

Magic Realism in Morrison's *Paradise*

CHEN Yue-ting

National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics Dongfang College, Haining, Zhejiang, China

"We Are the Furrow of His Brow" is the graffiti altered from "Beware of the Furrow of His Brow" or "The Furrow of His Brow" on the hood of an oven in a separated black town Ruby. Young people of Ruby change the words because they feel regretted contriving to shoot an assumed guilty woman living in the nearby convent. However, whether the woman Consolata and the other four women at the convent are dead remains mysterious. There are some descriptions of magics in *Paradise* in which the most magical abilities are Connie's "bat vision" and "stepping in". This paper demonstrates the ways that Morrison manifests magic realism in *Paradise* including multiple narrative timelines, ambiguous writing, reconstituted marginal figures and naturally blended reality. Primarily in the four ways Morrison presents how she utilizes magic realism genre to depict the changeable world penetrating through the appearance.

Keywords: Magic realism, Toni Morrison, *Paradise*

Introduction

Magical realism is a weapon that Morrison manifests in her novels in which the multicomponent integration of various past, present and future, unfamiliar weird plot, and metaphysical illusion in concrete scene typically constitute her features of magical realism to show the "national imaginary" (Holloway, 2008, p. 434) and "political commentary" (Swanson, 2004, pp. 75-77). In fact, under the globalisational proceeding background, or being interpreted Americanisation or Europeanisation since they are the representations of the strong culture, a predominated character of magical realism is to make the strong invasion localised. Walter D. Mignolo firstly introduces this point to strengthen vernacular characteristics of magical realism. Julio Escoto in more depth discusses magical realism is a product of social relationship. He observes the problem of Latin America is the lack of national identification but a certain similarity of this spectrum is the invasion of an extraneous interference of political, economic, social and cultural areas in the historical proceeding of colonialism and neocolonialism. Based on future development, similar root, historical kinship, worries about the national destiny and united national global identity of views, in the works of Latin American writers in the third world they consciously constitute the style of magical realism to confront aggressive North American and European literary theories. Therefore, Escoto warns the social realistic connotation of magical realism should not be ignored as the first world identifies it merely as an exotic sentiment. The paramount importance of the vulgar developing of

CHEN Yue-ting, Ph.D. student, Foreign Language Department, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan; Lecturer, Foreign Language Department, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics Dongfang College, Haining, Zhejiang, China.

magical realism is to search for a unique cultural identification to compete with the greedy absorbing of the other advanced cultures. Most of Latin American writers explore practical means of social innovation and excavate latent social problems, and thus Indians, mulattos, rural people are the fundamental elements of literatures. The influence of literary pioneers such as Alejo Carpentier, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes Macías etc.. in Boom Latinoamericano and the vibrant interactions of the region popularize the creation of national literatures. Hence, local culture, or called oral literature, including country legend, racial myth, family history, heroic stories, traditions and folk stories create a nostalgic literary atmosphere. In fact, besides the ambiguous relation of reality and magic on rhetoric or content in magical realism, it represents a countervailing power with its social value glossing in literary world.

The above is a broad summary of the general features of magical realism. However, when it comes to the heterogeneity and connotation and implied meaning of a specific text, it would be analysed in detail. By taking the representative magical realistic work of Morrison—*Paradise*, besides it qualifies the general profound absurd features of this fashionable modern genre, Morrison endows her characters meaningful names and mysterious personalities by symbolism and allusion. These heroines, mainly the five female protagonists, are combined to reflect their characters or be reflected each other. The myths and religious tales from the origin of African black men influence the story and the plot is developed as annular or spiralling movement. The meaning is delivered with accumulating and the narration and the description of the characters display a film-like montage attraction from outsiders to the nearest and from summary to the detail. Morrison admits the similarity of her works and Latin American magic realism but her realism differs from the traditional western literature. This essay will analyses: firstly, Morrison's narrative timeline presents a multiple confusional pattern other than a single line. Crossing present, past and future time period embodies levels of penetration of the author's thoughts. Secondly, writing on transcendent and magic matters implies the objective real world. Morrison favors ambiguity in her novel rather than explaining everything in a rational and clear way. The satire by taking myths discloses the transformation of historical memory which could be constituted under the camouflage and the hypocrisy of history. In this way, magical realism is somewhat a root-seeking literary genre. Thirdly, reconstituted marginal figures are another conspicuous element in her magical realism. Big Papas Cafe and Tea are the representatives. Additionally, in the end of *Paradise*, Morrison gives five pity women even the isolated black town Ruby rebirth by using magic realism. She manifests the complicated things in a dreamlike illusion on the way to paradise which expresses her hope for the future harmony of multi-national living together. Fourthly, reality is naturally blended in magic but it still remains its realistic essence. In this way Morrison displays how to perceive the changeable world penetrating through the appearance.

Elements of Magic Realism Genre

Magic realism is a modern fiction genre that contains objective realistic depiction and magic manifestation. It transcends the limits of realism and draws resources from allegory, folktale and myths and connects to the realities of contemporary society. Figures in magic realistic fictions usually have the abilities of flying or telepathy, with both realistic and magic atmosphere, leaving no trace of changing from time to time. Applying these features of mazy narrative and plot and mysteries presents the changeable politics and social realities in the 20th century. A German art critic Franz Roh finds magic realisms are more novel and imaginative, more

exaggerated and bizarre, and full of mysterious features of folk or primitive art. Magic realism is based on concrete reality of natural, social and historical reality or psychological reality. Through imagination of the author, magic realism is usually elaborated on an illusion to a new reality of a fantasy or with a magic color. In the theory of magic realism, the writing purpose of the author is to show how the reality connects to magic power other than uses magic as the real thing as Roh (1968) points out "magic isn't the opposite of reality, but is reality itself (p. 70)". The Table 1 shows the differences between realism and magic realism and surrealism (Simpkins, 1988, p. 141).

Table 1

Elements of Realism, Magic Realism and Surrealism

Realism	Magic Realism	Sur-realism
History	Myth/Legend	Dream Reality
Mimetic	Fantastic/Supplementation	Freud's <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i>
Familiarization	Defamiliarisation	
Empiricism/Logic	Mysticism/Magic	
Narration Meta-narration	Open-ended/Expansive	
Closure-ridden/Reductive	Romanticism	
Naturalism	Imagination/Negative Capability	
Rationalization/Cause and Effect		

Roh illustrates magic realism of having the features of myth, supplementation, defamiliarization, magic, meta-narration, open-ended, romanticism and imagination. Actually magic realism and surrealism both belong to realism but their major difference lies on surrealism focusing on dream reality based on Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Magical realism presents its art charming with scattered narrative methods. The complex technique strategy of time and space, and refractive views of figures by a nonlinear narration not only strengthens the magic features and artistic glamour, but deepens cultural connotation of ethnic minorities and expands realistic creative freedom under the post-colonial context. As a typical example of postmodern narrative, magical realism exemplifies a new critic pattern after narrative theory, formalism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism and subversive discourse space by offering a treatment scheme for the existing crisis of literary internal criticism. In addition, the more profound understanding on reality of the magical realism authors extends the concept of time and space. They incarnate the former virtual reality of emotion and consciousness in spiritual and psychological categories with imaginative thinking, which shakes off the limits of traditional objective reality and thus opens a new era of subjective reality and proves subjectivity is reality too in literature.

Magic Realism in Morrison's *Paradise*

Followed by the writing style of *Beloved* (1988) in a ghost world based on the logic origin of creation that one dead baby could appear later as a lively allusion or a ghost, *Paradise* inherits this genre with a special African American style. There are several essential surrealistic descriptions in *Paradise*, for example, a mysterious man had appeared before Zechariah and his son Rector arrived at Haven.

They saw him at the same time. A small man, seemlike, too small for the sound of his steps. He was walking away from them. Dressed in a black suit, the jacket held over his shoulder with the forefinger of his right hand. His shirt glistening white between broad suspenders. Without help of stick and with nary a groan, Big Papa stood up. Together

they watched the man walking away from the palest part of the sky. Once, he lingered to turn around and look at them, but they could not see the features of his face. When he began walking again, they noticed he had a satchel in his left hand. (Morrison, 1997, p. 97)

In fact, the name of Zechariah has a symbolized meaning as he is a Hebrew prophet who has once persuade Jews to rebuild the Temple from the myth prototype in the Bible. Another prototype is the fucking couple of town Wish in Arizona. People compare them as Gomorrah which is a sinful ancient town in the Bible and it is destroyed by God because of its guilt. Zechariah said the man was God who guided their way. In fact, this novel refers to Christian religion. Lots of religious allusions are expressed. Morrison suggests in the beginning of the novel as a scapegoating symbolism as 8-rocks of Ruby shot a white girl: "Shooting the first woman (the white one) has clarified it like butter: the pure oil of hatred on top, its hardness stabilized below. (Morrison, 1997, p. 4)" It accounts for hatred as the reason to shoot the white woman but does not explain her illegal guilt. "It will turn silver soon and make grass rainbows low enough for children's play before the sun burns it off, exposing acres of bluestem and maybe witch tracks as well (Morrison, 1997, p. 4)". Why does there probably have witch tracks? Because first the women living in the convent, 17 miles far from Ruby, were regarded as the evil source of the unexplained things that happened in Ruby. 8-rocks contrived a murder to the assumed guilty women in the convent. A white unknown girl and Consolata are known shot by them but the other four have disappeared in the grass. Another example within mystic color is the woman Piedade, "who sang but never said a word (Morrison, 1997, p. 264)". She was told in the story when Connie consoled four stray women living with her by drawing the pictures of body having the function of replacement of psychoanalysis and described the first image of heaven.

She told them of a place where white sidewalks met the sea and fish the color of plums swam alongside children. She spoke of fruit that tasted the way sapphires look and boys using rubies for dice. Of scented cathedrals made of gold where gods and goddesses sat in the pews with the congregation. Of carnations tall as trees. Dwarfs with diamonds for teeth. Snakes aroused by poetry and bells. (Morrison, 1997, pp. 263-264)

Real concrete space is completely integrated with spiritual illusionary space: "Of scented cathedrals made of gold", "gods and goddesses", "carnations tall as trees", "Snakes aroused by poetry and bells". The speechless mysterious singer Piedade actually appears three times in the novel, and it seems Consolata has no doubt to believe in the existence of such a person even at the end of the novel a younger woman, most possibly Consolata, goes with her. The blended material and spiritual space not only displays the realistic elements to the readers, but bears the illusionary experience of the novel figures in mental space. The illusion, towards characters, is totally real and realistic. The second time Piedade's showing up is before the day Consolata is shot when the other convent women asked her to tell again about Piedade.

We sat on the shorewalk. She bathed me in emerald water. Her voice made proud women weep in the streets. Coins fell from the fingers of artists and policemen, and the country's greatest chefs begged us to eat their food. Piedade had songs that could still a wave, make it pause in its curl listening to language it had not heard since the sea opened. Shepherds with colored birds on their shoulders came down from mountains to remember their lives in her songs. Travelers refused to board homebound ships while she sang. At night she took the stars out of her hair and wrapped me in its wool. Her breath smelled of pineapple and cashews... (Morrison, 1997, pp. 284-285)

In fact, because of the prevailing discrimination under the conserved patriarchy, classes, dictatorship and violences in Ruby and its near around, these lacerated women are eager to heaven which is constituted by the

boundless sea, cozy harbour, wonderful song, young women, pure love and relaxed spirits described in the novel ending. This dreaming heaven, is in such an artistic world of pure love and relaxed heart without racial discrimination and fights. Consolata is a figure who has the authority to contend with patriarchy. In the novel she is not only the victim but also the rescuer, who fully embodies the effect of sacrificing and saving as a scapegoat. Having the most magical power of "bat vision" to "see best in the dark" (Morrison, 1997, p. 241) and the magic of "stepping in" (Morrison, 1997 p. 247) to save life, Consolata was gifted as Lone said. She always wears sunglasses because she is scared of the dazzling sunlight, however, "The dimmer the visible world, the more dazzling her 'in sight' became (Morrison, 1997, p. 247)." To persuade the readers believing in the supernatural means to save lives, the ability does not always work by Morrison's design, for example it could not be used to save Mary Magna's life.

Consolata looked at the body and without hesitation removed her glasses and focused on the trickles of red discoloring his hair. She stepped in. Saw the stretch of road he had dreamed through, felt the flip of the truck, the headache, the chest pressure, the unwillingness to breathe. As from a distance she heard Easter and July kicking the truck and moaning. Inside the boy she saw a pinpoint of light receding. Pulling up energy that felt like fear, she stared at it until it widened. Then more, more, so air could come seeping, at first, then rushing rushing in. Although it hurt like the devil to look at it, she concentrated as though the lungs in need were her own. (Morrison, 1997, p. 245)

She rescued the life of Soane's son Scout and these two women became good friends later. Seeing Pallas' pregnant proves her ability again. Since nine years old she was adopted, the guilt she only has is because of the desire she has had an affair with Deacon, the husband of Soane. Soane revenged her by asking her to help abortion and after Scout's life being saved, she said her resentment disappeared. Except from the symbolism of scapegoating, as the meaning of death in the Bible could be interpreted as release and immortality (Daube, 1962, pp. 82-104), the death of Connie is for "union" and resurrection. Daube points out that in the Bible, there is "Saul and Jonathan, lovely and pleasant in their lives, in their death were not divided" (Daube, 1962, pp. 90-91). Therefore, although to some people death means a dark chasm, the death in the Bible has the meaning of getting the access to be united in another world—namely it opens a mysterious hoping door to escape from this mortal life to the ideal world for the dreamers. Moreover, it is the way Consolata could meet Piedade on the way to heaven. On the other side, through these characters Morrison shows her doubtful attitude to the problematic world by exposing the darkness of Ruby, a separated town black men build as their tangible heaven. The conflicts between the twin Deek and Steward after shooting Connie are not only because of the changes of their valuing standards but also the reflections of the people themselves. They are puzzled:

How hard they had worked for this place; how far away they once were from the terribleness they have just witnessed. How could so clean and blessed a mission devour itself and become the world they had escaped? (Morrison, 1997, p. 292)

Distance between the real world and the dream heaven is the reason why Connie at the cost of her life fights for a better world. Young Rubian feel regretted and self-blamed as they change the graffiti on the hood of the Oven to "We Are the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison, 1997, p. 298). The feeling that they are "Furrow of His Brow" means God is angry for what they have done on the convent women. Moreover, the revered Misner especially unsatisfied with the situation of Ruby, he reflects that evils in human nature of selfishness, pomposity and callousness are the source of the unhappiness:

Born out of an old hatred, one that began when one kind of black man scorned another kind and that kind took the hatred to another level, their selfishness had trashed two hundred years of suffering and triumph in a moment of such pomposity and error and callousness it froze the mind. Unbridled by Scripture, deafened by the roar of its own history, Ruby, it seemed to him, was an unnecessary failure. How exquisitely human was the wish for permanent happiness, and how thin human imagination became trying to achieve it. (Morrison, 1997, p. 306)

Actually, whether Connie really dies is a mystery and is an ambiguity of Morrison's writing, which is an example influenced by magic realism rooting from Latin American literature. Holloway (2008) admits "magic realism" is a trademark of Latin American literature since many literary works have combined surrealist conventions with productions of the foundations in indigenous and Afro-American culture to construct the national imaginary from the first half of the 20th century (p. 433). He states magical realists are connotatively political when they take practice into "language, narrative structure, local tradition, and the fantastic" because these categories including race and class could be connected with national imaginary (p. 434). In the meanwhile, Swanson warns ambiguity as the new narrative of magic realism has its richness and suggestiveness to the novel; however, it could be utilized as "an effective political commentary" (pp. 75-77). Because of the ambiguity, some logic impossibilities could become like possible. If Connie is not dead, what kind of "national imaginary" and "political commentary" could be from its symbolisation? Lone shows her unsureness for Connie's death.

Except for her, no one overheard the men at the Oven and who knew what they really said? Like the rest of the witnesses she arrived after the shots were fired; besides, she and Dovey could be wrong about whether the two women in the house were dead or just wounded; and finally, she didn't see anybody outside the house, living or dead. (Morrison, 1997, p. 297)

Rubian women sympathize with these pitiful convent women. They hate the enclosed patriarchy in Ruby and the convent women have planted a rebellious seed in their hearts. Billie Delia is another woman doubting about the death of Consolata. Instead, she admires the rebellion of the women in the convent and she expects them to return to fight against the dictatorial patriarchy. Before the day being killed, the circumstance with the metaphor of rain and their ceremonious shaved heads are like they were welcoming to be baptized for rebirth.

The rain's perfume was stronger north of Ruby, especially at the Convent, where thick white clover and Scotch broom colonized every place but the garden. Mavis and Pallas, aroused from sleep by its aroma, rushed to tell Consolata, Grace and Seneca that the longed for rain had finally come. Gathered in the kitchen door, first they watched, then they stuck out their hands to feel. It was like lotion on their fingers so they entered it and let it pour like balm on their shaved heads and upturned faces. Consolata started it; the rest were quick to join her. (Morrison, 1997, p. 283)

The irresistible rain washes their recollections of a recent warning or intimations of harm (Morrison, 1997, p. 283) and indicates regardless of fear they are freely dancing and peacefully and happily waiting for the incoming resurrection. The connection of the religion and mysteries is discussed by Richard and Anna when they doubt about the disappearance of the women and looked for them in the house. Richard Misner said "Belief is mysterious; faith is mysterious. But God is not a mystery. We are (Morrison, 1997, p. 304)". Jesus answered the question of Nicodemus in *The Holy Bible* about rebirth that "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John, Chap. 3)." In this quotation, the rain implies the water while the joy of free dance and later Consolata's being shot connote the sublime sacrificing "Spirit", which presents a resurrectional image that after raining Connie's being shot she renews her life with Piedade in paradise. In fact, as

a root-seeking feature of magic realism, the description in the end of the novel about paradise most probably implies the hometown of Consolata.

In ocean hush a woman black as firewood is singing. Next to her is a younger woman whose head rests on the singing woman's lap. Ruined fingers troll the tea brown hair. All the colors of seashells—wheat, roses, pearl—fuse in the younger woman's face. Her emerald eyes adore the black face framed in cerulean blue. Around them on the beach, sea trash gleams. Discarded bottle caps sparkle near a broken sandal. A small dead radio plays the quiet surf. (Morrison, 1997, p. 318)

Although Connie describes Piedade for a few times, their interactions indicate she is an acquaintance of Connie but when they having known each other remains mysterious. The reason for the affectionate nostalgia feeling could be possibly traced in “a small dead radio” and “the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home—the ease of coming back to love begun” (Morrison, 1997, p. 318). The surrealism of the realistic scene but ambiguous characters is a very important evidence of “national imaginary” and “political commentary” of Morrison's magic realistic ambiguous narration. Although hometown or local culture is not perfect and no matter how strong is the exotic culture, there is always a part for it in people's heart as the root is the beginning of the life showing where people come from, who they are, and the distinguished identities under the globalised environment.

Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez interprets “magic realism” as a genre to reflect the entire life and history of Latin America (Macune, 1989, p. 497). Obviously, Toni Morrison imitates one technique of Márquez magical realism, that is parody to the Bible. Márquez creates a village called Macondo which corresponds a series of events in Genesis. Morrison also fictionalized the towns of Haven and Ruby in where refer to some stories in the Bible. Except the symbolised Zechariah and his experience to rebuild the black home and the metaphor of lovers rock formation people associate with Gomorrah in the desert near to the town of Wish where Gigi was looking for, then the connection to lovers' trees in Ruby where she redirected to, the whole town Ruby permeates a christian religion. “The twins were born in 1924 and heard for twenty years what the previous forty had been like” (Morrison, 1997, p. 16). The way constructing the memory of Deacon Morgan and Steward Morgan, the heads of Rubian, is to listen, imagine and remember. In fact, this oral histories of the town learned from “pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremonial speeches” (Morrison, 1997, p. 188) have been powerfully publicly acknowledged and it needs keen imagination and persistent thinking to doubt and question. Hence, it could become an identified tradition that there had been no death record in Ruby. By oral tradition and ceremonies, as often applied as features of magical realism, magic could be fabricated, memory, tradition and history could be broken and constituted, and confines between human and ghost, death and life could be freely traversed in times and spaces. Consequently, the novel presents a style of realistic in the theme and magic realism in the semantic. Alan Knight (1993) has observed magical realism could be adopted in literature as exaggerating the facts to present imaginative historical reality (p. 32). In fact, Morrison designs *Paradise* with almost the entire life of the convent women. They are introduced by various memory, known at present and seen the future life. Because the ambiguous narration, the missing bodies lead to the unknownness of the convent women's death. When Richard and Anna went back to look for the disappeared victims, Anna felt she found a door while Richard sensed it was a window behind the pepper pods. A door in woman's eye represents feminine thinking of going out while a window in man's eye symbolizes seeing outside. No matter whether what they sensed is a door or

window, their eyes would see something through the door or window. Later when Richard gazed at the coffin lid of Save-Marie, he saw the window in the garden again. One explanation is through the window he could see the illusion of the convent women's life after the shooting since he has sensed the window again at a coffin lid. And Ruby was a town conventionally used to have no mortality, thus it could have another guess that the convent women were dead by murder without report. Those four women lively appear at the end of the novel could be an illusion but no one has a sure answer. Gigi went back to see her Daddy Man. After being "baptized", her shaved head has grown less than one inch hair. Pallas went back to see her mother with the baby. She has no hair. Mavis met her daughter Sally and she found her mother cutting the hair off. It seems these three women escaped from being shot and the plot seems like continues to develop from things happened last day but the ambiguity is that Sally saw her mother disappeared into the crowd and she got a feeling between real or unreal. She is unsure whether they actually have met. Morrison also gives brief words to Seneca, she encountered her cousin Jean. The similarities of the four women are they all coming to meet their kinsfolks and leaving. It is another ambiguity in this novel. These scenes are like farewell but what are the afters of these convent women without explanations. The last paragraphs of the novel, the mysterious wordless singing women Piedade shows up for the third time while Consolata rests her head on her lap and there are no other women. However, the similarity of going home again proves Morrison's root-seeking feature of magic realism.

Conclusion

Viewed from another angle, it could see the similar settings of Eden of Adam and Eve and Consolata's dreaming illusion of paradise where a black woman Piadade sings. In the end of this novel, Connie rests her head on Piedade's lap. This gesture and the singing bring her solace. The setting of a black woman as a protagonist in paradise crossing the boundary of races expresses the author's good will of a beautiful heaven where people could be equal, no matter rich or poor, no matter skin colors and no resentment, enjoy happy life. Furthermore, because of the shooting case and young Rubian's voice, Ruby becomes a reborn town with blackness and whiteness living together, which could be a sign that integration instead of absolute segmentation is a way to enlighten racial conflicts. In conclusion, the meta-narration of an open-ended plot, with the myth prototype, absurd magic, some romantic imaginary illustration of the wonderland and symbolisms constitute *Paradise* a profound charming magic realism writing and ambiguously express Morrison's political views.

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