

What Makes a Text a Magical Realist Work? - A Study Using Family Resemblance and Genre Theory

Aishwarya. V¹ & Dr. Devimeenakshi. K²

¹ Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages (SSL), Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, 600127, India

² Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages (SSL), Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, 600127, India

Correspondence: Dr. Devimeenakshi. K, Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages (SSL), Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, 600127, India. E-mail: devimeenakshik@vit.ac.in

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Abstract

Magical Realism is one of literatures most elusive and debated concepts, as it can be easily confused with other related genres. There is an ongoing debate about whether to label it as a genre or mode of narrative. Magical Realism is an International contemporary genre with its roots in Germany, while it became popularised and pioneered in South America. Over the years, critics have had issues defining the characteristics of Magical Realism as it subtly overlaps with other similar genres like surrealism, fantasy, science fiction, and gothic. Family Resemblance theory explains the overlapping resemblances of almost similar genres using Genre theory. This paper explores the binding relationship between Magical Realism and other genres. Later, they resemble yet differ in detail using their core characteristics. The paper also provides a comparative study on selected genres and studies the concept of genres, their construction, and their evolution. Textual analysis methodology is used in this article to understand the characteristics of magical realism in the novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami. Further analysis of how the novel differs from the other genres is also studied using textual analysis. Genre theory can be analysed to trace the origin and evolution of a genre throughout the years and how they are arbitrary and are constantly misused by authors.

Keywords: Family Resemblance, Genre study, Genre Theory, Magical Realism, Realism

1. Introduction

Genre as a technique and tool helps to categorise never-ending works of Literature and Movies alike. Genre plays a crucial role in creating specific categories with its salient features and characteristics, which makes grouping the works more accessible and provides clarity to the readers in literature. Genres cannot be structured with clear-cut divisions as they overlap with the other related genres, and they can be understood better in comparison with others. Genre studies have been an evolving field of study, as genre is a cultural phenomenon that keeps upgrading as time goes on. With the impending knowledge of technology and postmodernism, genres have been experimented, cancelled, and even fused in all possible ways in the creative spree for the need to produce novelty in literature and films. The Rationale of the study is to understand the salient features of Magical Realism in comparison with other genres rather than in isolation. The Magical Realism genre was popularised by Latin American authors and third-world nation authors as a tool to rebel against the colonised mindset of people. The colonisation altered their rootedness to their culture, and magical realism is a way of reclaiming what they lost during the subjugation of colonial culture. The paper's main objective is to study the core characteristics of Magical Realism compared to other similar genres of literature. The paper focuses on understanding the genre, specifically Magical Realism when it is known for being elusive in defining the genre with specific characteristics. The theories used in this paper are Genre theory and Family Resemblance theory, which help us explore the workings of the genre as a product of resemblances and differences. The Research Gap is the lack of study on the genre using theories, which made it more challenging to distinguish from similar characteristics shared by other genres.

The Research Questions follow:

1. Does the genre study help the literary circle understand genre characteristics and use them appropriately if they are studied in detail?
2. Does family resemblance theory aid in understanding the characteristics of magical realism from other similar genres?

As much as creators have experimented with genres in the past, genres are still challenging entities to define accurately with their own specific characteristics. Genres overlap with related genres, making it highly incoherent to describe them as valid entities without collaborating with other genres. Oscar Wilde (1890) stated that "to define is to limit." In this context, without defining the genres, the chaos will persist in literary circles as the genres are confusing to describe with one singular term without making it a pair or multiple terms. Magical Realism is a genre that puzzles the literary circle with its uniqueness yet shares its characteristics with fantasy and realism

equally. It has become a cultural phenomenon in this past century with its vast usage in postcolonial literature. Magical Realism is a tool for postcolonial writers to reclaim the lost voice from their colonisers. The treatment of magic in the Western context differs vastly from the postcolonial and ethnic write, "Magical realism is a genre where eccentrics (ex-centrics, perhaps) are centralised while traditional strongholds of knowledge and power are simultaneously decentred." (Laws, 2017, p.10).

2. Review of Literature

Magical Realism has been around for a few decades under several other names before it was adequately described and termed as Magical Realism. Franz Roh, a German art critic, first used the phrase 'Magic Realism' in 1925 while reviewing a post-expressionist artwork that "tried to capture the mystery of life behind the surface reality" (Bowers, 2004, p.2). He paved the way for forming the Magic(al) Realism genre, even though it was initially introduced in criticism of painting. One of the critical, pivotal points in the formation of Magical Realism was by the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, who transferred his thoughts from pictorial art to verbal literature. During the fascist regime, Massimo Bontempelli was a proponent of Magic Realism, where he applied the ideas to writing and tried to bring a new perspective to everyday reality. His contribution reinforced the position of Magical Realism within the literary circle and made it convenient to every other European artist. Bontempelli proposed, "*precisione realistica e atmosfera magica*. This formula — normalizing a supernatural atmosphere by describing it or narrating it in precise realistic detail—remains, to this day, a core technique of magical realism." (Camayd-Freixas, 2014, p.6).

He also brought about the major characteristics of magical realism to have "no solid compromise solution emerges in this quintessential example of magic realism, and no plot attains its resolution for very specific reasons" (Jewell, 2008, p.728).

Alejo Carpentier coined 'marvellous realism', also known as *lo realismo Maravilloso*, for application in Latin American literature. This contribution played a crucial role in establishing an understanding of the concept, which is further analysed in Magic(al)Realism, "a concept that could represent a mixture of different cultural systems and the variety of experiences that created an extraordinary atmosphere, alternative attitude and differing appreciation of reality in Latin America." (Bowers, 2004, p.13).

The terms "magical realism" and "marvellous realism," two other variations of the phrase, did not exist before 1955. In the essay *Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction*, Angel Flores coined "Magical Realism" and stated that "in Latin America, Romanticism and realism seem bound together." (Flores, 1955, p.188). Though magical realism started in Germany, it is widely acknowledged to be of Latin American origin owing to the abundant works they produced. "The first period is set in Germany in the 1920s, the second period in Central America in the 1940s, and the third period, beginning in 1955 in Latin America, continues internationally to this day." (Bowers, 2004, p.7). Imbert, in an article about "*Magical Realism*" in *Spanish-American Fiction*, retraces how Magical Realism paved its way into mainstream literature, more specifically in Spanish-American fiction where it flourished the most, "A narrator of "magical realism," to create for us the illusion of the unreal, pretends to escape from nature and recounts an action that, however explicable it may be, unsettles us with its strangeness." (Imbert, 1975, p.1)

Magical Realism attained its position from being a minority to a majority owing to the use of Spanish-American authors in their works. They have recreated and brought their innovation to the genre without alienating it from its original form, making it alive and relevant to present-day readers.

Past research on magical realism has focused on analysing fictional works from different perspectives, such as political, psychological, and cultural contexts; not much research is dedicated to understanding the characteristics of magical realism in comparison to other related genres. "In none of its applications to literature has the concept of magic realism ever successfully differentiated between itself and neighbouring genres" (Slemon, 1988, p9). One of the main reasons why magical realism is seen as a compendium of genres put together, "Formalist definition, critics have argued that magical realism overlaps with the fantastic, the absurd, and the other genres that defy realistic representation conventions." (Figlerowicz & Mertehikian, 2023, p.5). In *An Introduction to Genre Theory*, Daniel Chandler claims that defining genre may not look problematic but is a theoretical minefield (1997, p.2). Classifying the text into separate categories with its own ever-extending genres and subgenres can be daunting.

European literature treats magic in literature as pure fantasy without rationality, while Latin American magical realist writers treat magic as everyday reality. This disparity makes it highly flexible to writers of third-world nations."The archetypal pattern is a story depicting people living on political or social margins or those who struggle through the lack of social, possibly political power. In other words, it tends to disrupt the fixed perspectives without regard to the nature of the perspective." (Brabencov 2011, p.6).

An article titled *Rereading Magical Realism* aptly points out, "Many critics have questioned or denied its applicability as a serious critical term, let alone as an analytical tool, declaring it illegitimate on political grounds or simply inadequate because of its general vagueness." (Benyei, 1997, p.149) This elusive nature of magical realism has made it almost challenging for many readers and writers, as it does not fit the mould.

The article also makes a bold statement by labelling Magical Realism to be a mode instead of a genre " 'Mode' seems to be appropriate precisely because of its vagueness: the term is narrow enough not to define the phenomenon as a genre." (Benyei, 1997, p.150). One of the easiest ways to grasp the concept of magical realist characteristics is by comparing it with its successor or neighbouring genres, as it helps one understand it and differentiate it from other confusing genres. "Any attempt to understand the modus operandi of the traumatic imagination in magical realist writing needs to start with an analytical survey of the neighbouring literary genres." (Arva, 2008, p.61).

The article on *Genre as Knowledge* organisation by Pauline Rafferty (2022) extensively studied the concept of genre in different mediums, not just constraining it to fiction but extending it to library organisation, music and film and concludes how genres are slippery to be defined. They are also fluid and culturally transforming. The paper also included genre theory and Family resemblance theory to understand how a genre's complex nature pertains to jotting down its features into a condensed version.

3. Proto-Magical Realist works

Proto-Magical Realist works are works of literature that exhibited Magical Realist characteristics before Magical Realism was appropriately coined and characterised. The Proto Magical Realist works laid the foundation for the present-day Magical Realist works, with or without their direct influence on contemporary works. One of the earliest recorded Proto-Magical Realism works is a short story, *The Nose*, by Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, published in 1836. The story narrates how a person's nose (organ) transforms into an independent person of its own and takes a superior position in society where the nose owner is not enjoying the same privileges as his nose. *The Nose* story is a satire to ridicule the superficiality of the class system, which is based solely on one's clothing and job position, where society decides how an individual should be treated. When the nose becomes a person, it wanders around the street, and people respect it as an actual person without questioning its very essence of existence. In deciphering the story of *The Nose*, usage of the literary device known as Estrangement or Defamiliarization means looking at aspects of life from a different vantage point. (Pierre, 2022).

Another significant work of proto-magical realism is Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915). Many of his works follow the theme of alienated, desolate individuals thrown into the absurdity and unfair life to survive. One such story is *The Metamorphosis*, where the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa transforms into an insect and is made to face reality as a vermin. "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a Gigantic insect." (Kafka, 1915,p.7). He is disgusted by his own family, isolated in a separate room away from the family, and dies a tragic death after his family decides to get rid of it. Overnight, he is reduced to 'it' rather than the 'he' that he was. It also portrays the uselessness of a man who fails to provide for his family and sees him as a liability.

4. About Genre

Genre is the most essential and crucial element in literature; it helps categorise the vast body of works produced by writers into separate small entities for easier recognition. The genre was initially categorised as writing like prose, poem, novel, and drama. Over the years, it diversified to be synonymous with categorising any piece of work according to its similar characteristics and themes. Genre has acquired a secondary meaning with its usage in literature; genre also signifies a specific theme style and elements followed by a particular set of texts and grouped as one. Now, the genres have many branches of sub-genres branching from the primary genre group. In recent times, one work could showcase the characteristics of two or more genres without sticking to one specific genre. The predominance of subgenres can be witnessed in modern works of literature and cinema equally. One example is *The French Lieutenant Woman* by John Fowles, which comes under the genres of Romance, Historical metafiction, Pastiche, and Historical fiction. Genres have evolved with the literature from accommodating to present-day works of literature. Tzvetan Todorov claimed in his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* that "We can identify a genre because no one is at some level aware of other genres that it is not, and this relationship is systemic." (1975), with the help of genre theory, it is easier to specify what magical realism is and compare and contrast it with other genres. It makes understanding the nuances and the characteristics of any genre uncomplicated.

Kincaid states, "We can neither extract a unique, common thread' that binds together all science fiction texts nor identify a 'unique, common origin' for the genre." (2003, p.415). Contrary to his statement of not finding common ground with the other genres, we could draft a few recurring characteristics, making recognising the typical characteristics of a particular genre of work easier. It is undeniable that some work of literature does not necessarily adhere to the rigid proposed rules of specific characteristics of the genre. "A text can violate established generic expectations, but it can only be said to have established new expectations when other texts, in imitating its strategies, solidify them into the features of a genre." (Rieder, 2010, p.196).

Even though Magical Realism is a challenging genre to define with specific characteristics, the works of a few authors from certain ethnicities established particular genre characteristics. Over the years, people have taken the creative freedom to avoid the established set of rules that the writer is expected to follow. It shocks the readers, who are used to familiarity with the genre; this breaks the predetermined expectations from the genre and opens a new avenue to experiment more. A few common features of magical realism -

- a. The setting is based on a real-life location grounded in reality
- b. The magical elements should be accepted as ordinary events without any questions.
- c. The presence of distorted time and the altered idea of space.
- d. The story has to deal with real-life crises common people face in everyday mundane life.

Magical elements should be treated as everyday events rather than supernatural events. Sometimes, a work imitates its predecessor, sometimes breaking the preconceived characteristics to create its genre. Not all texts follow every characteristic of the book to be termed as a specific genre. "For a text to be recognised as having generic features, it must allude to strategies, images, or themes that have already emerged into the visibility of a conventional or at least repeatable gesture." (Rieder, 2010, p.196).

There is a delicate balance between the texts conforming and subverting from the expected conventions of the genre.

4.1 Genre Theory

Genre theory, proposed by Steve Neale, declares that "Genres are instances of repetition and difference ." (1980, p.28). Genres confirm an itemised set of characters, which makes it predictable for the consumers of the genre, either as a movie or novel medium. It helps them differentiate one genre from another, but now genres have evolved to overlap with other genres to make it more complex for readers to comprehend. Over the years, genres have stopped adhering to fixed characteristics as it makes it monotonous for the audience, and there is no novelty in the genre for them to be entertained. Genres follow the prefixed yet subvert from those characteristics to bring in more layers and a new storyline to the work. Genres are evolved through borrowing and adapting.

The genre is called 'typified rhetorical action,' where the audience expects some clichéd characteristics to be repeated in that specific genre. The makers and authors ensure the audience is not robbed of that experience. "There are features that repeat again and again, over time, with few differences, in part because audiences expect certain things to happen or because they want certain kinds of experiences" (OSU School of Writing, literature and Film, 2020). The structuralist approach to genre theory claims that " literary texts do not function as free standing entities, but exist in systematic, intertextual relation to one another within a literary universe". (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p.17).

The book's publishers exploit the genre's popularity in their book selling. Even well-established publishers use these tactics to sell the book that sells for their genre. Magical Realist writers are often reduced to this genre without experimentation with other genres. David Fishelov stated that

the decision as to whether the works of a particular writer do or do not belong to a given genre is a function of direct influence and of the way that literary genres are perceived and divided in a specific period and literature. (1991,p.135).

4.2 Family Resemblance Theory

Ludwig Wittgenstein introduced the Family Resemblance theory in his book *Philosophical Investigations*, which was published posthumously in 1967. It explained the workings of language and words with the analogy of games and their rules, as they have different names but have similar rules. It can be better understood as "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein, 1967, p.32). Among all the theories available for analysis, Family resemblance theory is best suited for understanding and investigating magical realism as it also deals with ambiguous concepts that are hard to define.

There is another study using family resemblance theory to define the very definition of power as there is no one unified definition for the concept of power, which also states that "Wittgenstein developed the concept of family resemblance concepts to denote concepts that overlap in usage while there is no single essence that unites all these usages" (Haugaard, 2010, p.424). Magical realism comes under the concept of being ambiguous, which does not entail one specific essence that unites it with other similar genres.

This notion of a 'family resemblance' has come to be used by many philosophers to deal with a range of situations where there appears to be a difficulty in finding a single definite common property and yet there exists a desire to call some set of things by the same name. (Manser, 1967, p.210).

It is a permutation and combination of other related genres that became a genre and is argued to be a mode of narration.

5. Methodology

The descriptive methodology is applied in this paper as it best suits the nature of research in studying and defining the characteristics of the Magical Realism genre. The methodology effectively explains the detailed characteristics of the topic with the chosen text. It explains how and what makes a text a magical realist work of literature.

Textual analysis is used in this paper to understand Magical Realism using the novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami. The key elements of textual analysis of the summary of the text *Kafka on the Shore* context are explained, and a clear interpretation of the theories used is explained along with excerpts from the text to understand the specific elements of magical elements seen in *Kafka on the Shore*. It also compares and contrasts other works of literature from different genres to understand the essence of magical Realism, which can be easily confused with other genres. Magical realist elements found in the novel *Kafka on the Shore*, which makes it a text of magical realist work rather than other similar genres, are highlighted with the story. The characteristics of magical realism seen in the novel are explained as it is compared and contrasted with other genres.

6. Analysis

John Frow comments, "We can identify a genre because we are at some level aware of other genres that it is not, and it is this relationship that is systemic." (2013). Magical Realism shares its boundaries with several other neighbouring genres, which makes it easier to get confused. It is an emerging yet established genre owing to the renowned people worldwide, the authors who bagged several awards for their work using the genre. It is often regarded as a byproduct of fantasy and realism in layperson's terms, but it is more than just a combination of two extreme genres.

One of the main genres constantly confused with Magical Realism is fantasy; to understand the differences, one must learn the main characteristics of magical realism.

- It revolves around the ordinary people of a realist setting and world

- Supernatural elements in everyday occurrence
- Magic treated in a matter-of-fact manner
- Limited information regarding the supernatural happenings

6.1 *Magical Realism vs. Fantasy*

Magical Realism was assumed to be the subgenre of fantasy or realism as it predominantly resembles the core characteristics of Fantasy and Realism. One of the major reasons why it mirrors fantasy is the presence of magic and supernatural in the story. The story is usually set in a magical wonderland where the humans possess superhuman powers like flying, telekinesis, or being invisible. Magical Realism has the exact characteristics of the supernatural powers of the humans and magical elements in the story, which navigates the whole plot. One contrasting difference is that Magical Realism is rooted in reality while fantasy is mostly not. The fantasy genre is known for its unreal setting that is not remotely realistic. At the same time, magical realism is set in the realistic, mundane everyday setting of ordinary people who experience uncommon things in their monotonous lives.

The magic is seamlessly interwoven into the story in magical realism. That magic does not seem like anything out of the ordinary, and it fits right into the plot. Fantasy has incredible elements that make it escapist literature, where people read it to escape the reality of their lives. Magical Realism, the setting, the story, and the characters are set in everyday problems one faces. Magical Realism deals with the issues in the postcolonial world, and now it is invariably used by authors worldwide, where it was and is still predominantly used as a voice to fight against hegemony. Magical Realism was used as a statement of their voice, suppressed and looked down upon by the colonisers with their rationalism and racism. Fantasy entertains children and adults alike with its incredible setting of supernatural elements that are far removed from reality and have no way of happening in reality. Vampires, werewolves, witches, and zombie bestsellers are on the shelf of thriller fantasy, but they cannot represent the reality of people's lives. Fantasy coincides with science fiction, horror, and a few other genres.

6.2 *Magical Realism vs. Dystopian*

Dystopian literature is seen as an extension of speculative fiction of the major 'what if' factor associated with it. Even though it shares the same realistic setting as Magical Realism, it is set in reality in the future and does not accurately resonate with the present realistic setting. Dystopia is predominantly set in the reality where a government or technology has taken over the present-day reality to be 'the perfect society.' The main motto behind dystopian fiction is the urge to create a utopian society, masked as the ultimate comfortable, problem-free society for the people who suffer without knowing the reality. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood, the future reality faces a drastic decline in population due to pollution and contraceptive measures of women. The goal of the government is to produce babies, who are the future, by depriving fertile women of their every right and stripping them down as enslaved people used just to procreate for their country. Dystopian literature is the worst-case scenario far-fetched in the present-day reality, which could be a possibility if we remain passive to the unjust rulers. It is the main lesson behind the dystopian novel. The dystopian novel often deals with a totalitarian government that tries to bring about the best possible living standard by eradicating all possible opposition and favouring the submissive ones who live without questioning. Magical Realism differs from dystopia in treating the injustice people face in the present reality without locating it in the nearest or far future.

6.3 *Magical Realism vs. Children's Literature*

It is easier to confuse Magical Realism with children's literature owing to the similar characteristics of fantastical elements of talking animals, fairy godmothers, and an enchanting world of good vs. evil. One limiting factor of Magical Realism that will never be termed children's literature is a fable table for bedtime stories for children to teach morals. Even Magical Realism has occurrences of animals being able to talk and act like humans. One of the fine examples would be the novel *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami. One of the main protagonists can communicate with cats, and people value his service by using it to search for their lost cats instead of isolating him as eccentric. Combining the fantastical elements and treating them as ordinary, everyday events make it a magical realist work rather than children's literature. Fairy tales and fables are the main components of children's literature, where magical elements of the tooth fairy, talking dragons, and singing rats make up most of the story. The theme and subject of Magic Realism are for adults, which is unsuitable for children. A recurring conundrum of the famous *Harry Potter series* comes under Magical Realism, fantasy, or children's literature. Harry Potter was born to wizard parents and was brought up by his muggle aunt and uncle, who are cruel to him. It evoked the evil stepmother dynamics of children's literature. The wizard and muggle world cannot coexist as they must constantly remain in secret from the muggle that defies the very concept of magical realism, treating magic as an everyday event. There is a striking contrast in Ron Weasley's household of wizards, where magic is seen as a regular event of dishes cleaning themselves without the help of the hands of humans and flying vehicles. The world divided into two separate entities makes it more into the arena of fantasy and children's fiction than magical realism.

6.4 *Magical Realism vs. Realism*

In differing Magical Realism with Realism, "Realism attempts to create an accurate picture of the world as it is experienced by ordinary human consciousness, readers of realistic fiction are most familiar with focalizations that seem to be grounded in empirical evidence" (Faris, 2004, p.44). Magical Realism depends on the realist part of the story, which sets it apart from the rest of the genres and Realism. Booker Prize winner Salman Rushdie (2015) stated in a video interview that, for a text to be considered magical realist work, it has to be

grounded in reality and use techniques that are not necessarily realistic. Magical Realism is a newish name for a very old thing. (Rushdie, 2015).

7. Magical Realist Elements in the Novel *Kafka on the Shore* (2005)

7.1 Summary of the Novel, *Kafka on the Shore*

The Protagonist is a teenager named Kafka, who elopes from his house to flee the Oedipal prophecy cursed by his father. The prophecy is that Kafka will murder his father and sleep with his own mother and sister. The sister is the new addition to the prophecy in the Murakami version, unlike Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex*. The story begins with this traumatic and appalling relationship that the fifteen-year-old protagonist shares with his father and has to endure until he decides enough is enough and elopes from the cruel curse of his father.

The story follows a unique chapter structure where the odd and even chapters of the novel follow two different characters only to converge at one point. The Odd Chapters is about the teenager Kafka, who fled from his father's house. The Even Chapter is about an older man, Nakata, who has the supernatural ability to converse with cats. In the meantime, Kafka meets Miss Saeki, the librarian of the private library who is about the same age as his mother. His father had destroyed any traces of his mother's picture in his house. So Kafka had no way of discovering his mother and sister, who left him when he was little. As the story progresses, it is revealed that Miss Saeki lost her boyfriend during a student rebellion protest in his university days, and she has not been the same ever since. The song she wrote, 'Kafka on the Shore,' became a hit, and she did not compose a song after the death of her childhood sweetheart. It was later known that Kafka might be her son. Miss Saeki opens the portal to the parallel world in a desperate attempt to reunite with her dead lover. These two characters' paths merge when Nakata stabs Kafka's father to death, who discreetly lives a Jekyll and Hyde life of being a world-famous sculptor and a cruel cat murderer in an attempt to make a flute. He escapes into the woods after Kafka comes about his father's death. Kafka continues to lay low after his father's death because he dreamt of killing his father, which was oddly realistic to him as he woke up in a puddle of blood far away from where Nakata killed his father. Two missing World War II soldiers patrol the woods, looking after the entrance, and the forest where he is temporarily hiding has a mystical, enchanted quality where the parallel universe dwells. The opening of the portal brought about the consequences in the real world. Nakata was the chosen one to close the portal to stop the repercussions of the opening of the portal. Kafka accidentally enters the parallel world and meets young Saeki. Kafka and Saeki spend their time together before he leaves for the real world. The portal is finally closed by Hoshino after the death of Miss. Saeki and Nakata. After the death of Miss. Saeki, Kafka decides to pursue his schooling and leaves the library.

7.2 Magical Realist Elements in the Novel

Kafka on the Shore is one of the successful works of Haruki Murakami, whose fiction predominantly uses magical realism for his novels. The readers can easily distinguish the magical realist elements in his novels, where he has created his signature style and elements, making them unique. One of the quintessential magical realist elements in his novels is the use of cats, dream worlds, parallel worlds, and the segregation of self into two halves in different distorted spaces and times. His characters are normal, lonely Japanese people who live a simple middle-class life.

Wendy. B. Faris (2004) proposed five elements of the genre in the book *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. These are Irreducible Elements, Phenomenal Worlds, Unsettling Doubts, Merging Realms, and Disruptions of Time, Space, and Identity. (Faris, 2004, p.7). These are the elements drafted for the postcolonial context, where *Kafka on the Shore* doesn't belong but has some elements.

Murakami voices out the socio-political happenings and states those issues subtly, making the protagonist suffer due to the political issue caused by the government. He does not comment on those issues when asked in personal interviews. He may side with the politically neutral stance in his everyday life. At the same time, he does not hesitate to make statements about the political decisions the governing party has made in the present and past.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, the other protagonist, Nakata, loses his ability to remember the suspicious mystery incident in the Rice Bowl Mountain during his childhood. He made a conjecture that maybe he lost his intelligence as a side effect of a poisonous gas bomb allegedly used by the US government. Then, the nuclear bombs, a little man, and the fat boy were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nakata's medical history and the incident of school children falling unconscious were kept secret by the government, and the incident was never reported in the newspaper to avoid hysteria among the people. Meanwhile, Nakata's school teacher, Setsuko Okamochi, then recalled beating him up on a mood swing while he found her sanitary napkin. She later felt guilt and confessed that out of embracement and panic, she beats the child unconsciously. The school teacher later confessed to the incident, and after years, the case was closed.

Another incident that Murakami sets his novels is the Student Revolt of 1969 in his first realist novel, *Norwegian Wood*, and it recurs again in the novel *Kafka on the Shore* when Miss. Saeki, then-lover, lost his life to the students' protest at his university. Murakami makes his story set around historical events, often forgotten by people over the years. This allusion to those events may not have any immediate direct influence now, but it makes the rest of the world aware of the happening that their people forgot. The historical setting of Murakami's novels is often ignored or brushed out as fantasy rather than real.

Treating the extraordinary as mundane everyday events is one of the key markers of magical realism. This characteristic differentiates it from other parallel genres like surrealism, fantasy, and science fiction. In a realistic setting, magical elements and supernatural incidents occur, and it is conveyed by the author with a neutral attitude in portraying them as ordinary events. In the novel, Nakata voluntarily

discloses his murder of Kafka's father to the police officer, but he dismisses him as mentally unstable. Nakata also alerts the officer to bring an umbrella as it will rain fish from the sky tomorrow. True to his words, it rained sardines and mackerel from the sky.

Adding to treating unusual events as usual, people use Nakata's ability to speak with cats to find their missing cats rather than treating him as a wizard in this realistic story setting.

The cat hesitated for a time, then plunged ahead and spoke. "Hmm ... so you're able to speak."

"That's right," the old man said bashfully. To show his respect, he took off his threadbare cotton hiking hat. "Not that I can speak to every cat I meet, but if things go well, I can. Like right now."

"Interesting," the cat said simply. (Murakami, 2002, p.43).

One another central element of the genre is distorted time and space. In *Kafka on the Shore*, the presence of a parallel world is a major element, where two soldiers cross the border of the real world and become immortals in the parallel world, patrol around the woods for decades, and eventually become the guardians of the entrance. In the enchanted woods, where Kafka stays in the cabin. Oshima describes the parallel world in the woods as

There's another world that parallels our own, and to a certain degree you're able to step into that other world and come back safely. As long as you're careful. But go past a certain point, and you'll lose the path out. It's a labyrinth. (Murakami, 2002, p.326).

Young Kafka mistakenly enters the parallel world that Miss Saeki opened as an attempt to reunite with her dead lover, who was killed in the student revolt. When Kafka enters the parallel world in the woods, he is fascinated by how time doesn't exist there, and he meets the young Saeki there to live as a young Saeki when she enters the portal. One of the main purposes of Nakata's existence is to make sure the portal is closed to the parallel world before he dies. he finds the purpose of his life through the closing of the portal.

8. Results

Any genre could be traced down to its origin, and its evolution could be studied easily using genre theory and family resemblance theory. A genre is formed by adding and fusing one or a few other genres. Magical Realism is seen as a combination of Fantasy and Realism. At the same time, an in-depth study concluded that Magical Realism has separate characteristics that may resemble both genres but is a separate mode of its own. Family resemblance theory postulates that genres of the same category showcase similar features, though they are different. Magical realism may resemble other similar genres like science fiction, realism, and children's literature, but it is entirely different from them in comparison. The study focuses on the differences and similarities that the genres share with magical realism. Genre theory also explains how magical realism can be understood as a typified repeated action of finding similar characteristics in various works, making it a genre characteristic. The major common characteristics seen are realistic settings, supernatural elements treated as ordinary events, the co-existence of different worlds in reality, and the treatment of real-world problems in the storyline, merging fantasy and realism.

Kafka on the Shore showcases elements of Magical realism, which can be easily distinguished from other identical genres. The realistic setting sets it apart from the fantasy, as it relies primarily on lands of imagination that are far removed from reality with supernatural creatures. The novel is set in Tokyo, Japan, where ordinary characters witness supernatural events like raining leeches. The protagonist, Kafka, travels through a parallel world guarded by the lost World War soldiers and the talking cats, which are some of the few recurring elements of magical realism seen in the novel. Though it may overlap with the fantasy genre, it can be easily distinguished from other writers' mainstream fantasy fictional works.

9. Discussion

Magical Realism has proved to be an effective mode of narration for complex stories. Furthermore, magical realism has historical and cultural context embedded in it. With the characteristics discussed above, one could quickly identify the unique features of Magical Realism that often overlap with similar genres.

In a chapter titled *Why We Need Another Study of Magical Realism*, Marisa Bortolussi stated that

Casting the net too wide results in definitions so broad that they fail to recognize important lines of generic demarcation, and casting it too near results in definitions that are so restricted that they either preclude much of what common sense would sagely include, or fail to capture what is most interesting about the mode or genre. (Bortolussi, 2003, p.284)

The definitions to demarcate magical Realism have been limited in their depth and analysis as they need clarification on the vast works of magical realism that seldom resembles the same characteristics. Specific restrictions make it challenging to differentiate magical realism from other genres used interchangeably. When genres are used without inherent distinctions, it leads to chaos for the readers. The overt usage of the magical realism label in publishing houses has caused many authors to avoid the genre altogether. Although many publishers take advantage of the terminology's popularity, some authors are careful not to mislead the readers through the fake labelling caused by the publishers.

Toni Morrison (1988) once stated in an interview about her refusal of the term magical realism in her works:

I was once under the impression that the label 'magical realism' was another one of those words that covered up what was

going on ... If you could apply the word magical then that dilutes the realism but it seemed legitimate because there were these supernatural and unrealistic things, surreal things art historians and literary critics way to skip again what was the truth in the art of certain writers. (pp.141-150)

Magical Realism is seen by publishers as a charming way to sell books, which has made distinguishing the terminology even more challenging. Genre theory helps us understand that genres are interrelated and seen as an extension or fusion of other existing genres.

A generation of people who claim themselves as the “McOndo Generation”, stay away from the magical realism branded for Latin American works. They strive to break away from this stereotype following the Latin American ‘boom’. It is evident that while magical realism helps authors worldwide voice their opposition, people from Latin America strive to avoid associating with the style altogether.

10. Conclusion

Magical realism as a mode of narration and genre is an effective tool for voicing out the narrative of the oppressed. This does not exclude magical realism writing, which only pertains to the voice of the voiceless, as most third-world nation writers use the genre abundantly in their stories. The article tries to analyse the characteristics of the magical realism genre, which has been challenging to define with its fluid nature to overlap with other similar genres like science fiction, dystopian, and realism, to name a few. The paper traces the origin of magical realism from art to literature and analyses the characteristics of magical realism in its entirety. It also compares and contrasts the unique characteristics of similar genres that set them apart from the rest, making understanding the characteristics of magical realism a bit easier for readers of literature. To consider a text a magical realist work, it has to adhere to the genre's characteristics and restrain it from overusing the usual elements of the genre. Other research in this field of study failed to compare the genres to highlight the characteristics of magical realism. Family resemblance theory is employed in this article to understand magical realism from other similar genres that share the same characteristics. Magical Realism is widely understood and misunderstood by critics and readers alike. Family resemblance theory states that genres are related even with apparent differences. The genres thrive in differences rather than similarities.

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