



**'MAGIC REALISM'—
'A POSTMODERN DEVICE TO DEPICT THE ALTERNATE REALITIES OF
LIFE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GRIMUS BY SALMAN RUSHDIE'
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ABSTRACT



Article Info:

Article Received: 1/07/2014

Revised on: 15/07/2014

Accepted on: 23/07/2014

Postcolonial discourse is a retort to the process of colonial extension. Post colonialism employs numerous devices and tropes allied with postmodernism. Both post-modern and the post-colonial share common concerns in terms of techniques like magic realism, themes like history and marginality, and devices like irony and allegory.

The concept of magic realism has never actually managed to noticeably differentiate itself from neighboring forms such as marvelous, fantasy, metafiction, the flamboyant, or the Oxymoronic in nature. The magic realist draws from the authentic as well as the miraculous. Rushdie is categorized as a postmodern author. One of the main features is the presence of a fantastical element which cannot be explained according to our knowledge of the world, but the magical things really do happen. I have selected these features because I believe they also exemplify the magic realism (as used in postmodernism). Magic realism is apprehensive with problems that are vital to postmodern literature. However, magic realism in postmodern literature is chiefly used to criticize the conventional order in different spheres of public life.

keywords: *Allegorical, Discourse, Dimension, Engender, Elixir, Galvanizing, Metamorphosis, Metafiction, Veracities.*

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**METAFICTION A FORM OF WRITING IN
POSTMODERNISM**

Metafiction is regarded as a form of writing in postmodernism. Illusory work that is fretful with the nature of fiction in order to look at the relationship amid fiction and reality, are metafictions. Rushdie's work interrogates a structured reality and also an ordered fictional world. Postcolonial and postmodern writing finds a device and graceful

contrivance in magic realism as it problematical conventional narrative conventions. Linda Hutcheon affirms that many critics have tinted the magic realist practice as a site of concurrence between postmodernism and post colonialism. She points out that, "The challenge magic realism poses to generic categories and realism are part of the agenda of both post colonialism as well as postmodernism". (Hutcheon. "Circling the Downspout of Empire." 131).

MAGIC REALISM A TECHNIQUE FOR TRANSCENDING TO ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

The concept of magic realism has never actually managed to noticeably differentiate itself from neighboring forms such as marvelous, fantasy, metafiction, the flamboyant, or the Oxymoronic in nature, the magic realist draws from the authentic as well as the miraculous. The amalgamation of pragmatic description and naturalistic technique as well as the insertion of weird elements of dream and fantasy, exemplify magic realism. Wendy B. Faris observes,

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

While they are ingrained in a realistic construction, magic realist works include numinous elements. Hutcheon opines that postmodern writing is best characterized by works that are Historiographic metafiction in that they are self-reflexive while at the same time they consciously meddle with history. Metafiction is regarded as a structure of writing within postmodernism. Fictional work that is fretful with the nature of fiction in order to look at the relationship between fiction and reality, are metafiction. Rushdie's work interrogates a structured reality and also a structured fictional world. "It displays an ambiguity about the legitimacy of its depictions". (Hutcheon: 131)

Postmodern writing finds a maneuver and unforced device in magic realism as it is intricate in the customary narrative conventions. Rushdie is categorized as a postmodern author. Magic realism emerges at the beginning of the 20th century but its stimulation is perceptible in the 80s with authors that are considered postmodern because of their 'decentralization'. They are either from places other than Europe or the United States or are marginalized because of gender or race. Due to his Indian origin and then being a British citizen, Rushdie probably will rank among these authors, even if he has never been marginalized as the author since his works were a great success. He uses magic realism to expunge the boundaries between West and East (centre and margin) or disparage the migrant's status in foreign society. "Basically, magic realism combines realism

and the magic (or fantastic) in a way that the magical elements and miracles rise naturally from the reality portrayed". (Zamora 163).

One of the main features is the presence of a fantastical element which cannot be explained according to our knowledge of the world, but the magical things really do happen. To understand Rushdie's work we must class him as a postmodernist and the author from 'elsewhere'. 'There are several reasons why Salman Rushdie ranks among the postmodern writers and there are several features that mark postmodernism; these are for instance metafiction, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the erasure of boundaries, and the destabilization of the reader' (Zamora 194).

Rushdie's brand of magic realism is engaged in the service of serious biased veracity. His novels are hailed as some of the most predictable exemplars of the merge of magical realism with rigid political reality Prodigies, prophecies, fairy tale patterns, renowned exploits, hallucinatory exaggerations, fantastic correlations and overdeveloped sensory organs find a place amidst the usual and the distinctive all through Rushdie's exertion. It is of concern to note that Rushdie's fastidious magical realism leads the reader into confounding the categories of the real and the fantastic.

Rushdie makes the readers transcend to an alternative world designed by him with the constituent of fantasy. *Grimus* is an attempt by Rushdie to create a work of fiction like that of *Arabian Nights*, using the mysticism of the Sufis, to make his novel a 'stimulating and imaginative one', full of strangely echoing mysteries. The novel appears as a fictionalized picture of the writer's attitude towards change and search for new realities. He constantly attempts to deconstruct the given facts and truths, and to destabilize the concept of pure culture and supreme facts. Hence, the critic is of the opinion that according to Rushdie, there are two forms of history; formal, exclusionary, despotic history which offers a singular view of the historical events, and polyphonically figurative history which provides manifold realities and multi dimensional historical truths. Hence, the critic relies on the recording of 'facts 'and the events' and these new historical speculations constitute the theoretical

foundations. "Rushdie's *Grimus* is made significant by his ability to build pluralistic worlds mediated by fantasy which permits entrance into alternative universe. In the novel, he uses the intervention of fiction to make the implausible possible. The alternative reality created in this novel, in particular, is mediated by fabulous events and fantasy to oppose the imposed rational reality and also as a technique that enables the excluded characters in the novel to escape the particular social restriction and conformities in their sad cities through the wings of fantastic imagination. Yet, the technique of fantasy in this novel serves to represent Rushdie's visions of 'social change' and how history should be re-created to gratify the individual demands of new imaginative life. These pluralistic visions of realities and experiences indorsed in the novel form what we call 'alternative versions' of history" (Bite 111).

The critic is of the opinion that to transgress distinctions of genres Rushdie incorporates magic realism: "Rushdie relentlessly draws attention to the provisional status of his text's "truth".

INTERTEXTUALITY THE CONFIGURATION OF A CONVENTION TO ENABLE SUBSTANCE:

A phrase coined by Julia Kristeva, intertextuality proposes that, "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another". (Julia: 37) All systems of meaning are unruffled by the mode in which they convert previous systems of meaning. A work is not self-sufficient but gains its connotation in the luminosity of existing texts. It is the affiliation of a renowned text to other texts and to language at large that determines a literary text. Many texts play a part in the configuration of a convention that enables substance. 'Writing then becomes a re-writing, foregrounding the texts that it invokes, in the process. The intertext bears a dual semantic charge, operating like a "lexical Janus".' (Michael: 72)

In the words of Kristeva, "the notion of intertextuality replaces that of Inter subjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double". (Kristeva. 37). Thus, there is no undeviating conveyance of connotation via writer to reader, but the meaning is wrought by the codes working on the reader as well as writer, in the form of other texts. Intertextuality subverts conventional perceptions of authorship as it

undermines the text as a self restricted entirety, underscoring the mutual temperament of texts.

"In existing in dialogue with other texts and contexts, it has been regarded as a tapestry, a weave of strands that has both a horizontal and vertical analyses of prior relations to other texts. According to Roland Barthes, a text exists as: a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is tissues of quotations ... The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as to never rest on any one of them". (Barthes: 146)

A momentous part of the galvanizing energy of Rushdie's texts is contributed by their assorted intertexts. Talking about *Grimus* outside the work in an interview to John Haffenden, Rushdie says: "It was easy in the sense that it [*Grimus*] was the only book which had its source in another book, a twelfth century Sufi narrative poem called The Conference of the Birds, which is the closest thing in Persian literature to Pilgrim 's Progress. The characters are all birds, which is why the central character of *Grimus* is a bird, Flapping Eagle." (Haffenden: 43) Hence, to James Harrison, one of the intertexts of *Grimus* is, "the Persian poem in which thirty birds climb a mountain in search of a god called ' Simurg' only to have it dawn upon them, on finding no one there, that Simurg consists of "Si" and "Murg" and means "thirty Birds"(Harrison. 38).

The title of the novel *Grimus* is derived from the twelfth-century Sufi poem, "The Conference of Birds", and the novel's title is an anagram of the word '*Simurg*' which appears in Persian, Russian and Caucasian mythologies and hence it is said to be the bird of the Persian Tree of Life. This fabled bird has the ability to immolate itself like the Phoenix and is a symbol of the developing soul. Rushdie starts with Farid-ud-Din Attar's allegorical poem "The Conference of Birds" - "There is a Sufi Poem in which thirty birds set out to find the *Simurg*" (*Grimus*. 232-233) Amusingly, Rushdie himself has turned out to be the spring for the critic — the critic is quoting from the Rushdie interview I quoted above — and tumbling one time again a great work of Islamic thinking to a measly escapade of birds looking for a

“god,” named Simurg. A swamped analysis of *Grimus* and its decisive response would use the text and its response as a beginning pad to study its intertexts intensely. One could use Rushdie's use of the Simurgh and Muntaq-attair in instructing not just the history of Persian poetry, but also the meaning of mystic poetic tradition in Persia as well as the Muslim world.

“Allusions to cinema, myth, epic, religious texts, fable, fairy tale, gossip, proverbs, and superstitions, popular songs and films, comics, advertisements, news items, anecdotes, as well as Rushdie's other work, come together on his canvas. “Postmodernism” as Hutcheon maintains, “directly confronts the past of literature - and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts (documents). It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony”. (Hutcheon, Poetics. 118). Similarly, there is a parallel text of Ferdowsi's *Shah-nama*, which is an earlier Persian epic which introduces the mythical Simurgh in *Grimus*. And there is also the influence of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. In both the Divine Comedy and *Grimus* there is a character named Virgil who acts as a guide. Myth plays an important intertextual position in the dynamics of Rushdie's work. Mythological archetypes are strained upon and interwoven with the existing veracity throughout his corpus of work.

In *Grimus* Rushdie practices his ability to merge genres, and his blending of Eastern and Western philosophies, myths, and narrative techniques. *Grimus* is a scientific fantasy, at times, tending to an allegorical interpretation. The plot deals with the quest motif of the protagonist ‘Flapping Eagle’, the world of Calf Island becomes the fictional locale. In this fictional locale, that is rarefied fantasy, the spatial dimensions are in a state of fluidity. Broadly speaking the dimensions in Calf Island may be related to the feelings and state of mind of an individual; “One never knows what universe may lie locked within one's mind. The effect can work upon the mind with devastating effects.” (*Grimus*.55)

From the postmodernist view, *Grimus* translates the idea of reliable experience through

Rushdie's approach to historical representation. Rushdie uses the idea of hyper-reality in lieu of reality as a likely and valid experience. Life in Calf Island, therefore, is an excellent example of an authentic experience out of the limits of space and time. In so doing, Rushdie deals with the issues in a sphere of postmodernist world. Rushdie's postmodern world is seen as the unconventional world where the symbol and image become reality itself. Rushdie's approach to myth and history includes the postmodern concept of hyper-reality—reality as an image. Hence, as a fictional writer, his primary apprehension is to represent the historical veracities in a different way. It is significant to consider that Rushdie's belief on the relation between novel and history is based on the idea that, “Knowing the world is a necessary first step towards changing it.” (*Imaginary Homelands*. 14)

Postmodern writing is best characterized by works that are historiographic metafiction in that they are self-reflexive while at the same time they deliberately tamper with history. Metafiction is regarded as a form of writing within postmodernism. Fictional work that is concerned with the nature of fiction in order to explore the relationship between fiction and reality, are metafiction. Rushdie's work interrogates an ordered reality and also an ordered fictional world. It displays an ambiguity about the legitimacy of its depictions. This novel foregrounds the notion of the metamorphosis of mortality into immortality due to the occurrence of an alchemical mold in the structure of the elixir of life. The dimensions talked regarding by Virgil as a intuitive one and says that Eagle even as moving in an peripheral world is incisive not for his sister but for his real self in an internal world because when he suffered the attack of the dimension fever, he felt that he was plunging deep into an inferno which was himself. So his flight was a passage from self perception to *Grimus* consciousness or a limited consciousness to an extended one. The Ion Eye possibly will be compared to a device worn in looking for rational patterns. The novel relates how word play is the technique used to construct the novel potent, anagrams being one of them. *Grimus* is the bird simurg, Calf is the Arabic letter Kaf, gorfs is an inversion of frogs, nus of sun and the galaxy Yawy

klim the Milky Way. The world of the Gorfic (frogic) planet is an overseeing presence of their ascent: "The Gorfic planet is sometimes called Thera. It winds its way around the star Nus in the Yawy Klim galaxy of the Gorfic Nirveesu. This area is the major component of the zone sometimes termed the Gorfic Endimions." (*Grimus*. 65)

Flapping Eagle symbolizes a realized soul, Calf Island is a representative of disarray, the inhabitants of K stand for compliance and uniformity, the Stone Rose symbolizes dreary stagnation, and *Grimus* stands for coherent thinking. He shows how the novel presents a detained Unexciting truth in that reality is required for among the temporal. Rushdie's *Grimus* is made momentous by his capability to build pluralistic worlds mediated by fantasy which permits access into unconventional universe. In the novel, he uses the intrusion of fiction to make the improbable possible. The alternative realities fashioned in this novel, in particular is mediated by fabulation and fantasy to combat the compulsory coherent realism and also as a technique that facilitate the expelled characters in the novel to break out the scrupulous social constraint and conformities in their sad cities through the wings of fantastic thoughts. Yet, the technique of fantasy in this novel serves to embody Rushdie's visions of "social change" and how history should be re-created to indulge the individual demands of new ingenious life. These pluralistic visions of realities and experiences indorsed in the novel form what we call "alternative versions" of history.

SCIENCE FICTION AN ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTION OF REALITY

However, *Grimus* is considered by many critics as a science fiction, a term that encompasses novels and short stories that "represent an imagined reality that is radically different in its nature and functioning from the world of our ordinary experience" (Abrams. 278). Hence, the story is primed to provide possible the illusory world by allusion to famous or predictable scientific principles whereby fantasy can be the differing device, particularly in the issue of historical illustration which is based on recreation. Fantasy then is used to enrich realism.

Science fiction is fundamentally deliberated to endow with an alternative description of reality and thus to engender a possible way of looking to reality from diverse angles and dimensions. It is a assorted world of the real and the hyper-real and the events in this world budge from temporality to timelessness, crossing the borders of the genuine and the fabulous, the real and the hyper-real. On this basis, Rushdie's *Grimus* is projected as a science fiction because it makes use of these elements, and its themes have been conveyed within the frame of this genre. The novel makes use of knowledge and alchemy in order to emphasize the themes of alteration, modify and re-creation.

The blurring of the "real" and the "fantastic", and the past and present is a prevailing feature of the novel. From the beginning of the novel, we comprehend about the "elixir" which transforms the hero fascinated in an immortal and time-traveler being who breaks the precincts between time and place. In his implausible cruise, the Eagle explores and experiences many versions of life in the past and present. The multi-experiences of his journey facilitate him to envisage and plan the form of the sensible state of future. For this, we see him in the end of the novel giving his declaration to the conflicting views of the unyielding and inert state and the utter liberal one.

Mainly, science fiction is a structure of fictitious work whose central distress is to research history, new predictable universes, and world of technology. The writer of science fiction relies on two major things: the complex knowledge of technology and the searching of new cosmos. In this case, Rushdie's *Grimus* searches for possible versions of histories and alternative realities, by focusing on the different experiences of his characters and by burdening them with the search for a "history". Nevertheless, some critics disagree that science fiction is not alternative history, but a fantastic story that deals with unusual reality in which the histories of the worlds being described do not join with our own. Yet, Rushdie's *Grimus* is not essentially a distinctive science fiction narrative that explores the future events and predicts new technologies. Relatively, it is a description that explores within a science fiction narratology a probable version of

history through dealing with diverse alternative realities. The main strife of Salman Rushdie's *Grimus* is to offer an alternative account of history. Since history is a man-made activity, and since historical experience and its conclusions varied from one individual to another and from one society to another, the certainty of historical truth is invalid. What we have, then, are different forms of realities, each has its particular truth.

GRIMUS: NEW POSSIBLE HISTORIES AND A HISTORY SEEKING NOVEL

Grimus is a history-seeking novel. The central character, Flapping Eagle, and his companions travel from one place to another, seeking shelters for new free lives. Also, they seek the truth of life, knowledge and "new possible histories". Elfrida, a female character says, "There are a million possible Earths with a million possible histories, all of which actually exist simultaneously." (*Grimus*. 53)

"Alternative history" can be described as a counter-narrative to the adjacent reality of repressive authority which is clearly shown in this novel in the case of Amerindians, the inhabitants of Calf Island and particularly the denizens of the city of 'K'. This contrastive image of Axona and K town represents two visions of historical representations. Hence, this narrative helps in the meaning of confrontation and liberation, transformation and creation of new realities. In this case, the "alternative history" might be a conception of new fictions and myths alongside the fictions and myths of the central authority which is clearly evident in *Grimus*. "Alternate history is inherently presentist. It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the present. Based as it is upon conjecture, alternative history necessarily reflects its author's hopes and fears." (Rosenfeld 93)

Science fiction in this novel is basically intended to provide an alternative version of reality and thus to create a possible way of looking to reality from diverse angles and Dimensions. It is a varied world of the real and the hyper-real and the events in this world move from temporality to timelessness, crossing the frontiers of the actual and the mythical, the real and the hyper-real. On this basis, Rushdie's *Grimus* is considered as a science fiction because it makes use of these elements, and its themes have

been conveyed within the frame of this genre. The novel makes use of technology to highlight the themes of transformation, change and re-creation.

The novel at the outset deals with the re-creation of history. Through the character of Flapping Eagle, Rushdie has shown us different versions of history and it is clearly depicted in several verges of Flapping Eagle. Subsequently, Flapping Eagle continues his "search of history" (*Grimus* 107). This is clearly evident in the novel because Axona represents the authoritative vision of history which excludes any other interpretations, and everything recorded is fact and truth. We notice that Axona is governed by strict laws of morality and discrimination. "All that is Unaxona is Unclean" (*Grimus*. 24).

The significance of the idea of re-imagining the past and how the Eagle emerges from his present home at "Calf Island" into the history of Phoenix to 'redeem' and 'reform' that history. We read in the passage that there is a longing for another history. The protagonist says, "To be in 'K' was to return to a consciousness of history, of good times, even of nationhood" (*Grimus*. 130).

To support the above statement Joel Kuortti in her essay, "A View of History," argues that this longing connects the individual's identity to the national imagination (Kuortti. 64).

Virgil Jones, the philosopher and the guide of the Eagle gives his views about history. "An historian is affected by the present events and that eternally recreate the past." (*Grimus*. 13)

In the novel *Grimus*, Salman Rushdie makes use of myth, history, local beliefs / traditions and anagrams in naming the characters. "In both *Divine Comedy* and *Grimus* there is also a Virgil who acts as a guide, and hands this task in the end to Beatrice in Dante, or Media, (Cundy 1992, Pp.45-54) and Bird-Dog as well" (Johansen 1985, 24). "Is of 'Rassellas' where the ideas of longevity and immortality are explored. The poem 'Rassellas' mentions the water of life drunk by Al-Khizr in the time of Abraham, which conferred the gift of immortality on him". (www.bloomsbury.com)

CONCLUSION

Rushdie insistently draws consideration to the conditional status of his text's "truth" and, of

course, the conditional status of any accustomed account of reality. Hence, *Grimus* incorporates magic realism in order to contravene distinctions of genres, which mirrors the state of perplexity and estrangement that defines postcolonial societies and individuals. The novel appears as a fictionalized picture of the writer's attitudes towards alteration and look for new realities. Rushdie uses the thought of hyper-reality in representing reality as a probable and reliable experience. Life in Calf Island, therefore, is an exceptional example of a valid experience out of the limits of space and time in which the inhabitants fulfill freely and obviously their desire; they live their desire and not merely dream of it. In so doing, Rushdie deals with the postcolonial issues in a realm of postmodernist world. Rushdie's postmodern world is seen as the alternative world where the symbol and image become reality itself. In this way, Rushdie has provided another vision of Indian history in particular and postcolonial world in general. To develop it further, Rushdie's approach to myth and history includes the postmodern concept of hyper-reality—reality as an image. Hence, as a fictional writer, his primary concern is to represent the historical veracities in a different way. It is significant to consider that Rushdie's opinion on the relation between novel and history is based on the idea that "knowing the world is a necessary first step towards changing it." (*Imaginary Homelands* 14)

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