although it was never clear the attacks were in response to Ayatollah Khomeini’s call. In 1993, Islamist protesters torched a hotel in Sivas in central Turkey, some of whom were angered by the presence of writer Aziz Nesin, who sought to translate the novel into Turkish. He escaped but 37 people were killed. In 1998, the government of Iran’s reformist president Mohammad Khatami assured Britain that Iran would not implement the fatwa. But Ayatollah Khomeini’s successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said in 2005 he still believed Rushdie was an apostate whose killing would be authorized by Islam. Many Muslims were furious when Rushdie was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2007 for his services to literature. Iran accused Britain of Islamophobia, saying its fatwa still stood, and there were widespread Muslim protests, notably in Pakistan. Rushdie was by then living relatively*

*openly in New York where he moved in the late 1990s, and where his recent novels are set. After many years living in the shadows, he became something of a socialite and is seen by many in the West as a free speech hero” (“Salman Rushdie stabbed: The 1989 fatwa against the Indian-born novelist” *Straits Times*, August 13th 2022).*

Ayatollah the Cretin

Having listened to the fatwa, it eventually became clear that Ayatollah the Cretin was so insecure that he thought Rushdie was actually referring to him. Is it justifiable for a writer like Rushdie to cause moral turpitude through magical realism? And how can one explain Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa against Rushdie for the latter’s wisdom rather than his stupidity?

We can not make any excuses because the Cretin’s insecurity and self-abuse were caused by jealousy and being trapped by a variety of religious interpretations that the Cretin had ironically declared himself since the fall of the Shah of Iran.

Meanwhile, in another part of Asian magical realist narratives, a different pattern of self-abuse emerged. We start with a different idea of fictional and romantic eros, a kind of decadent sensorialism:

As the lieutenant lay dying, he thought of his first love. She was an 18-year-old girl born in the year of the dragon and at the Hour of the Rooster. He would later discover that all the women in his life were mere footnotes to her. They were riding in a taxi. As they passed the Botanical Gardens in the direction of Holland Road, the dream suddenly changed to Winnie’s mother’s flat in Kim Tian Road. It was weird to see her mom on the floor smilingly ironing clothes on a blanket. She went to shower and returned with her long, wavy hair that fell to her waist. Winnie was tall if she was a foot high. And beautiful. Her smile. Her face. She would light up any room that she entered. He just could not bring himself to make love to her while her mother was in the hallway ironing her Pierre Balmain sarong kebaya. She showed him some trinkets she bought. He told her he was happy she was not re-joining the Airline. But she lied.

*One day, during the Hour of the Tiger, she asked him why he took so long to ask her out. He took it as a compliment. As they were in a mall going down an escalator and he kissed her. She looked surprised, and cool but mostly phlegmatic” (Rappa, *Love in a Stream of Unconsciousness*, 2022).*

The dying officer in the preceding passage uses his last moments on earth to dream about a true story from his life about an ex-lover that he pedestalized. This tells us that perhaps eros begins with a magical story of unrequited love that scars the young man for life, thereby making him think of her in all his other love relationships in waking reality.

The thing about magical realism

Magical realism must be grounded. Grounding is important because it makes the book, film, or movie familiar. For example, Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* was realistic, genuine, and magical. *Jaws* was particularly authentic because it was made without the use of computer-generated imagery (CGI), so the stunts and the props, especially the robotic shark, were all real.

Because there was no CGI, Spielberg had to rely entirely on actual film. Most scholars are afraid to say that Spielberg's classic *Jaws* is a magical realist movie. Yet I argue that Spielberg's movie is indeed about magical realism (as it is based on reality), as the monster (robotic) shark is realistic. The shark looks, acts, and behaves as a natural predator. But it is simultaneously larger than life.

At the time, there was no such thing as a large white shark. In *Jaws*, the town of Amity Island and its people are all fictional, but the audience can connect with Amity and its surroundings, its hero, Chief Brody, and its peripheral characters. That is the realistic aspect of the film version of the book. Ironically, the book is an act of complete fiction without anything magical.

There is no magic about it because it was written to be realistic. So, the shark was artificial, Amity Island was artificial, but the place it was filmed at was real. It was filmed on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. Nevertheless, Spielberg's *Jaws* is as magical as *Godzilla*, *Ultraman*, and *Astro Boy*. It was so well made that every single sequel movie that followed it failed. Even with CGI.

A survey of magical realism works in Asia

Recall that I argued that magical realism must satisfy four main criteria: it must be based on reality, it must juxtapose reality with the bizarre, there cannot be any clear plot or pattern, and the story or narrative is not linear. Subsequently, it must involve illusion, delusion, grandeur, and fantasy. And it is mainly in Asia that this is more clearly demonstrated.

Magical realism in Asia involves fringe events. One example is the affair reported by Murakami Haruki. In my opinion, Haruki's detached and morbid approach reveals the moral decay of Japanese individual identity during the inter-war years in what came to be known as part of the popular *Zen-Kyoto* movement (6). The ironic thing about Japanese culture is that despite their efficiency, they insist on wearing clogs and clothes that restrict movement.

Japan is a country with a perceptibly well-defined and delineated literature on magical realism, from *Warm Water Under the Red Bridge* to the most infamous genre of Japanese samurai films (jidai-geki), that catapulted actors such as Toshiro Mifune into Japanese movie rock-stardom, making

him into a cult figure overnight in *Rashomon*, *Seven Samurai*, *The Hidden Fortress*, *Throne of Blood*, and *Yojimbo*, in a wide range of over 150 monochromatic and color movies, including those excellent ones directed by Akira Kurosawa, into Japanese movie rock-stardom, and cata.

He is almost only known for writing and directing one movie based on magical realism's requirements of juxtaposing the real with the unreal, plotless plots, and dreams confused with waking reality. For example, one movie that Kurosawa wrote and directed, *Rhapsody in August* (1991), can be considered to use a magical realist style. This is the one made popular—to an extent—in America because a young Richard Gere appears in it. But the work that Kurosawa wrote and directed that is the most obviously part of the magical realist genre is *Dreams* (1990), which is made up of eight vignettes.

Kitsune

One of the vignettes is about a boy who disobeys his mother in mysterious dreams. Kurosawa discovers the fable of the existentialist foxes as a child. In Japanese folklore, the fable of *kitsune* weddings is common. *Kitsune* weddings are celebrated under rainbows where they live.

In English literature, foxes are known to be cunning and conniving animals. The English story of the fox and the grapes is about the idiomatic expression "sour grapes." There are many different varieties of fox fables from Chaucer and perhaps even earlier. And they were always written for young children, such as "*The Fox and the Crow*."

But in Japanese literature, foxes are more than just cunning. They are duplicitous, deceitful, and swindlers by nature. And they are always or very often referred to as "fox spirits" animals in disguise. One similarity between English fox stories and Japanese ones might be the fear of discovery and of being caught. Foxes are always being chased by hunters (the fox and the hounds) in England.

They are a part of the game and are always the prey. This might be why, if there was any sharing of fables and myths that in Japanese folklore, foxes always fear being discovered, as in Kurosawa's fox wedding vignette. Hence, Kurosawa may have chosen the fox analogy because of his knowledge of Western literature.

Or was at least influenced by it, or perhaps it was because he was decrying the similarities between Japanese and English fox fables. The fox wedding vignette was also a story that Japanese mothers told their children to entertain them on boring rainy days in rural Japan.

Just like my own father, Kenneth Anthony Rappa, told me as a young boy, "When the sun shines and it is also raining, monkeys get married."

In Akira Kurosawa's original film *Dreams*, which he wrote and directed when he was 80 years old, Kurosawa reveals a dream he had as a young boy. It was a dream about foxes

within a dream about his mother. It is raining outside, and the boy Kurosawa runs out and stands under the main gate of his mother's house.

She comes out of the house hurriedly and removes the drying food and condiments from getting soaked from the sudden downpour. He turns and looks at her while she does her chores. Then, while holding an umbrella, his mother tells him the story of the fox fable. In Japanese folklore, kitsune like to get married under a rainbow. "If you see them get married," says his mother, "they will get very angry."

But her disobedient son is intrigued by the fable of the *kitsune* and soon after discovers a wedding procession in the forest. He is frightened by the foxes while spying on them behind a tree. Scared, the boy runs home to a waiting mother. The rain has stopped. She says she can not let him inside as "an angry fox came by looking for him."

And that the "fox left a dagger for you" and says that he will "have to kill himself." She advises him to return the knife and apologize to the foxes. But she also says, "They usually do not forgive," and that he is "likely to die." She then shuts and bolts the gate in his face. The young Kurosawa sees the rainbow across a field of bright flowers. But no one knows what happens next.

The boy Kurosawa discovers that it is perilous to watch a *kitsune* wedding because one will get trapped in an unreal world of strange *kitsune* and cannot escape without the permission of the *kitsune*. He is shocked by the procession and is thus ensnared by the fable. The procession is made up of two long lines of people.

These people are wearing masks of human faces. They look human but are voiceless. They walk like humans and are dressed like humans. There is no indication, apart from what his mother tells him, that these people in a procession who are wearing masks are *kitsune*. His own mother is as cold-hearted as she is unfeeling and callous.

He is inquisitive and obstinate, which, one assumes, will be his undoing. It is inferred in the scholarship that Kurosawa drew this story from two sources: (1) the Japanese *kitsune* fable; and (2) the Japanese mask dance called *Noh*. Apart from his mother, there are no *waki* (other characters) in this Japanese fable.

The wedding procession has everyone walking tall on two legs. Foxes walk on four legs. The audience is left captive, unable to tell if the wedding procession is made up of humans who do not speak or foxes who have learned to walk on two legs. Hiding "reality" is indeed a *Noh* tradition.

And then there is nothing left to figure out about the fox's fable, as it is already zen. The *kitsune* fable is similar to another dream within Kurosawa's *Dreams*: that is the fable of the *Peach Garden*, an existential narrative about peach trees that have been chopped down much to the chagrin of the peach tree spirits.

Kurosawa's dreams

My own father, Kenneth Rappa, used to tell us as young children that when monkeys get married, it is time to give them bananas that have been rubbed against the cheek of someone with mumps (technically known as *parotitis*). And all its symptoms—the headaches and swelling—will go away. Hospitals were of no use. My own father said that people go to hospitals to die. Many never come out of them, and most eventually die in them.

Dreams' magical realism draws from almost all of Kurosawa's other films. Yet, his notion of magical realism appears muted. It is represented by the shooting of spurts of blood from being chopped by a *katana*, with the loss of a foot here and an arm or leg there. What was perhaps most powerful in Kurosawa's 30 movies was his ability to blend movement, weather, and gestures.

His movies were as stark as they were colorful. He mastered the elements of wind, fire, water, smoke, snow, and rain. He would have it snowing outside while a wood fire burned on the inside. A warm glow inside was juxtaposed with the slanted, expressive eyes of an assassin—such as Toshiro Mifune—who would smile menacingly while chopping up a victim's limbs.

While the hero is walking, everyone else is running around in the background. While it is raining outside, it is dark and warm inside. Kurosawa had the innate ability to blend style with his characters. Most of the time, his characters were voiceless. If they did say something, it was short and sharp.

And then there were the cries of those whose limbs were hacked full of spouting blood while it might be raining buckets on the outside. The weather always reflected the thoughts of the protagonist and the overall mood of the film. Sadness often was accompanied by rain and snow, whereas burning fires would reflect hatred and vengeance. Howling winds and dusty streets often indicated that a battle was afoot.

It also reflected the level of violence and insanity in the minds of the hero, villain, protagonist, and anti-hero. Music played an important part in his dramatic orchestration, but only if it added to the integrity of the violence of the scene. An enemy's chopped hand or pierced torso was always followed by a state of shock. A stare of disbelief.

Kurosawa always ensured that his protagonist always had three things: a main job (such as working as a masseuse); a hobby (such as gambling); and a life mission (such as helping the underdog). The thread that tied all three things together—the main job, the hobby, and the life mission—was violence. And violence always involved human blood drawn from severed limbs.

He did not direct films that involved physical torture. Rather, he preferred that his protagonist cut off human limbs in the main street of a village, during battle, in a roadside tavern, in a Japanese palace, or in a grassy field. To his credit, none of his movies showed any violence toward animals.

Kurosawa gradually perfected the ability to maintain the focus of the audience on the hero. There were usually several extras, actors in their own right, occupying different parts of the scene within Kurosawa's frame. Some would build coffins; others would lurk in the shadows; and still more would shadow the hero as he remained the center of attention.

Also, his heroes had distinct, unique, and even weird mannerisms or gestures, such as walking with an obvious limp, having a noticeable facial tick, or staring with a menacing smile. Of course, there were many other highly capable directors, including several who reinterpreted *The Blind Swordsman*, *Zatoichi*, *47 Ronin*, and other *ronin* stories.

A *ronin* is a masterless samurai who ought to have committed *seppuku* on his master's death but usually does so only after his last mission. Elements of magical realism in these *ronin* stories are muted as well, and flashes of magic only occur to shock the audience with gushing blood, a sudden tear, or the chopping off of a limb. Remember that magical does not necessarily imply fantastic in a good way.

Akutagawa Ryunosuke's "*Kumo no ito*," or *The Spider's Thread* (1918), is about the bridge, spiritual, real, and magical, that spans hell and heaven. Ryunosuke's work seems overly similar to Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*, involving the River Styx and Valhalla (the hall of the fallen heroes) in the afterlife. Homer's work is said to have been written around the 8th century before Christ.

There is a wide modern range of literature in Japanese magical realism that has virtually and single-handedly transformed its culture from the modern to the postmodern; from Godzilla to anime; and from Gameboys to cosplay girls. If the works of Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Murakami Haruki, Akira Kurosawa, and Minae Mizumura represent the modern past, then surely Banana Yoshimoto represents the modern present in her twelve novels and many essays about decadence and listlessness.

Magical realism, if we begin with Akira Kurosawa's pre-postmodern Japan, has created the cultural space for newer works by authors like Maki Kashimada's *Touring the Land of the Dead* (2021); Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* (2021); and Hiromi Kawakami's *People From My Neighborhood* (2019) or *Kono atari no hitotachi*. Japanese magical realism has influenced not only the Japanese but also many generations of Chinese, Taiwanese, South Koreans, Americans, and other globally connected cultures.

The South Korean case

Doubtless, we see aspects of Kurosawa in many South Korean movies. We only refer to South Korea and not its northern cousin because the latter is a gigantic tragic comedy on its own. In South Korea, in order to illustrate the wide variety and innovative nature of magical realist fiction, Japan-based second-generation Korean novelist Kim Sok Pom characterizes diasporic Korean identity and hybridity using

the trope of the ghost and other literary motifs in his 1971 novel *Mandogi yrei kitan*.

Kim stands out among Korean writers for his unwavering commitment to the fiction of the Cheju Massacre (1948). Kim is a voice in the Korean wilderness within different accounts of the Asian-Korean diaspora.

It is through the medium of a spiritual narrative that Kim melds identities that run across boundaries in spite of Korean "monoculturalism," a mono-cult that aided Korean resistance against the Japanese colonial powers. By the 1990s, the first civilian government emerged after three decades and resulted in the ascendancy of Shin Kyoung-sook and Choi Yoon, who continue to represent the deep-seated resentment among the 1960s generation of students who had been repressed by successive authoritarian regimes from the time of their birth in the 1960s until they attained young adulthood.

Korean writers resorted to, as a result, magical realism as they believed that it was the best way to articulate their political interests as they felt obligated to be the conscience of the fledgling Korean liberal resistance under the weight of the authoritarian military dictatorships, without which they, along with the rest of South Korean society, would be no more than powerless citizens.

It was only after the end of successive authoritarian regimes that some space was created for the feminist-sounding "personal is political" and the rise of "interstitiality" a la Homi K. Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Bhabha would not have it any other way, he told us over dinner in Honolulu in 1994.

Overt references to magical realism in South Asia reveal that the colonial novel evolved from fables and myths in English literature, as exemplified in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) (5), which was a relatively boring precursor and much poorer cousin (designed to impress the Indian lower classes such as those who drink Sankar) of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) (2), a far more brilliant achievement.

While the essay offers a thorough reading of the novel, it situates Rushdie alongside a host of lesser-known English and vernacular-language writers from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Further, it shows that beyond this time frame, the term has been used by writers with tremendous heterogeneity to address social issues ranging from gender, caste, religion, ecology, identity, refugee movements, and others. However, Indian Salman Rushdie's writing contains more overt terror. For example, Rushdie employs magical realism to terrorize his readers while also terrorizing the intended:

"Out of thin air: a big bang, followed by falling stars. A universal beginning, a miniature echo of the birth of time ... the jumbo jet Bostan, Flight AI-420, blew apart without any warning, high above the great, rotting, beautiful, snow-white, illuminated city, Mahogany, Babylon, Alphaville. But Gibreel has already named it, I mustn't interfere: Proper London, capital of

Vilayet, winked blinked nodded in the night. While at Himalayan height a brief and premature sun burst into the powdery January air, a blip vanished from radar screens, and the thin air was full of bodies, descending from the Everest of the catastrophe to the milky paleness of the sea. . . And now a pretty young British Asian woman with a slightly-toobulbous nose and a dirty, bluesy voice was launching into Bob Dylan's song. *Saladin Chamcha* is a creature of selected discontinuities, a willing re-invention; his preferred revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, "false?" And might we then not go on to say that it is this falsity of self that makes possible in *Chamcha* a worse and deeper falsity call this 'evil' and that this is the truth, the door, that was opened in him by his fall? – While Gibreel, to follow the logic of our established terminology, is to be considered 'good' by virtue of wishing to remain, for all his vicissitudes, at bottom an untranslated man. But, and again but: this sounds, does it not, dangerously like an intentionalist fallacy? Such distinctions, resting as they must on an idea of the self as being (ideally) homogeneous, non-hybrid, 'pure', an utterly fantastic notion! cannot, must not, suffice. No! Let's rather say an even harder thing: that evil may not be as far beneath our surfaces as we like to say it is. That, in fact, we fall toward it naturally, that is, not against our natures. And that *Saladin Chamcha* set out to destroy Gibreel Farishta because, finally, it proved so easy to do; the true appeal of evil being the seductive ease with which one may embark upon that road (And, let us add in conclusion, the later impossibility of return.) *Saladin Chamcha*, however, insists on a simpler line" [*The Satanic Verses*, 1988 (2)].¹

A Filipina case: fish hair woman and pink dollars

Rushdie's fictional sensorialism, something that is neither corporeal nor sensational, as I always say, involves a lot of falling. He uses the word "fall" no less than 167 times. Falling does not mean falling down or having fallen down. His characters never land on the ground because they are magical. While Rushdie is threatened by Iran's Mullahs, he terrorizes his English readers by violating their sense of native-English speaking.

Another form of terror comes from Filipina feminist writer Merlinda Bobis' "Fish Hair Woman" (2012) about personal violence and political terror during the Marcos regime (that ended in 1986 with his escape to Honolulu through Singapore after the prime minister Lee Kuan Yew offered him safe passage) (3). However, it was only in graduate school that

I discovered that the LGBT community was very tight-knit, and they controlled everything from pink dollars and cents to LGBT bars and academic journals.

So I guess that I was in the know when I said that "those in the know, knew" about the LGBT agenda. So believe me when I say that Bobis had a different agenda that was not immediately apparent. It was hidden behind the walls of a large and briny clam shell. But because I was basically white, I was afraid of everything.

People who are afraid of everything are usually concerned with political correctness. In South Africa of 2022, a white manager feared he would be perceived as racist if he sacked a black subordinate, while a black student who gets a place at Harvard University will never know if she got in because of her ethnicity or on merit. She cannot say anything lest she be perceived as "playing the race card."

But Bhabha and the rest of us really had no inkling or sense about the kind of magical realism that had been burgeoning in South Korea. For example, we did not know that *A Man Who Was Superman* (2008) was directed by a South Korean film-maker named Jeong Yoon-chul, who was born in 1971, would rise to magical fame again with his movie *Superstar* (2008).

On the other bank, Chung Chiao's *River in the Heart* as well as *Pear Flowers* used magical realism to criticize class, gender, and ethnic inequalities in the Republic of China (ROC) Taiwan (7). As well as the plight of the disenfranchised Hakka community on the so-called mainland as well as in Taipei.

In effect, the famous modern Chinese writer, Mo Yan (a.k.a. Guan Moye), featured magic realism in some of his works, including *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (1997), which won the *Dajia Honghe* Literature Prize. In any case, Mo Yan finally won the Noble Prize in Literature in 2012 (8–10).

But it was his *Garlic Ballads*, a feminist treatise, that seemed to appeal mostly to scholars; nevertheless, Zhang Yimou's direction of Gong Li's big roles in movies such as *Red Sorghum*, *Big Breasts*, and *Full Hips*, as well as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *The Chrysanthemum Throne*, continue to remain the kinds of works that are most preferred by the hoi polloi.

Among many others, Mo Yan's magical realism was influenced by Pu Songling. The latter's works themselves often involve violence, death, and disharmony. Choo Yangtze's *Ghost Bride* (2013) (11) is an example of how Asian magical realism has been adapted for television's small screen (on *Netflix*) from his book about ghost marriages and spirit weddings in Chinese American culture.

In this classic retelling of an old Chinese superstition, a beautiful woman named Li Lan is forced to choose between an exciting life with a prospective (but dead) husband and a boring normal life with a live one. Li Lan is therefore haunted by the spirit of a recently deceased man, whose (live) family wants her to be his (ghost) bride.

¹ Notice that throughout the *Satanic Verses*, Rushdie deliberately misspells many common nouns; using onomatopoeia and other idiomatic expressions. He is consistent in his betrayal of common English nouns and verbs.

Lifted from Malacca Chinese Peranakan culture about ghost “brides,” spirits, and mediums can be considered part of Southeast Asian magical realism. It raises questions about how it ever became possible for dead men and women to become the spouse of a living person.

Hawaiian cases

The magical realist dimension involves wearing red and the burning of artificial accouterments of married life in capitalist reality, such as houses, cars, hand phones, pets, children, and money. In *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1996), the military camp town of Pupyong is haunted by the ghost of a Japanese officer who, during the Japanese Annexation era, had “tortured and murdered tens of thousands of Koreans for his amusement” (12).

“While praying to the Patron Saint of Womanizers in Hawaii, the aging lieutenant met and attempted to date a Korean-American girl named Jane Wong.” In fact, she did not even look Korean but sounded like a white, blonde American sophomore.

*He opened his heart to Jane, but she slammed it down with a swift metaphorical kick to the balls. Out of sheer amusement. Jane was so gleeful that he was sure that she was the reincarnation of the Imperial Japanese officer in *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1996).*

The bad luck with women began in 1981, when he met Winnie in junior college. She would join Singapore Airlines as an air stewardess in 1983, just before he enlisted for compulsory national service (NS). It was only because of Winnie that he discovered how little he knew about women, or rugby union, for that matter.

She was Hokien but spoke Cantonese and looked the part of a squint-eyed and hunchbacked Marty Feldman. One day she surprised him with a call from Germany, saying, “Hi hunk!”. That was the biggest compliment she ever gave him. In the Year of the Pig, after returning from her flight to Pakistan, she presented him with a leather whip she bought from Karachi.

He did not know what to do with the whip but thought perhaps she wanted to be whipped. He recalled the day she broke up with him. It was a hot and useless day, like most days in Singapore. They took a cab to the Peninsular Hotel, where she had an aerobics class.

It was the year that Jane Fonda released her workout videos. At the Hour of the Dog, she broke up with him, but he was not sure how she had communicated the breakup to him as it was all a blur. The flowers he bought for her did not work. He wanted to visit her mother to look for her, but he got lost in the HDB estate. When he finally found the flat, her mother said she was on a flight.

Moving from one woman to another, he became a serial womanizer. The list was long and abortive. Esther, for example, had a wide mouth and large, elephantine-like ears; but at least her hair was long and silky. Dorothy had the most crooked smiles and was bald by choice, not by necessity.

She went on to receive her Ph.D. from a famous American university in Baltimore. In his third year at university, he met and dated Rosina, who turned out to be the most possessive of them all. She was even suspicious of her own shadow. The reason for her possessiveness was not her Catholic upbringing but because she had been hit by the school bus that she was waiting for and flung wide-across to the other side of the street.

However, a school teacher named Rina was a horse-faced nympho; she invented the amazing turn-around and swallow-down maneuver. As the main nymphomaniac of the group, Rina was also highly sexually frustrated. Perhaps because her father was a police officer, or maybe because she was also a pedophile, she loved those tall and handsome Malay high school students until it was all over.

In contrast, Jolene was the size of a hairy black domestic pig. She got fatter and fatter every time they met. She grew so large one day that tourists started taking her photograph because they mistook her for the rare South Asian brontosaurus. Eventually, Jolene ate herself to death.

The Chinese cases

Dorothy was a Han Chinese woman with the agility of a monkey who had been skinny her entire life before embarking on a pro-White crusade to save White men from unscrupulous Singapore party girls. Anna, on the other hand, was always there for him, like when he was hospitalized for a flesh-eating bacteria, when his father died, or when he had a series of heart attacks.

She seemed like an angel of death, always waiting to claim those bodies about to die. She also surrounded herself with toadies and fawning close friends who kept manipulating her to do things that were against her own best interests, and by extension, in their own best interests.

Crystal Tan, the Chinese girl who almost made it as a supermodel, claimed to have appeared in several pornographic films. He recalled that she liked being choked. But dating her was like dating a small giraffe.

The later Esther was older and wrinkled, a Chinese blonde with short hair who loved Korean soap operas. She was

older compared to the rest, as she was in her mid-30 s. But she brought him good luck. She preferred the CIM move and would always ask for it matter-of-factly.

Gail was untrustworthy. She lied about everything: her boyfriends, her parents, and her membership at the American Club in Singapore. He recalls seeing her many years after they had drifted apart and noticing that she was putting on a tremendous amount of weight.

Clary was a very structured person and often preferred to get the sex out of the way before having supper. She wasn't interested in sex because she wanted to get as much done as possible so she could repeat the pattern the next time.

For example, they would watch a movie in the car afterward and then get ready for more nocturnal activities. She liked it when it rained heavily—in car parks, alongside shipyards, in nature parks, as well as inside a Chinese cemetery next to all those gigantic Chinese tombs. She was *summa cum laude*, if you will.

The fall of Adam

Women could be unfaithful for a long time because it had been ingrained in them since Adam's fall. But a man always had something else that he could, like the young lieutenant, rely on. And the hope was to pass on the same fox and hounds to the next unsuspecting virgin.

One day in the 1990s, it became clear after he received his scholarship from Cambridge University that he was indeed intellectually far ahead of other men and women. As the lieutenant lay dying, coughing up spasms of blood, he thought about the future that he might have had with Clary or Felicia.

While at the university, the young lieutenant focused heavily on his studies and ignored all pleasures of the flesh. But the more he ignored them, the more they wanted him: for his tawny, olive-colored skin; his unkempt, curly brown hair; his toned, muscular body; his big, brown Portuguese eyes; and his incredible ability to make a woman laugh recklessly.

He was so attractive that they would giggle in girlish giggles as they watched him stretch his arms or play lawn hockey with the other men.

There was a young Chinese girl with pearly white teeth. Because she was short, everything else about her looked big. And they were. Dolly was a strange English name that no one used on her.

Dolly, or Sher, as everyone called her, was the kind of girl who grew up too fast and knew what every man who

walked was staring at. Sher, a barely legal 17-year-old, was carrying two massive milk jugs. Her mother had given them to her for posterity.

She had long, black, and ash-colored hair. and gave the impression that she had just washed it. She would also follow the aging lieutenant all over campus like a puppy dog. Unfortunately, she dressed like her mother, black spandex tights with an overly large but colorful top made of cheap silk. One evening, he pressed her against the wall of the 3rd floor administrative building, and she showed her flexibility by stretching her right leg and resting it on his left shoulder.

From then on, their *risqué escapades* took place often. On Mondays, for example, they would make out in an empty lecture hall. Mondays were always exhausting for him. Sher did not mind that he smoked two packs of Marlboro Reds a day like he was some mythical symphonic dragon, wafting curls of blue-gray smoke curling above his curly brown hair and burgeoning ponytail.

It made her happy, and she too would smile the smile of a thousand suns. Every evening after that first time at the Admin Building, she would lead him to a secret cabal.

When safely inside, she would gently open her secret brown sugar box to share her sweets. On Thursday nights, they would scale the main library's roof. He would then unravel a pashmina for her to lie on top of. As they kissed, a flotilla of tiny purple violas suddenly floated down in a magnificent drizzle.

She had unwittingly become a new hostage to his will. She pointed out the Little Dipper to him in the night sky. And he showed her his Big Dipper in return: the constellation of Ursa Major, also known as the Great Bear, lying at approximately 10 h and 39 min right ascension and 56 degrees north declination.

The lieutenant's knowledge of physics and astronomy impressed SL. His knowledge of astrology enabled him to read her palms while touching them both. They drew close. And kissed. He used to wonder why she ate like a pig even though she was born in the Year of the Rabbit.

And she always made him feel like a rock. He grew to love her only a decade and a half after they broke up because she was one of the three women who never cheated on him. But when they broke up, she quickly attached herself to some stranger, and her acne spread across her once-almost-beautiful face. That is called "karma." Rappa, "Love in a Stream of Unconsciousness," 2023 (13).

Magical realism and other concepts

We already saw that related to magical realism is an idea known as a "stream of consciousness." In one sense it is

about the re-questioning of the human senses that interrupt the conscious mind without a care for the world around us. This was why I referred to a stream of *unconsciousness*, a hyper-narrative technique in dramatic fiction that counters the flows of illusion, grandeur, and fantasy in reality.

Magical realism itself possesses different amounts of illusion, delusion, grandeur, and fantasy. There are some other concepts that are not well-treated in the literature on magical realism worldwide. We need to fix that problem here by defining these other concepts. There is a big difference between illusion, delusion, hallucinations, and fantasy. We need to know this because magical realism often involves one or all of these concepts.

Illusion is defined as the result of poor or inaccurate sensory perceptions or experiences. For example, a striped shirt is said to have a slimming effect on the wearer. An illusion is a distorted view of something that is not there or present, such as seeing, hearing, feeling, or tasting something that is not there or present.

However, a delusion is a false and abnormal thought or belief about a living or dead thing. A delusion occurs when you mistake a real and living person for another person (dead or alive in the latter case). Delusions are persistent, unshakable beliefs that are not based on reality (3). For instance, a person may believe that their thoughts are being controlled by aliens or that black and red cars on the street are sending them coded messages only they can decipher.

A fantasy is to imagine that a dead or living person exists or is seen in actual, concrete places or sites where no such dead or living person is actually present.

There is a critical difference as well between delusions and hallucinations. We have already described delusions. Hallucinations, on the other hand, involve imaginary sensations (via thought, sight, hearing, or touch, but not taste). One usually cannot taste a hallucination that no one else can experience. For instance, a person may hear sounds or voices when no one else is in the room or see spiders crawling across the wall.

When we refer to delusion, illusion, and hallucination in this paper, we are referring to cases where such occurrences happen in reality or waking reality. We are not referring to cases in the dream state or in deep sleep.

While it is true that magical realists tend to make use of fantasy in the dreamscape as well as other concepts such as anthropomorphizing, we focus mainly on what happens in waking reality and cases where the person of interest is actually awake.

Anthropomorphizing or anthropomorphization is about attributing or giving human characteristics to animals within the human world. This is illustrated in the following scene from Rushdie:

'To be born again,' sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, 'first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji! To land

upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly. Tat-taa! Taka-thun! How to ever smile again, if first you won't cry? How to win the darling's love, mister, without a sigh? Baba, if you want to get born again . . . ' Just before dawn one winter's morning, New Year's Day or thereabouts, two real, full-grown, living men fell from a great height, twenty-nine thousand and two feet, toward the English Channel, without benefit of parachutes or wings, out of a clear sky [The Satanic Verses, 1988 (2)].²

How can someone or anyone possibly be born again by dying first? Does rebirth involve falling out of the sky without wings? This is clearly giving some human attributes to fantastic, fictional, and named entities from the heavens.

There are two kinds of hallucinations occurring here: one that exists in Rushdie's mind and the other that is presented to the reader if s/he can accept it in the first place. Acceptance means believing in the fictional hallucination.

Another form of humiliating fictional fantasy is seen in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's brilliant *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970), where swarms of locusts attack a village while thousands of flowers fall around it as the villagers' poverty changes from bad to worse from their separation from the outside world.

Magical realism and the concept of *phi* in Thai culture

Thai culture has a long and distorted history of spirits and ghosts. The main reason is that Siam, and since 1946, Thailand (the Land of the Free), has and continues to maintain an animistic and superstitious culture where fantasy and delusion play a significant role in its socio-cultural and political structures.

There are different ghosts for different occasions. There are festivals for ghosts. Thai cultural scholars distinguish between *phi* (ghosts) and *thēwada* (deities), and theoretically, the former guards the latter, but this neat arrangement is not always the case, creating a problem for the researcher. We rely on STL as a standard language and avoid too much reliance on various Bangkok and other dialects that deviate from the norm.

Conclusion

We saw how Spielberg's monster was akin to Shelley's similarly fictional monster in many respects, but both monsters die differently. However, Spielberg's monster's

² *Ibid.* fn. 3.

exploded body sinks silently into the depths of Amity Island's coastal waters after being shot by Chief Brody's gun.

The death of Shelley's monster is real, even though he is a fictional character, and it was not evidently witnessed by anyone or any other character. Frankenstein's monster escapes to the Cold North (Arctic), but not actually, as it is an escape from which "there can be no escape."

In Frankenstein, the monster has a suicidal motif with a death wish. This is the kind of leitmotif you want to have if you do not wish to violate anyone anymore. Both monsters not only add color to their media but also make their narratives simultaneously magical and real.

This paper attempted to analyze magical realism as it has appeared in Asia, from South Asia and Southeast Asia to China, Taiwan, and South Korea. Gabriel García Márquez's work is so influential that many scholars hold the erroneous belief that magical realism originated in Latin America.

This belief is not really true. Magical realism is about fantasy, delusion, illusion, and fictional characters. It is similar to the claim that Márquez makes in *100 Years of Solitude* (1967), when he writes, "que uno no se muere cuando debe, sino cuando puede (a person doesn't die when he should, but when he can)" (4).

Murakami spoke of the actual insignificance of our lives. While Guan Moye (Mo Yan) was somewhat influenced by the work of Pu Songling, he won the 2012 Nobel Prize for Literature because of the distinct magical realist work he had done.

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