

BOOK REVIEW

Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourseⁱ

Ben Holgate, New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 236

In the Anthropocene era and given the climate change crisis, magical realist fiction, as one of the most established aesthetic forms of world literary genres, can play a critical role in enabling writers to offer alternative visions of how humans may live in the world in order to limit, if not reverse, environmental degradation.

(Holgate 2019, p. 229)

The role of literature and imagination in the face of unprecedented climate change takes on a new significance during the Anthropocene era. It provides a unique and powerful means through which humans can explore their relationship with nature. Imaginative works, particularly those in the narrative mode of magical realism, have the potential to illuminate alternative visions of coexistence and sustainability. In his work, *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse* (2019), Ben Holgate investigates how this can be done within literature, arguing that by blending the real and the fantastic, magical realism inspires novel ideas on addressing ecological crises.

Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse (2019) presents a powerful and original approach to looking at magical realist fiction in the context of our current era marked by human activity on the planet. Holgate begins by asking us to reconsider what magical realism means and turns to 'genre theory, in particular the work of Jacques Derrida, to provide a critical framework by which to highlight the strengths and limitations of magical realism as a tool for literary analysis' (Holgate 2019, p. 15). Drawing on Derrida's notion that 'every genre has a single, common trait' (p. 230), he proposes 'a family resemblance model' that allows him to discuss the novels that do not include all the defining features of magical realism proposed in the lists created by other critics. Magical realism is thus defined in his book as 'literature that represents the magical or supernatural in a quotidian manner and which is embedded within literary realism' (Holgate 2019, p. 230). This minimalist definition of magical realism serves as the basis for the subsequent analysis.

Holgate's research specifically deals with Asia and Australia, demonstrating the broader relevance of magical realism. The book includes seven chapters dedicated to individual authors and the analysis of their selected works. The analysis focuses on contemporary Australian authors Alexis Wright, Richard Flanagan, Witi Ihimaera, and Keri Hulme, as well as Asian authors Amitav Ghosh, Mo Yan, and Wu Ming-Yi. This selection of authors not only provides a broad range of literary works showcasing the fluidity of magical realism but also offers a global perspective, making the reader feel connected to a larger, more inclusive narrative.

One of the key strengths of *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse* (2019) is its interdisciplinary approach, integrating magical realism and ecocriticism. Holgate establishes 'four key commonalities of the narrative mode and ecocritical fiction', a postcolonial perspective, 'a desire by authors to develop new forms of expression and language' mostly to question the rationalistic thinking developed in the context of the Enlightenment tradition, a biocentric perspective and 'a transgressive nature that dismantles

binaries between human and non-human' (p. 229). The focus on these four commonalities helps him widen the framework of his literary analysis and thus participate in an active discussion on environmental matters.

In conclusion, Holgate's innovative approach and analysis of overlooked areas has the potential to impact on the field of literary studies and environmental discourse. Through broadening the cultural and geographic reach of magical realism, he offers a deeper comprehension of its possibilities. For anyone interested in learning how literature can help us comprehend environmental issues, this book is indispensable.

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