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Magic(al) Realism: A Working Definition By Aída L. Irizarry

By Reason of Passion was originally titled, *Always, A Love Story*. When in 1997 I published a chapter and summary in www.paperbackwriter.com, one of my former sites, Mark D. Mapes contacted me. A French and Spanish translator, he asked to read the novel.

Shortly after reading *Always, A Love Story*, Mr. Mapes emailed me this comment: "Your work reminds me of Isabel Allende and her magical realism."

Magical what? Isabel Allende who?

No wanting to seem illiterate, I immediately sought information on Isabel Allende. I was flattered when I discovered Mr. Mapes had compared me to one of Latin America's beloved writers. But what of magical realism (also known as magic realism)? What on earth did the term mean?

To understand what magical realism is one must understand what it *isn't*. In his article, *What is Magical Realism, Really?*, Mr. Bruce Holland Rogers writes that magical realism is not speculative in nature.¹

Then *What is Magical Realism, Really?* Mr. Rogers states this literary stylistic device "...tells its stories from the perspective of people who live in our world and experience a *different* reality from the one we call objective. If there is a ghost in a story of magical realism, the ghost is not a fantasy element but a manifestation of the reality of people who believe in and have "real" experiences of ghosts."

Furthermore, he points out that in our world time is linear." But in this wonderful world of fiction in which magic and superstition is woven in the normal events of life, "... causality is subjective, and the magical and the ordinary are one and the same."

This technique, then, asks the author to mingle the unlikely with every day events. Only then can readers accept the magic and superstition in a novel as normal in the lives of the characters.

When I wrote *Always, A Love Story*, I didn't have magical realism in mind. I sat down to integrate the supernatural into a **contemporary love story** to highlight the main characters' dysfunctional relationship and its causes. *By Reason of Passion*, however, is *not* a tale of the supernatural since I mingle the unlikely with every day events in the characters' normal life. In a supernatural tale the author deals with that particular reality only.

The weaving of magical realism in the lives of the characters found in *By Reason of Passion* came from within. After all, I believe in ghosts (I've had an encounter or two

¹ Holland Rogers, Bruce: *What is Magical Realism, Really?*
- <http://www.writing-world.com/sf/realism.shtml>

... no, really!); a spirit world in which God, the devil, angels, and saintly protectors exists. I also believe our ancestors, guide and watch over us. Some of my beliefs may sound strange; they are natural to me because I inherited both the myths, religious teachings, and superstitions found in the Old and New World.

In any case, once Mr. Mapes pointed out magic realism as a literary convention, I read all I could get on the subject. And only then, did I do a complete edit of *Always, A Love Story*. The results: a more coherent theme in which magical realism begins to play a part in Chapter 3.

To illustrate, when Elena Pereira first meets Nicholas Straite at a party, she spills a drink on his shirt. She tries to correct the damage, and then bothered, pulls away. Still, she seems unable to draw away. Elena writes:

I went on to notice a dark mole on his face. The size of a pencil eraser, it sat over his right eyebrow. On the stranger's lips played a smile half in bloom.

One second, his fingers toyed with the knot of his tie. Next, he dropped a palm, face down, on the wet spot on his shirt.

I gasped. He didn't react, but my fear was all too real to me.

One immediately realizes that something is wrong. After all, Elena is frightened when Nicholas drops a palm, face down, on the wet spot on his shirt. But why should this cause her to fear? That question engages reader and impels him to keep on reading as he encounters other incidents that are ordinary in Elena's reality, but not in the reader's world.

Most scenes in *By Reason of Passion* scenes are fictional, and not all are linear. These particular events clash with Elena's normal world.

I've experienced some incidents I depict in the story, but have, of course, fictionalized them. What scenes are those, one may wonder. A hint—you will find them in that which is called, in this short paper, magical realism.

I've been asked why I won't delve into these fictionalized incidents. Well, the "magic" in magic realism, as I read somewhere, is in its mystery. And so I hope readers will suspend their disbelief and say while reading *By Reason of Passion*, "Um... this could be possible." Who knows ... it might just well be! But I won't tell you!

About the Author: Aida L. Irizarry, a New York based writer, is the author of *By Reason of Passion*, found at www.byreasonofpassion.com. At her site you can preview chapters of her novel, and download three complete chapters as well. If you wish to reprint this article, please do so, but let me know so that I may include a link to your site as my way of saying, "Thank you."