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Abstract

Amaryll Chanady's structural definition of magic realism, and the acknowledged historical moments of this literary mode's development--those periods in which artistic use of the mode flourished while the label attracted significant critical attention--support the critical consensus that magic realism subversively challenges prevailing narratives. A tendency towards critical myopia exists, however, as critics assume that all magic realist texts present revolutionary ideas. Deconstructive form does not necessarily result in subversion of hegemonic discourse. Feminist analysis of four magic realist novels in this study reveals that magic realism, with all its deconstructive potential, can reinscribe existing oppressive ideology.

In his novel *Shame*, Salman Rushdie highlights oppressive gender binaries inherent in phallogocentric discourse, but then ultimately reinscribes this oppression and a corollary patriarchal fear of the female beast in his novel. Robert Kroetsch attempts to deconstruct the heterosexual matrix in *What the Crow Said*, but only manages to reverse the gender binary that relegates men to the position of presence and women to the position of absence. Such reversal reinforces binary divisions that imprison both men and women within the matrix. Cristina Garcia clearly demonstrates that such binary opposition needs to be destroyed through her novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, and manages the destruction of such binaries in terms of ethnicity and political division; the gender division, however, remains intact. In this study, only Jeanette Winterson's novel, *The Passion*, fully realizes the subversive feminist potential of the magic realist mode.

Readers of magic realist texts must resist the slippage between form and philosophy. Without analyzing each text independently, too many critics blindly herald magic realist novels as a literary space from which marginalized voices subvert existing oppressive discourses. While magic realist novels certainly create unique potential for subversive ideology, the deconstructive form provides no guarantees.