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DEMYSTIFYING MAGICAL REALISM: A CLOSE READING OF *QUICHOTTE*

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Abstract:

Magical Realism is a genre that brings in together two completely different dimensions of study, namely realism and fantastic imagination (magic). There is always an air of eerie complexity around the genre due to the confluence of such contradictions. Salman Rushdie is one of the most important Indian Diaspora writers prominently known for the triumphant utilization of this genre through innovative techniques in his work. Some of his most famous literary productions of this genre are *The Midnight's children*, *Shame*, etc., This paper takes Rushdie's (2019) recent blockbuster publication *Quichotte* under study, and scrutinizes it from a hermeneutical point of view. It uses the principles theorized by W. B. Fraix (2004) in her book *Ordinary Enchantments* and attempts to analyse the book under the derived perspective. This brief analysis underscores the hidden elements that are unanimously typical of all Magical Realist texts with reference to *Quichotte* in and endeavours to demystify it.

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1.0 Introduction:

The age of new media bombards us with multiplicity of stimulus and enormous amount of information. And with too many options from television and social media applications to new generation online media service providers like Netflix and other streaming apps for entertainment, books and other single dimensional mediums of infotainment hence have a tough time penetrating through the barriers of highly distractive lifestyle of infotainment overdose. Consequently, writers who write with the vision of conveying their valid ideas always innovate, to be perceived more than just as blunt reflectors of reality or mere reporters of pure make believe romanticised fantasies. One such novelty is Magical realism that came into existence as a reaction against the rigidity of realism. Even though magical elements and realistic elements have coexisted in novels since Defoe and Richardson (Hawthorne, 2000, p.196), this genre in particular have specific features that distinguish it from pure fantastic and imaginary fictional pieces. The genre with its unique, believable oxymoronic fusion of both realism and fancy together, dances well even today to the contemporary beats of readers' expectations. Magical realism is a trend that bloomed out in

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1920s in Germany as an art movement in paintings took deeper roots and spread its shoots across nations. Franz Roh a German art critic was the first to use this term to describe the combination of reality and unbelievable elements of magic in the paintings (p.195). As traced by Jeremy Hawthorne (2000), Seymour Menton, an American professor in his book *Magic Realism Rediscovered* has reported the increased usage of this term since 1955 after the employment of this technique in the post World War Latin American fiction (p.195). Latin American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marques, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, Jorge Luis Borges, Elena Garro, Mireya Robles, Juan Rulfo, Rómulo Gallegos, Arturo Uslar Pietri, and Isabella Allende, were all initially associated with this trend. Later this unique “juxtaposition of magic and realism” (Hawthorne, 2000, p. 195) that attempts to capture “the strange, the uncanny, the eerie and the dreamlike aspects of everyday reality” (p.195) with its two major booms in Latin America and in the Caribbean (Selmon, n.d., para. 1) gained popular attention especially among the Post Colonial writers from the periphery.

For the reason that this genre with its space for the placement of myth and elements of knowledge unfamiliar to the western canon, opened up a vast opportunity for postcolonial expressionists from various Commonwealth Nations and attracted them. They included their diverse undisclosed perspectives, culture and varied elements of exceptional “supernatural” (Hawthorne, 2000, p.196) elements into this mode of literary expression. Such fantastic or magical elements were skilfully interlaced that they appear as a normal constituent of the plotline without seeking any florescent or odd attention to them. This genre gained global popularity for this rarity and has become one of the important international modes of contemporary fiction writing. Among writers like Toni Morison and Nick Joaquin, Salman Rushdie is a notable pioneer in the contemporary setting of this genre.

Salman Rushdie is a Diaspora writer born in India and is currently residing in the USA. He is best known for his “sensational literary” (Iyengar, 2017, p.753) production *The Midnight's Children* that won him a Booker Prize and the Best of Booker in 1981 (p. 753). His works are an impressive blend of both history and Magical realism.

When Rushdie talks about Magical Realism in one of his interviews he says that, “stories don't have to be true to be real. By including the elements of fantastic or pure make-believe you can get to the truth in a different way. It's another door into the truth” (Tyson & Kaku, 2015, 00.07-00.28). In the same interview he says that ‘the truth’ that he, as a writer intends is ‘The Human Truth’; not photographic, exact or journalistic truth or unaltered realism. He communicates the message that it is alright to add a smidgen of animation, untruth, and wild imaginary embellishments to elevate the ride to the truth- the strong vision of the real to another level of interest and excitement. This paper proposes to identify the alter paths or doors to the aimed universal human truth that Rushdie takes in his recent fictional tour de force, *Quichotte* in the following.

In an intriguing novel-within-a novel technique, Salman Rushdie's novel *Quichotte* revolves around a mediocre struggling fiction writer who is called as Brother or sometimes as Sam Duchamp (his pen name). He, just like his author Rushdie does, is inspired by *Don Quixote* the magnum opus of Cervantes and wishes to write a novel celebrating the immortal work. This novel that he sketches, is the secondary novel within the primary plotline. It revolves around an ageing salesman Ismail Smile as the protagonist, who renames himself as Quichotte and embarks on a journey with his imaginary son named Sancho. His goal is the hand of the Holy Grail, the impossible love, the television star of Indian background Salma. R. Like Don Quixote and his squire, he travels through diverse imaginary Valleys across America, a nation which according to Rushdie is in the rim of spiritual and ethical collapse in the text.

The paper uses analytical study by close reading of the novel under the light of WB Faris' (2004) investigation of Magical Realism in her book *Ordinary Enchantment: Magical Realism and Remystification Narrative*. Faris (2004), investigates Magical Realism as a discourse and places it in between post-colonial modernism and postmodernism, and then deliberates the common characteristics of Magical Realism. Namely the irreducible element of magic, phenomenal world, merging of different realms, unsettling doubts, and disruption in the received ideas of space, time and identity.

The aforementioned elements would serve as the template for the present investigation of identifying the unreal and uncommon roads Rushdie uses to reach the ultimatum or the realistic truth.

2.0 The irreducible element of magic:

These are inextricable strands of magic braided into the narrative that cannot be subjected to scientific testing or logical scrutiny by the readers. These elements escape the universal laws of reason and they are understood by the readers only with the willing suspension of disbelief, because they often break away from the hold of sensory perceptions. From the world of fantasy, they suddenly fringe into the dimension of reality in the text all of a sudden and none of the characters in the work would be astonished by their presence. All these elements coexist with the other elements of reality mutually affecting each other. For instance, Sancho, the son of the protagonist of the secondary narrative is a main character who travels alongside Quichotte as his son, as a companion to end his long solitude (p.19). He is not a realistic or natural occurrence; instead, he is a manifestation of Quichotte's long yearned wish, a miraculous product that is bestowed upon Quichotte after his persistent hunts of various meteor showers across America as instructed by "his dusty library books specializing in Astro-aracana and... admittedly dubious websites" (pp.16-17) on the art of wishing well. While narrating the genesis of the boy, Rushdie (2019) writes that

The magical child manifests himself in black and white, his natural colours desaturated in the manner that has become fashionable in much modern cinema. Perhaps, Quichotte surmised, the boy was astrologically related to the monochrome inhabitants of Tierra Del Fuego. Or perhaps he had been seized long ago and now returned by the aliens in the mothership hiding in the sky above the meteors illuminating the Devils Tower, after many years during which he had been studied, drained of colour by their experiments and somehow failed to age. (pp.17-18).

In monochromatic fashion he suddenly exists as a younger version of Quichotte himself sharing a mysterious connection to parts of his father's brain, having his father's memories as his own in his mind. But with all the incredible description a reader might find him to be a rendering of Quichotte's hallucinations or a figment of his imagination shot into reality. But the plot is uniquely fabricated that other characters in the story share space with him, they identify his presence without any question cancelling the logical doubt that might arise to the reader. This is one of the peculiarities of Magical Realism where the fantastic elements are plaited together into the braids of reality. For example, the parthenogenetic child (Sancho) in an incident in Lake Capote "in his youthful hot headed way intervenes the conversation" (p.126) and he is beaten up by the xenophobic racist mob. Confirming the fact that he is not just noticed by Quichotte but also by others in the plot. He becomes a very strong character in the narrative that chapters six and nine are from his viewpoint.

The writers help these elements fringe into the dimensions of reality unquestionably incorporating them into the realism narrative. Though these irreducible elements are intact in the reality they are distinct like a scoop of stardust in a water bottle glitching and scintillating, distinguishable yet inseparable.

For instance, Sancho has all the characteristics of the real human child yet he glitches and buffers like a Wi-Fi powered internet gadget when he moves away from his parent and finally ceases to exist when he separates himself out of his father's life. (p. 354). The blue fairy "blond, nordic and almost two seats wide" (p. 344) who appears in human form, to warn Sancho about the limitations of his being during his bus travel in quest of his beloved is a significant example of a figmental and magical projection of from the conscious of another magical projection (Sancho). The other minor magical elements like, a talking "Rusty Glock 22 gun" (p. 337), a guiding Hans Christian Anderson's statue in the Central Park are also notable. Similarly in the primary narrative concerning the Author Sam Du Champ his fictional productions are all magical. His ideas on spy fiction, the characters in it, his fictional scenes in Quichotte narrative, all bounce from the book to his reality, overlapping and affecting it on a serious note.

Most of the times, these animated magical elements establish their own presence, firmly announcing it loud to other characters, to the reader and sometimes to themselves. For instance, Sancho often says "it's me, I am here" (p.341), "Look at me, Flesh and blood. I live and breathe and think and feel. What more do you want? ... I am a genuine human person." (p.341). Similarly, the Rusty Glock 22 gun wanting a conversation says "it's me" (p. 377).

3.0 Phenomenal world:

Jean Patriot and Barry Smith (1996) in their article on *Physics and the Phenomenal World* says that "the phenomenal or common sensical world that is apprehended in perception and described by natural language" (para.1) and define Phenomenal World as "the world macroscopically organized in object forms, shapes, secondary qualities and states of affairs" (para. 1) or in simple words it is the world that is perceived based on human understanding, that is built in the mind of the perceiver, wishfully thought, completely unlike the real world, phenomenal world contains what one wants it to contain. Faris (2004) while talking about this in his book says that "realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in often by extensive use of details. On the one hand the attention to sensory details continues and renews the realistic traditions, on the other hand in addition to including magical events or phenomenal and magical realist fiction includes intriguing magical details" (p. 14). He also says that these details create a "reality effect" (p. 14) Roland Barthes' *Effect of the real*, a mode of interpretation that willingly neglects content of a representation in order to instil the notion that 'this is reality'." (Hawthorn, 2000, p. 294) which pulls the text towards believability while all the elements of irreducible magic that escapes human logicity pulls the narrative to the side of unbelievable, creating a tensed space in-between which can be called as the Phenomenal World. It is repetitively said in the narrative of *Quichotte* that it is an "Age-of-Anything-can-happen" (Rushdie, 2019, p. 17) registering the fact of the presence of a phenomenal world strongly in the minds of readers to facilitate them into believing the unbelievable. This world according to Author in the book might be based on twin principle that guides the world; they are "paranoia" (p. 23) and "entropy" (p. 23). This world in the narrative is characterised by strange unreliable time, with instability in its existence. "A week could be a month long; a lifetime could pass in a day. The world was falling apart; a great roaring maw of nothingness had appeared in mid-air near the storeyed secular spire of Empire State Building" (p. 371)

The world as Quichotte believes has Seven Valleys with hurdles that test him on his worthiness of attaining the love of his beloved Salma R. This world has space for imaginary figments to move freely with certain restrictions, it can have a talking genius Cricket, Blue Fairy, mobs of inhuman racist men with imaginary chokers on their neck, where the Angel of Death can hover around anyone and the instability with the universe can make the dimensions perforated with voids of nothingness that could swallow anything in matters of moments,

Like a colossus with a huge blaster blew a hole in the air. You look at it, you want to die. This can't be fixed... that's what the human race comes down to after all these years. Shakespeare Newton Einstein Gandhi Mandela Obama Oprah and in the end its just an impotent scream. Aaaaaaaa (p. 375).

4.0 Merging of different realms:

It is characteristically typical of this genre to blend in various areas or realms, as Magical Realism rudimentarily in itself is an exotic confluence of magic and realism; fantasy and facts; etc. This text under investigation primarily fuses Rushdie's (2019) primary imagination and his secondary imagination wherein two narratives (one of the Author Sam Du Champ and other of his own creation Quichotte) are seamlessly interwoven into each other. One could easily catch the author wondering how similar his and his creation's lives are. Sam Duchamp himself says that "Now Quichotte and I are no longer two different beings, the one created and the one creating, he thought. Now I am a part of him, just as he is a part of me." (p. 304)

Even when Rushdie introduces the Author (Brother) in the second chapter immediately after the one on Quichotte, he explicitly tells that "The tale and the teller were yoked together by race, place, generation and circumstance. Perhaps this bizarre story was a metamorphosed version of his own" (p. 22). Rushdie also amalgamates the occidental literary form, the oriental bodies of myths and wild scientific possibilities in the plotline. For instance, Sancho in the narrative is a product of Quichotte's oriental superstition; of the art of wishing well (p. 16) over falling meteors. This is brought into the occidental life he lives in America. But Rushdie throughout the novel permeates as logical explanations as possible to justify his existence in the phenomenal world thus trying to fuse the illogical and the logical together.

The merging of temporal realms, most importantly of the past and present is another unification of prominence. There are occasions like a live conversation with the great dead author Hans Christian Anderson's statue in the central park etc., The author even carves out characters from his past in India, he brings most of them into a nightmarish existence into the present. For example, the paedophile paternal figure from his familial past is placed in one the main character Salma's past, who is resented by both his Sister [when Brother narrates the story he is presently working on (p. 299)] and Salma [when she is reminded of her maternal grandfather by seeing Quichotte's photo (p. 166)] in the present. Similarly, Author Sam Du Champ finds his present, the characters from his books find a near future real life reflections, through his son (who emits the vibes of both Quichotte and Sancho) and the Japanese FBI agent (who emits the energy of his earlier spy fictional characters).

His doubly pseudonymous life, Quix 97, Marcel DuChamp. His son had become an imaginary being- two imaginary beings! - by the force of his own will. So also Brother had brought Sancho into the world and then Sancho had willed himself into being real, live. These doubled births echoed one another deafeningly... the dizzying union of the real and the imagined (p. 229).

Further, when Quichotte prepares to meet Salma for the first time in real, he compares it to the entering into the "realm of the blessed" (p. 329) by a mortal and recounts as

Between the gods and the mortal men and women there hung a veil, and its name was Maya. When Quichotte saw Miss Salma.R walking toward him through the park, he was about to have an experience granted to very few creatures of flesh and blood" (p. 329).

In the secondary narrative, when the world is portrayed to be heading towards a catastrophic end. Evel Cent with his *Near Earth Xchange Technology* (NEXT) physically opens a gateway into another realm of possible life and facilitates a trans dimensional exchange. But they end up leaking into the dimension of the author where the author proudly states that "the microscopic man, the creature of author's imagination, had brilliantly done the impossible and joined the two worlds"

(p. 390). Apart from all this, Rushdie effectively merges two variant cultures, one of India and the other of the west in the novel. He encapsulates the identity crisis and alienation as immigrants the characters undergo and registers the plight of diasporas.

5.0 Disruption in Space, Time and Identity:

Disruption is one of the most common features of magical realism; Faris (2004) says that “multivocal nature of the narrative and the cultural hybridity that characterize magical realism extends to its characters which tend towards radical multiplicity.” (p. 25). The post coloniality of magical realism allows it to borrow the concepts and principles from realism and move past or beyond it, then anchor its audience to it; just resembling Caliban “who learns from master’s language, then uses it to curse” (p. 28) him back.

Spatial disruptions initially happen at once the reader starts reading the text. Rushdie employs a nonlinear narrative where there are two spaces i.e. the textual reality (pertaining to the life of Sam Du Champ) and the textual constructed or imagined (pertaining to DuChamp’s fiction about Quichotte). This makes readers to juggle between the ulterior and the primary narratives throughout the novel. Quichotte’s world is filled with a lot of hypertextual links to his Author’s world which is where the primary disruption initially happens when readers switch from one to other for constant references.

Concerning the author Sam Du Champ, his life keeps revolving around three physical spaces. One is India where his past lives, two is America where his present lives and three is London where the amalgamation of both his present and past, his sister (the only living family member to support him) lives.

Concerning Quichotte, at once Ismail smile assumes the identity of a desperate medieval ingenious gentleman Quichotte and sets up on a quest to reach his impossible love Miss. Salma R. to be her “verray parfait gentle knight” (Rushdie, 2019, p.7). He embarks on the journey through America to reach his beloved, which he has imagined to be through a series of valleys namely, valleys of quest, love, knowledge, detachment, harmony, peace and poverty or annihilation. So normality of the realistic spatial setup is disrupted as he travels through all these and as he finally reaches the last valley, the world altogether annihilates.

The narrator keeps highlighting an infringement of the reality and spatial instability throughout the narrative, in the ulterior plotline, Evel Cent says “this is happening. The universe is fraying at the edges. It’s coming apart.” (p. 268) Similarly, Author says when he finds a group of floaters in his eyes, “it looked as if the universe itself might be fraying” (p. 281).

Disruption in time is more frequent than other kinds of disruptions, since we are all seated in the Author’s mind, for a roller coaster ride through the memories of his past, the reality of contemporary world and the imagination of possible future, there are many flashbacks and flash-forwards. When author Sam Du Champ or Quichotte who are nothing but lively projections of the narrator, are affected by their constructed realities, Time loses its function and disrupts. For instance, when Quichotte stoops down his proud stubbornness to make peace with the Human Trampoline, his sister; asking for forgiveness and freedom from the paralysing past,

Time stood still inside the room. Outside, or it seemed to Sancho, a week passed, a month, a year, a decade, maybe a century. The sun rose and set, the moon waxed and waned, seasons fled by. Mighty men and women rose and fell, the world changed, the future enveloped them, and they were leftovers from an ancient past unknown to all, lost in their own labyrinth of love and pain. (p. 276)

When Quichotte messed up his first meeting with his beloved and felt an excruciation of having been the reason for her opioid accident and a near death experience, he felt the same way where, “time did not pass there, nor kind breezes blew. All was stagnation. Life, having been rendered meaningless, lost power of movement... a perpetual twilight reigned” (p. 234).

When the predicted catastrophe was swallowing up earth, time becomes “strange...stretching, compressing, unreliable” (p. 371).

The irreducible elements of magic are empowered to control the dimensions of their existence, when Sancho leaves his dad putting at stake his whole existence to meet the girl Beautiful from the town Beautiful, the Blue Fairy who had a protective eye on Sancho, messes with the reality. “Sancho felt dizzy. This wasn’t right. They shouldn’t be back here. They did this already. This ghost was hours ago. So was this gas station. Something was terribly wrong” (p. 237) he felt like a prisoner inside the temporal loop.

Disruption of identity in the novel reflects the postcolonial identity crisis. None of the characters live by their original identity. Their assumed identities take lead and become their reality. For instance, Ismael Smile becomes Quichotte to win over his beloved. Salma, R who the world perceived and trusted as a shining star falls from above when her opioid addictive nature is revealed out, shattering her stardom her identity. Sancho the projection of Quichotte’s self, struggles to find who he really is, as he is constantly affected by his father’s restrictions and his father’s past memories. Author assumes a pen name, Sam Duchamp “the name on the books veiled his ethnic identity...this was not because. Ashamed of his race but because he did not want to be prejudged, did not want to be ghettoed inside an ethnic-music pigeonhole surrounded by the bars of white attitudes.” (Rushdie, 2019, p. 25) and often swaps his identity with that of the Angel of Death, which he projects into Quichotte’s reality as well.

The narrative style makes the readers feel one with Sancho who shares access to all of the Author, his creator’s memory of the past, his dilemma of the present and his Future aspirations.

6.0 Unsettling Doubts:

Since there is an intrinsic clash between the numerous representations of the rational and the fantastic bodies of knowledge in this genre, there arise many unsettling doubts in the minds of the readers, as they are not used to the alternative canons of non-European bodies of knowledge, fuelled by the principles of empiricism. Mind is torn between the strong pull of the believable descriptions of the “extra sensory phenomenon” (Faris, 2004, p. 17) and the pull of the “post enlightenment perspectives” (p. 17) of science. But the text organically plays a key role in keeping the readers tied down to experience the author’s intended effect of unreal realities in the narrative. Whenever events that cannot be bound to the laws of nature happen, human brain tends to categorize them under hallucinations, illusions and dream like situations. It is where the text intervenes to inform the readers, to assert strongly that it is not a dream in the narrative.

For instance, in the beginning of the interior narrative, Quichotte is introduced as a man of “retreating mental powers” (Rushdie, 2004, p.3) who suffers “a peculiar form of brain damage” (p.3) resultant of his unusual television binge watching habit and a serious ‘interior event’. Thus when the readers encounter elements of irreducible magic around him in the narrative, like the sudden existence of Sancho or his witnessing of the instability in the fabric of the world; they automatically classify the events as projections of his imagination or figments of his hallucination as he is seriously brain damaged. But the text, with other characters that are sane, normal and real intervenes to testify that such a hasty conclusion as erroneous. For example, when Sancho himself doubts his existence in the beginning, he says, “I don’t seem to be visible right now to anyone except him. My ‘father’... People look at him. That look people use on crazy people.” (p. 82) But

the text later evolves to unfold instances in which people see him, talk to him, fight with him, feed him and even give him a near death racist experience asserting his presence strongly in the fictional reality. Another fitting example is when the news reader on the television, addresses Quichotte directly through the telecast, Quichotte voices out the doubt on behalf of the readers, but the news reader again asserts that he speaks to Quichotte.

Also, the text attempts to answer the logical questions with a little bit of rationality and scientific endorsements. As in, when the narration revolves around the episode of manifestation or 'the birth' of Sancho all of a sudden with just a man mentally procreating with no partner, with only the help of his desperate wish and bit of possible magic, text gives available evidences of Parthenogenesis "Water fleas, Scorpions, parasitic wasps and me. Gods could do this also. Dionysus born from the thigh of Zeus." (p. 85). To infuse a little bit of believability into the unbelievable, the author uses realistic details into the narrative like in the moments when Sancho wonders about his nature and being, he says,

I get some distance away, I feel, How to say this. Out of range. Like, the signal drops, or it threatens to drop. If I try to walk away from him,... I start- I don't know how to put it - breaking up. Parts of me become just static. Just like a bad TV picture. Like Wobbly. Its scary. (p. 83).

All these attempts only to ease out readers' hesitation into believing this unprecedented. Thus the content both ally unsettling doubts and at the same time tries to somewhat infuse some rationality into it.

7.0 Conclusion:

To conclude, this article hereby highlights the realistic truths of humanity that Rushdie intends to reach in the following. It is voiced out by Brother in the novel when he discloses the intentions behind the writing of his novel in the primary narrative.

Take on the destructive, mind numbing junk culture of his time just as Cervantes had gone war with the junk culture of his own age. He said he was trying also to write about impossible, obsessional love, father-son relationships, sibling quarrels, and yes unforgivable things; about Indian immigrants, racism toward them, crooks among them; about cyber-spies, science fiction, the intertwining of fictional and 'real' realities, the death of the author, the end of the world. (p.289)

After the close reading of the novel and recognition of mystical and magical make belief elements Rushdie exploits in the work it is clear that he has reached the intended Human truth and the mist of unreliability and fantastic illogicality vanishes as the truth is revealed in the novel.

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