

# Framing the Colonial Nightmare through a Dream: Magical Realism as a Post-colonial Narrative Mode in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*

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## Abstract:

Magical Realism as a critical strategy may be located in postmodernism as it problematizes the 'real' and its 'representation'. Mingling realistic portrayals of ordinary events and characters with elements of fantasy and myth, it creates a rich, often disquieting world that is once familiar and dreamlike. The characters in magical realist works unconditionally accept rather than question the 'logic' of the magical element. The term itself was initially used rather pejoratively to undermine non-Western, alternative modes of representation. Having its origin in Latin American literature particularly in the works of Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges, Magical Realism has been used as a critique of both Western modes of narration and their constructions of reality with regard to the 'other', which are at once essentialist and hegemonic. Derek Walcott, the Caribbean writer, uses magical realism to great effect in his play *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. The paper titled "*Framing the colonial nightmare through a Dream: Magical Realism as a postcolonial narrative mode in Derek Walcott's Dream on Monkey Mountain*" will argue that Derek Walcott uses this mode of perceiving reality and of representing it as an effective postcolonial strategy to radically examine the devious stratagems of colonialism and their material effects. Makak, the central character in the play, dreams of an alternative reality, which serves as an antidote to the problems created by 'constructs' and their tangible adverse consequences. The paper will argue that Derek Walcott frames coloniality, a concept which is a nexus between the practices and legacies of European colonialism in social structures and forms of knowledge, using magical realism to foreground the disconcerting realities caused by colonial control of a people. The term dream itself has a lot of resonances in the play. The quality of dreaming defines each character in the play and it is in this series of dreams, the paper will argue, that Makak's dream is located. Makak's dream, which weaves elements of myths and legends, will showcase the true and ugly face of colonialism. The dream, in itself is not a solution, but a means of acquiring clarity in stating the problem. Derek Walcott, who is caught in the in-betweenness of two cultures, then, states the problem by portraying Makak's yearning for an apparently irrecoverable African past. The

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paper will conclude by saying that the play, at best, juxtaposes 'mimicry' and 'ambivalence' by the non-real mode of magical realism.

**Keywords:** colonial and post-colonial, magical realism, constructs and representation, mimicry and ambivalence, alternative modes of perception and depiction.

Magical Realism is most commonly associated with the Latin American Literary Movement that came up in the 1960s. The term has been attributed to the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who first applied it to the Latin American Fiction in 1949. Magical Realism sometimes deliberately runs contrary to the realistic portrayal of life. The art world which the practitioners of magical realism create is very symbolic. The multidimensionality of life can be foregrounded only by Magical Realism and it is not a realistic presentation or portrayal. Realism itself became a particular mode of writing and then a norm in the West in the nineteenth century. Literary texts which adhered to this mode are considered to be superior to texts that did not follow this mode of writing. So any literary text, which does not belong to that norm has been put down. But many creative writers of the world realized that realism as a mode had miserably failed to showcase life. So they took recourse to alternative non-realistic modes of representation. The West which called the shots called one of these modes as Magical Realism, a term which had hugely pejorative connotations. This label was given primarily because they did not understand new modes of representation..

Derek Walcott, a Caribbean writer, deliberately chooses Magical Realism as a post-colonial stance, which is one of protest and subversion. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* deliberately goes against the realistic mode to understand the complexities of life impacted by colonialism. Rejection of realism was a deliberate act for two reasons: one, it was an inadequate mode to deal with complexity and two it was to run down the hegemony of realism, a Western model. One of the major reasons for Derek Walcott to use Magical Realism was that the conflicts which he had dealt with were beyond conventional language and so he used lot of symbols. In the play the White Woman and the Monkey Mountain are complex symbols. He openly tells the West that he has employed a mode which they could not conceive of and to foreground the conflict due to colonialism. Derek Walcott openly says that his play is illogical, contradictory, and derivative. Dream plays a vital role in the play and it is a dream which occurs in the minds of the people. The mindscape of the people will transform itself into the physical landscape. The realistic presentation is said to be the metaphor in Magical Realism. Derek Walcott stresses that the theme of the play revolves around the dream which problematizes conventional realism.

According to Philip Swanson, "Garcia Marquez's Magical Realism must be a political question of reinterpretation of reality, utilizing the oral style inherited from his grandmother's fantastic story-telling. Garcia Marquez seems to want to reproduce a traditional, popular rural perspective—challenging the hegemony of the alien, dominant imported culture and reinstating the value of the community's own cultural perspective (2).

"Framing the Colonial Nightmare through a Dream: ..."

It is true, Makak in the play feels that Caribbean consciousness is a Schizophrenic consciousness. Makak's dream showcases the cause and effect of oppression. The power of art is to make everyone undergo a radical departure from certain stereotypes both in thought processes and actions. Uniquely the dream itself revolves round and is directed by a white woman in a cave. Dream is designed by a white woman and dreamt by a black man. Monkey Mountain is a symbolic space and a non-real space. Makak's dream is a dream that would bring about an inner transformation. An inner transformation will help Makak acquire an identity.

In post-colonial literatures the identity crisis is very important crisis. The moment when one realizes that the Caribbean Consciousness is schizophrenic and one sees immediately an identity crisis. Derek Walcott shows that this schizophrenia is inevitable in every colonized space, if a person is sensitive. A Caribbean writing about Caribbean situation automatically implies post-colonial situation. Logically, during the colonial times one could be a post-colonial in consciousness. Expressing solidarity by stressing on the importance of indigeneity through dress, food preferences and cultural codes, a playwright can challenge colonial structures. A post-colonial identity may possibly be an amalgam of many identities beginning at least with two identities. The amalgamation happens only when slavish, uncritical copying of the West, called mimicry is replaced by a critical examination of identity called ambivalence which leads to hybridity, a merger. The presence of the white woman in Makak's dream traces these trajectories.

Makak is arrested and his arrest is a fruitful experience for him because he is made to come face to face with himself. He dreams but he never had a retrospect of his dreams. Makak is ideally himself in the dream which makes him give the ugly constructions of a black man by the Whites. An ape-man (Makak) realizes his human potential through the conflict between the Corporal Lestrade and himself. Though initially Makak is caught between two identities: his black identity which he hates and an approximation to a white identity, in the final analysis he moves towards clarity. Makak's understands that his consciousness is what should a Caribbean one be.

Makak cannot dream of black woman because his consciousness does not permit him to think that a black woman can be ideal at any point of time. Corporal Lestrade thinks that he has become a white man because of his power. Makak realizes that unless one celebrates indigeneity or Negritude one cannot have a unproblematic though complex identity. If a black women had been at the centre of the dream two things would have been possible: one, her voice will always be muted and two, the black woman would have spoken about the blacks or Caribbean identity rather negatively owing to colonial indoctrination. To the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" the play answers that they can speak after much struggle though the struggle is worth the while as Makak's realization that he is not an ape but a human being with multidimensionality.

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