Magical Realism In The Works Of Laura Esquivel And Isabel Allende

Texts which illustrate a realistic view of the modern world, through weaving fantasy, myth and elements of the supernatural into a mundane life setting, conform to the key features of Magical Realism. Being an extension to the literary movement of Postmodernism, Magic Realism was part of a larger cultural progression in the mid-twentieth century, common in Latin America. Postmodernism, encouraging the use of elements from history, illusion and complexity, developed Magical Realism as a genre within it, due to its convoluted nature and the blending of genres to produce something new. Authors utilise magical elements to determine the realism of society as well as evoke the mysteriousness and the extraordinary out of everyday life. Laura Esquivel’s ‘Like Water For Chocolate’ and Isabel Allende’s ‘The House of The Spirits’, both set later in the mid-20th century, heavily delve into the concepts of the exaggeration of love and the power of women. Through questioning classic ideas of time and space, converging with the elements of exploring and pushing boundaries, both novels manifest inner emotions in the physical world, making the hidden visible.

The merging of present and past, the juxtaposition of unlike things and the exquisite detail and unusual perspective employed by Magical Realists in literature, sought to re-invigorate the ordinary with the sublime. To amplify and exaggerate the universal value and belief of love, as well as the struggles and repercussions that come with it, elements of the supernatural can be applied. Esquivel intertwines features of Tita’s personality and her longing for love with the unexplainable situations which match her feelings, which are highlighted through the complexity of each character’s actions. Pedro’s justification for agreeing to marry Rosaura, Tita’s sister is that “when you're told there's no way you can marry the woman you love and your only hope of being near her is to marry her sister, wouldn't you do the same?” Conforming to the value of the invention of strange actions, Esquivel portrays Pedro’s strategic thinking as a way to gain his love, regardless of the unbreakable family tradition. During the mid-twentieth century, the typical marriage had the male as the dominant figure. As Pedro’s idea was simply unrealistic during that time period, Esquivel highlights the extent that people go to be with their loved ones. However, the main site of magic in this novel is the kitchen, as food is used as a means of communication and transferal in this novel. The structure of this novel splits each chapter into a recipe that evokes the protagonist’s perspective. To symbolise significant milestones in Tita’s life, each chapter begins with “PREPARATION: Take care to chop the onion fine. To keep from crying when you chop it (which is so annoying!)” From the onion chopping in Chapter 1, the representation of “Tita made her entrance into this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves, and cilantro, steamed milk, garlic, and, of course, onion.” Each chapter, beginning with a recipe followed by narration, ensures that home remedies are interspersed throughout the novel. This narrative structure shifts the focus to the food, which is not only symbolic of emotions, but includes key parts of the storyline. The structure of this text is solely dependent upon these recipes, as the main actions within the story involve the preparation and/or consumption of the dishes that these recipes hold. Conforming to the traditional conventions of magical realism, through weaving elements of fantasy, exaggeration and elements of the supernatural, Esquivel establishes the universal belief of love, symbolically represented through both food and characterisation.

Magical realism in postmodern literature was primarily used to criticise the conventional order of the different feature of public life. As a genre, it was further reinforced by postmodern beliefs characterised by alteration, enduring change and uncertainty. Through representing and responding to reality, while descriptively depicting the enigmas of reality, Allende’s ‘The House Of The Spirits’ entails different character perspectives and strange, recurring events. Through the utilisation of the author’s writing style, Clara’s predictions of the deaths of the characters depict the spiritual connections that she holds. In order to elaborate and exaggerate the constant tension created by the real and unreal elements of the narrative, Allende makes it clear that “They had also grown accustomed to the youngest daughter's prophecies. She would announce earthquakes in advance, which was quite useful in the country of catastrophes, for it gave them a chance to lock up the good dishes and place their slippers within reach in case they had to run out in the middle of the night.” The extent to which Clara’s supernatural abilities are real, is emphasised when actions such as her predictions are normalised, and rather informative than intriguing. The characters completely dismiss her gift of magical prophecy and focus more on addressing the problem she conveys. Allende passionately expresses her message of pain, vengeance and forgiveness through a woman-centred response to the paradigmatic text of magical realism. The postmodern author generally simulated other genres or texts. Intertextuality, having various components in itself, was a literary technique employed by many Postmodernists. Isabel Allende created both an homage and a critical complement to the work of Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude. The universality of the characters and occurrences is emphasised by not naming the country, as García Márquez also avoided doing in that novel. Allende impersonates Márquez’s essential concept of women and femininity in a South American country, even though “It was the custom then for women and children not to attend funerals, which were considered a male province, but at the last minute Clara managed to slip into the cortège to accompany her sister Rosa….” Clara completely ignores the social norms and societal expectations as, following her own rules, parallel to Márquez’s Ursula. Postmodern literature’s expressive mode of experimentation found new momentum with the use of pastiche (a form of intertextuality). Allende makes references to other texts to help create a unique narrative as well as comment on certain situations of postmodern society. Through presenting the rise in women power and femininity, Allende conforms to the elements of Magical realism and postmodernism through rejecting conventional norms.

Conclusively, by utilising imagery to depict objects in a surrealistic manner, while rejecting the conventions of literary movements before, Postmodernism, branching into Magic Realism, encouraged complexity and challenging traditions. Both novels effectively conform to the values and attitudes of Postmodernism and Magical Realism, such as rejecting traditional forms of art, the freedom to express one’s opinion about anything and emphasising pastiche, parody, irony and playfulness. In ‘Like Water For Chocolate’ and ‘The House of The Spirits’, Esquivel and Allende utilised magical elements to propose and establish the universal belief of love and highlight the power of women and femininity.