

# Magic Realism Mirror The Unconscious Self Estimation In The Select Novels Of Easterine Kire

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## Abstract

Magic realism, is a combination of two poignant words, 'magic' and 'realism'. This term was familiarized by a German art critic, Franz Roh, in the 1925. However, it was only in the 1950's that this term led to a movement in magic realism beginning in the Latin America. The magic realism as a movement and as a theory gradually broadened and encompassed several characteristics or elements. It is no longer restricted to the Latin American writers. In India, it was Salman Rushdie, who popularized this type of writing through his work, 'Midnight's Children'. In the contemporary Indian literature, this genre has been seen in many emerging writers of the North East. One such author, who uses magic realism, is the writer from Nagaland, Easterine Kire. This paper is an attempt to illustrate the elements of magic realism through the select works of Easterine Kire and also to emphasize on the relation that it has with the unconscious self, with the use of the psychoanalytic theories of Freud. The methodology used to achieve the above implication is by the theoretical application of the concepts of magic realism and psychoanalytic theory of criticism to the novels of Easterine Kire such as 'When the River Sleeps', 'Son of the Thundercloud', 'Don't Run, my Love', and 'The Terrible Matriarchy'.

## Introduction

The literary use of the term 'magical realism' has become quite common in the last few decades. It is now used widely in many university courses, academic articles and even dissertations. Not just that because of its binary or opposing nature, it has created a charm in the advertising field too. Magic realism, basically was restricted to various art forms but now has generated an outreach in almost every literary form of expression. Many a times there is a confusion in interpreting the words magic realism, scientific fiction and fantasy, as their connotative meanings almost overlap. But there is a distinct difference. The term magic realism fiction is generally used to portray a world which is similar to the real world, only difference is that there is a magic element introduced, which cannot be explained by the normal rules that govern humans or individuals. On the other hand, science fiction works also talk about different worlds, but the elements which are different from our reality are mainly explained scientifically. Descriptions are more focussed on the scientific developments or technological advancement. However, a fantasy fiction is different from magical realism fiction and science fiction, in the sense that it creates an altogether new or different world which is absolutely different from our actual reality. The most popular and well-known example being JRR Tolkien's 'Harry Potter' series.

In 1978, the term 'magic realism' was first used by a German romantic poet and philosopher, Novalis. However, Novalis, could not develop a concept around it to explain it further. It again surfaced in Germany in the year 1925. It was Franz Roh, who used it as a post expressionist device. According to Roh, the new forms of art that were originating in Germany, were able to bring together the two different movements, that of impressionism and expressionism. And the term 'magical realism', therefore, has the overtones of both these movements. Along with Roh, another major figure who contributed in the genealogy of this term is an Italian novelist Massimo Bontempelli. In a literary journal named '900', founded in 1926, circulating in Italy and France, Bontempelli,

spoke about this new formula, “precisionrealistica e atmosferamagica.”(Camayd-Freixas, 2014)meaning “normalizing a supernatural atmosphere by describing it or narrating it in precise realistic detail”(Camayd-Freixas, 2014). This explanation, till date is the most ‘core technique’ used in understanding the concept of magic realism.

As magic realism declined in Latin America by the 1990’s, it took precedence globally and various authors began to use it. The different terms coined such as ‘marvellous realism’, ‘fantastic realism’ eclipsed in the background, as the term ‘magic realism’ gained popularity. Wendy Faris, another noted international critic has summed up the elements of magic realism. According to her, magic realism should have an intricate amount of magic, should create a strong extraordinary and contrasting worlds which can create doubts in the minds of the reader, it should have a combination of different realms and a preference should be given for disturbing ideas regarding time and space. Faris, believes that magic realism generally originates in those parts of the world which have a colonized past such as Latin America, the Caribbean, India, Africa and Eastern Europe. Thus, we also find many techniques used in the analysis of post-colonialism such as hybridity and carnivalesque are also used in the interpretation the genre of magic realism. However, the most important primary trait or element of magic realism - the unnaturalness of the event, the implausibility of the event is most important. The rest are considered secondary, which may or not be present in the work.

Though magic realism has been used by great authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Alejo Carpentier, in various novels, but the genre became popular only after the publication of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s ‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’ (2006). This book uses magic realism in a manner that was not written before. The novel is the story of the various generations and history of the Buendia family in the fictional town of Maconda. The book is so well crafted that it has become an inspiration to authors, specially those working in the realm of magical realism. Laura Esquivel, another writer, whose novel, ‘Like Water for Chocolate’ (1992) is also an excellent example of magic realism. Though published earlier than Marquez, it received recognition much later, when the concept of magic realism gained prominence. It tells the story of the youngest daughter of the La Garza family, Tita, who was condemned to marry by the Mexican tradition and thus, compelled to take care of her mother till she died. When she falls in love with Pedro, knowing she can’t marry him, Pedro marries her sister, in order to stay near Tita. Another well-known Latin American author, Isabella Allende’s ‘The House of the Spirits’, is also based on magic realism. Other well-known texts which come under the genre of magical realism are ‘Beloved’ by Toni Morrison, ‘Midnight’s Children’ by Salman Rushdie, ‘Wide Sargossa Sea’ by Jean Rhys, ‘Life of Pi’ by Yann Martel, ‘The Tiger’s Wife’ by Tea Obreht, and ‘The Famished Road’ by Ben Okri.

Magic realism is thus the creation of a reality which is unnatural but made natural to the reader. The ability to create antimony or contrasting worlds is a reflection of the reality experienced and expressed through the characters of the story. The magic reality thus mirrors the unconscious urges of the characters. Sigmund Freud, a doctor and a practising therapist, was the originator of psychoanalysis, the concepts and ideas, which have led to the birth of psychoanalytic theory of literary criticism. According to Freud, language conceals the hidden fears, anxieties and desires. It does so, because many a times our cultures do not permit us to express them overtly and so we use gestures, sounds and words that will express them covertly. By saying this, Freud, created an interconnection between language and the unconscious self. The conscious-self projects only those images which are accepted by the society socially and culturally. This is the reason why the unconscious tries to find expression through different ways-ways which language and literary texts allows. Freud, divided the human psyche into three compartments, the id, the ego and the super ego. The Id is our inner-most desires, the ego is that part which we are most aware about, the conscious self and the super ego is our moral conscience, the place which makes us aware of social and cultural bindings. The area where our innermost desires are hidden is also know as the unconscious self. These hidden desires, which are repressed, find or create a reality which gives them an opportunity to express it, in ways which are either, acceptable or unacceptable to the society. The unacceptable ways lead to creation of elements in our reality which are unusual or magical. Thus, leading to the creation of a magical reality or realism.

Magical realism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been used by many authors all over the globe. The Indian writing in English has already seen Salman Rushdie use the genre of magic realism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has given rise to a well-known writer from Nagaland, Easterine Kire, who has made use of magic realism in many of her works. Easterine Kire, is a short-story writer, a novelist, and a poet. She presently resides in Norway. In

many of her novels she has used the genre of magic realism. Her novel, 'The Son of the Thundercloud', published in 2014 is an excellent example of magic realism fiction. The magic realism starts right from the first page. One afternoon, when an old Angami tribe woman, was drying paddy outside her house, it suddenly became dark and a single raindrop fell on her and she became pregnant and eventually gave birth to a son. This 'Son of the Thundercloud' was born as he had to avenge the death of the old woman's husband and previous seven sons who had been killed by a tiger. This magic event is told to the main protagonist of the novel, Pele.

Throughout the story we are introduced to many such unusual people and events. In the novel, Pele goes on a journey without a destination. During his journey he reaches a village where he meets the 400 years old sisters, who are waiting for the 'son of the thundercloud' to end the famine that had stuck their village. The same night Pele experiences an unusual event. Pele is asked to watch the stars at night with the old sisters. Out of curiosity, Pele too sleeps on the ground to watch the stars, at night. After some time, he feels the earth has been pulled eastward. He thinks it must be some kind of illusion as he was too tired. However, the next morning when he wakes up, he remembers the incident and thinks it must be a dream. But when he goes out of the hut he was sleeping, he sees the earth has got fissures and gaps and it has indeed moved eastward. Seeing this unusual happening, Pele thinks of running away. Just then heavy dark clouds are seen gathering and within few moments there is a heavy rain storm. He rushes the old sisters and himself to the cottage for protection. The following morning the rain subsides and Pele is astonished to see the change in the sisters. Suddenly they began to look younger than what they did previously. The sisters, then take Pele to the village of weavers, where their younger sister was residing. She was just a little younger than the old sisters. When Pele is introduced to the sister, he notices that she looked younger than the sisters and informs them that the rain drop had made her pregnant. She was known as the 'Tiger-widow'. Pele was shocked to realize that the story which he had heard from his grandmother, years back, was actually a prophecy that was coming through in front of his eyes. The next morning was more shocking and magical.

The next morning Pele woke up to the sound of a crying infant. The tiger-widow who was pregnant last evening had delivered a child over night! All these happenings were magical and unreal, but the ancient sisters were as alive and real. As Pele comments, "strangely it seemed more real than he had known to be." (Kire, 2016) Pele's unconscious wish to find out whether the 'tiger-widow's' story was true led him to this magical journey. The desire for the unusual makes Pele witness unusual things. Through the character of Pele, we are shown that anything can happen in this world, if you 'believe' in it. The unconscious mind, the 'Id', pushes the conscious mind to experience what it desires.

Another novel written by Easterine Kire, 'When the River Sleeps' (2014), is the story of a hunter who is in his forties. He is the protector of the forest and has made forest his home. Vilie is frequently troubled by a dream of a specific river which was talked about by the seers of his ancestral village where he lived. A magic stone in the bottom of the river was such that it had the power to grant any wish to its owner. After being faced with this dream for two years, Vilie decides to go in search of this 'sleeping river'. Vilie was in love with a girl named Seno. One day when Seno had gone to the forest to collect herbs and flowers. While returning, she told her friends and sisters that a tall dark man had climbed down the tree and was following them home. For many days Seno kept murmuring the same thing and one day she told her mother that the man had caught her. She fell sick with severe fever and finally died. For many days on her grave fresh flowers were found. Since then, Vilie had made the forest his home. When Vilie starts his journey, on the first night itself he comes across a weretiger-the spirit of a man transforming into a tiger. Vilie had been told about these stories since a young age, but he had never really seen a weretiger. The knowledge of the supernatural is told by the ancestors so that the younger generation do not disrespect them.

As Vilie begins his journey he is encounters many magical experiences. The forest trees become Vilie's protectors, providing him with food and shelter. In one instance when Vilie was staying in the forest, he had gone to the water stream to wash his face. When Vilie looked down at his own image, he was shocked to see the face of a young girl behind him. When he turned around, he could not see any one. Vilie was sure it was not a dream as he knew many spirits stayed in the forest. Again, the next morning when he went to the stream he saw the same face, this time for a longer time. The girl had kind eyes but below the beautiful face there was no body attached to it. At another time, when Vilie was sleeping in the forest, at night, he felt something very heavy over him, that was trying to suffocate him. First, Vilie thought it was a dream, then when he opened his eyes, he found a dark spirit

which had no specific human form sitting on him. Vilie tried to use his physical strength but he could not move. Only when he spoke with authority, by swelling his chest, the spirit fell away from him and diminished in size. All these unusual happenings, bring out the unconscious inner strength of Vilie. It seems Vilie was fighting his inner demons in the form of the spirits that he encounters. Vilie's desire to find the magic stone from the 'sleeping river', fuels his journey. The unconscious self helps him in achieving these uncommon feats. It was the knowledge of self which Vilie was exploring, with the exploration of nature, in his pursuit to find the 'magic stone' from the sleeping river.

The way Easterine Kire approaches the magic realism is another factor that has to be highlighted. A magic realist writer must show some distance from the magic world that has been created. The distance here implies that the author's personal prejudices, biases and beliefs should not interfere in the creation of the magical world. To make it believable, the author has to make sure her magic world is not compromised. And in order to achieve this the author must maintain an ironic distance so that the perception is not affected. In 'Son of the Thundercloud' (2016), Easterine Kire, skilfully, keeps her perception aside to make the readers believe in the world of Pele and the ancient sisters. This makes it possible to accept as true, that the ancient sisters could be 400 years old. And that a person could get pregnant by a drop of rain from the thundercloud. The magic, the supernatural, is therefore, never doubted.

The magic realism also depicts the cultural dynamics of the society or community depicted by the author. Many a times it is the beliefs, faiths, folklore, and superstitions, that are part of that culture that are illustrated. This is amply seen in the novels written by Easterine Kire. The culture of Nagaland is abound with such elements that have found expression in various novels written by her. In 'Don't Run My Love' (2017), Kire has used the folklore to create magic realism. The story of the spirit of were-tiger is a very common folklore in Nagaland, and Kire has used it in many of her novels. In this novel, Visenuo, the widow and Atuonuo, her 18-year-old daughter, are harvesting in the paddy field, when they come across a very handsome man called Kivi. As a storm is brewing, Kivi starts helping them and then later goes with them to their house. Kivi begins to like Atuonuo. He easily starts to slide into their lives. When the neighbours and relatives ask Kivi about his family he avoids to give direct answers which lead to Atuonuo becoming uneasy around him. Eventually, on another stormy night, Atuonuo realises that Kivi is not a real human, but a were-tiger. Kire's description of the places where the village elders sit, the woody apple tree, of Kivi are riveting and keeps the readers completely engrossed in this folktale with its magic realism

Another prominent element seen in magic realism is the use of terror which overpowers the prospect of transformation. The characters are shown to be either in fear or terror of some figure or something. This unconscious fear leads them to undesired or fearful results. This fear is used by the author to create terror, a terror which reflects the thoughts of fear. In the novel, 'A Terrible Matriarchy' (2007), Easterine Kire, uses the fear of Dielieno about her grandmother to bring out this effect. This novel has used magic realism more subtly than as compared to her other novels. Dielieno, from the age of five years is made to stay with her grandmother, who is very strict. She believes girls to be inferior to boys and so makes Dielieno do all the hard work. Dielieno is constantly facing injustices as she is asked to do the housework while her brothers are allowed to study. They are even given the best food to eat and leftover are given to Dielieno. She grows-up in fear of her grandmother. Though she constantly rebels against her rules and does everything to please her grandmother. But the fear of her grandmother makes Dielieno see the ghost of her grandmother, after her death. Terror is also seen when the were-tiger attacks Vilie in 'When the river sleeps' or when Atuonuo comes to know Kivi is a were-tiger. The unconscious fear is prominent in magic realism which aids in building the magic realism. Even the fear of Vilie, as he dives in the sleeping river to snatch the magic stone from its bottom reflects the unconscious fear that Vilie had about losing his most cherished dream.

## Conclusion

Freud says, "The unconscious is the greatest threat to our identity as rational humans"(Nayar, 2009) which leads us to behaving in a manner which may not be socially acceptable. The unconscious mind carries all our forbidden and unknown desires and fears. The conscious mind represses them so they cannot find a proper outlet. When these desires do not find a proper way of expression, they express themselves in the form of unnatural or

supernatural or magical. The magical world is then an expression of our innermost fantasies or desires. The novels of Easterine Kire reflect the unconscious feelings of her characters in the form of a world which is filled with unreal events, supernatural things and folklore. This paper thus concludes that magical realism is a mirror of oneself.

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