

EDITOR'S
NOTE

While in *Wonderland*, the Mad Hatter wisely told Alice that something is 'impossible' only if she believed it to be so. That is the essence of this week's page: the endless possibilities of reality. We take a quick peek into the world of magic realism, some must-reads that will make readers appreciate the genre and a critical analysis of how the genre is embodied in certain women's literature. We also welcome regular columnist Nupu Press and embark with her on a journey through the beautiful, topsy-turvy world of creation. Aspiring writers: don't miss out on the writing competition details! Comments, viewpoints and contributions are welcome at: DSLitEditor@gmail.com

MUNIZE MANZUR

Defining Works of Magical Realism



ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE
GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ



The Master and Margarita
M. Bulgakov



THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS
ISABEL ALLENDE



BELOVED
TONI MORRISON



THE WIND-UP BIRD CHRONICLE
HARUKI MURAKAMI



Midnight's Children
SALMAN RUSHDIE



Like Water for Chocolate
Laura Esquivel

the world have embraced the style. While one would be hard put to make 'the ultimate list' of its most influential books, here are, in no particular order, some must-reads that are sure to expand your literary horizons:

tional Columbian utopia of Macondo, but it can also be read as an allegory of the history of South America. It is about love and war, is full of visions, ghosts, languid women who live under clouds of butterflies and a secret proph-

Dead Fish and a New Story

NUPU PRESS

In her monthly column, Nupu Press shares her personal path of writing a first novel:

The story of my book begins with another book: one I had started for a writing class in college.

The narrator of my story was a young Indian man who heads off to boarding school where he meets his Bangladeshi roommate. I was not a man, nor Indian (I had at that point only visited India on a cursory basis) nor had I ever attended boarding school. However, the confidence of youth meant I could pick up any persona and scribble down tall tales.

The professor and students – generally a tough crowd – seemed enthusiastic in their response. What started as a short story grew to become a novel. I titled it Dead Fish Float Downstream for reasons I thought terribly clever at the time.

Only how could I write about boarding school or India with any propriety when I was familiar with neither? My knowledge of both came from books and films. It would be like a photocopy of a photocopy, a faint imprint of something that didn't quite belong to me. So, I re-set the novel to some years later, when the narrator visits his boarding school friend, Rafi, in Dhaka one summer.

While not as familiar with Dhaka as people who had grown up here, I at least had a relationship with the city that could ground the story in a milieu I could comfortably explore. I gave Rafi a cousin, Pippa, and the book evolved to how the three friends spent the summer in Bangladesh.

Six years later, with the novel complete, I contacted my writing professor and asked if he could read my manuscript. Not wanting to be distracted by others' works-in-progress while busy with his own book (a stance I now whole-heartedly adopt) he very generously put me in touch with an agent friend in London.

I sent it to the agent (who later became the head of Bloomsbury) and she read it over that weekend. She called me to say it wasn't right for her, but she hoped I kept writing.

My later experiences with agents proved to be dramatically different, even when introduced by friends: they could ask for the full manuscript and still disappear into a black hole, never to be heard from again; most never acknowledged the manuscript and it would be unthinkable one would agree to meet if the manuscript had been rejected. But I get ahead of myself.

I met the agent to thank her for being so prompt and gracious. I told her another story had been forming in my mind: that of Pippa. The agent kindly said with enthusiasm Pippa was her favourite character, and she would indeed be interested in reading about her.

And so, without a pause, I set aside my six years' work behind Dead Fish, and started on a new novel. I was still young-ish – twenty-six – and I claimed that this new book would have everything I wanted to say about everything: love, death, loyalty, betrayal, redemption, truth and art.

MAGICAL REALISM IN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

RAINA MOINUDDIN ABU ZAFAR

'Magical Realism' acquired new directions in Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier's, "real maravilloso", making it intimately connected with places where the technique was practiced with local myths and folklore. A further derivation of this approach to Magical Realism from Angel Flores' description of magic realism as 'an amalgamation of realism and fantasy' led to 'a rather indiscriminate use of the term for two very different offshoots from the same stem: an intellectual one derived from Borges and the surreal one of Marquez. A closer approach to the spirit of the marvelous, accommodates the supernatural, relies heavily on superstitious faith and has its source in popular folklore.

In the light of these descriptions of Magical Realism, the trend in most 'ethnic' and 'migrant' literature present bizarre situations as acts of fate or the unknown. This technique depicts the existence of ethnic beliefs as a protective mantle over unfamiliar and daunting experiences resulting from change and the constraints of alien societies and relationships.

Many female writers adapted this technique to explain such situations as

off shoots of ethnic beliefs, traditional folklore, and superstition. This trend is often found in the work of both non-European writers depicting controversial lives.

Kate Chopin's use of Magical Realism in the story, An Egyptian Cigarette, depicts the protagonist as one who smokes an Egyptian cigarette, goes into a stupor and enters the 'body of an Egyptian woman who had rejected her gods because of her lover and is then rejected by her own lover. This incident is explained as the consequence of rejecting one's traditions and how experimenting with such magical experiences lead to similar 'experiences'. Chopin's knowledge of local folklore, superstition and supernatural beliefs of the bayou and creole cultures, influence Magical Realism in her 'real life' stories.

Ana Costillo's novella, So Far From God, depicts migrant communities in America where patriarchal structures dominate and older people retain their faith in beliefs and customs of their native land; but the younger generation strive to go beyond the biases of traditional lifestyle to adapt to the new society in an attempt to get rid of the label of migrants. Whatever goes wrong

at this juncture is justified as 'metamorphosis' that occurs as a result of the 'unreal experiences' unexplained by universal laws or logic. The emphasis is on the influence of age-old beliefs to explain tragedies of life which could well be realistic but 'magical' with reference to the frightening nature of the occurrence itself.

Magical Realism reflects transgressing boundaries and multiple worlds as a means to change. However, the so called extraordinary incidents in perfectly 'ordinary' lives of the ethnic community of migrants are used in the story to facilitate the characters' transition to another kind of life – to escape the realities or tragedies they encounter. Two female protagonists of So Far From God make the transition after suffering debilitating attacks as a means to escape from their real world.

Toni Morrison in her work, Beloved, makes use of Magical Realism to define a society of social opposites. She borrows from the oral traditions of African folklore to write about supernatural themes that continue to dominate the African-American community. Sethe, a young slave, murders her baby girl in order to save her daughter from a life of

slavery. Her grief manifests itself to the body of a young girl. The 'magical' element used here exemplifies contrasting political views that create real life tensions between the colonized and the colonizer, slave and master.

Arab feminist writers and poets like Elmaz Abinader project the element of 'magical' in the traditions and images that magnify the reality of a 'hybrid' existence which is termed 'magical' for its mystique. The poetry magnifies the 'magic' of something 'exotic' in the realistic world of a migrant existence. Elmaz, a third-generation Lebanese-American, weaves the 'magic' mystique of her native land while based in the mechanized world of middle-class America.

Asian feminist writing carry elements of the Magical to not only identify the Magic in its traditions but the realistic lifestyle of a Bengali, a Punjabi or a Gujarati in the western atmosphere of an European society, in the sights, smells and décor of a realistic 'brick lane' or any ethnic area of some multi-cultural corner of the world.

Raina Moimuddin Abu Zafar freelances as an English lecturer at NSU and IUB. However, her 'first love' is writing.

SLR WRITING COMPETITION

Aspiring writers are invited to send in a short story or poem using the theme of “Possibility” as a starting point.

You must be over 18 years old.

Only ONE entry per person.

Word Limit: 500 words.

Deadline: 26th July, 5pm.

The top three winning entries will be printed in the SLR page.

Send your entries to DSLitEditor@gmail.com

Dwell in possibility...

Emily Dickinson

Nupu Press is a writer and film producer. Her blog is at www.nupupress.com