MA in Global Literature and Culture, University of York
Optional Module, Spring Term, 2018
Expanding Boundaries: Re-thinking Magical Realism
Convenor: Dr Ben Holgate

Module Description
Magical realism is an international style of writing that is regarded by critics as being inextricably linked to the development of postcolonialism and one of the most established world literary genres. This course raises questions such as: what counts as the political aspects of a novel; why Western literary forms came under question during the period of decolonisation; and what problems are associated with defining a literary genre and determining its literary value. The core texts will geographically expand students’ understanding of literatures around the globe by introducing them to authors from China, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand. The module investigates critical debates about defining magical realism, and explores how magical realism often identifies artistic or cultural aspects of a text that traditional genres, which are culturally conditioned and often Western-derived, may not. In each seminar students are encouraged to think critically about what magical realism constitutes and to not rely on accepted notions of the mode.

We begin by examining magical realism’s emergence in Latin America in the mid-20th Century, then trace its spread among previously colonised territories and other regions around the globe from the 1970s-80s, and finally move on to its evolution into thematic areas such as historical trauma, feminism, and the environment. By reading texts that traverse geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, students explore how and why writers from diverse historical and socio-cultural backgrounds have been attracted to magical realism as a style of writing that they typically deploy to resist authoritarian regimes, give voice to the voiceless, reassert alternative belief systems, and challenge dominant orthodoxies, often the legacies of European colonisers and the scientific rationalism of the European Enlightenment. Throughout the course students will learn how magical realism constantly evolves as a literary form as writers utilise it for differing artistic, cultural, and political purposes. However, students are asked to critique magical realism, by asking questions like whether it is a European-derived concept appropriate for non-Western texts, and whether it has limitations as an interpretive tool for literary analysis.

Background Reading
Required for Theory


**Useful for Overview**


**Week 2 – Beginnings: Definitions & Latin America**


**Required Readings**


**Suggested Readings**


Week 3 – Postcolonialism: hybridity & recovery


Required Readings


Suggested Readings


Week 4 – World literature: transnationalism & translation


Required Readings


**Suggested Readings**


**Week 5 – Mythology: re-interpreting meaning**


**Required Readings**


**Suggested Readings**


**Week 6 – Reading Week**

**Week 7 – History: truths & lies**


**Required Readings**


**Suggested Readings**


**Week 8 – Trauma: re-presenting the unpresentable**

Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (2017) (South Asia)

**Required Readings**


**Suggested Readings**


**Week 9 – Identity: feminism & gender**

Required Readings


Suggested Readings


**Week 10 – Biocentric parallels: magical realism and ecocriticism**


Required Readings


Suggested Readings


Films Adapted from Magical Realist Books:

*Life of Pi* (Yann Martel)

*Like Water for Chocolate* (Laura Esquivel)

*Midnight’s Children* (Salman Rushdie)

*Perfume* (Patrick Süskind)

*Red Sorghum* (Mo Yan)

*Whale Rider* (Witi Ihimaera)