

The Role of Fantasy and Magical Realism in Confronting Trauma in Rajiv Joseph's Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo

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Abstract: This paper investigates how Rajiv Joseph's play titled Bengal Tiger caged in Baghdad Zoo (2010) deals with trauma through the application of magical realism and literary fantasy, examines how these literary items expose the case of confrontation and healing in the play. By using mystical aspect and magical realism, Joseph, highlights the intricacies of emotional landscape, produced by memory, loss, and human intimacy. Exposing the lines between reality and imagination, the author indicates trauma as a story in evolution that can hardly be contained by the normal structures of space and time. This study presents how Joseph applies magical realism and fantasy to cover the realism in describing trauma and offers a creative background for describing the ineffable. Supported by trauma theory, literary analysis and aspects of theater studies in a vigorously interdisciplinary approach. The paper critically assesses the extent to which such practices allow the confrontation of trauma in an excellent and impressively invested ways, simultaneously by the actors themselves and the audiences.

Key points: Trauma; fantasy; war; ghost; magical realism.

1. Introduction

Fantasy and magical realism have been a part of literature and theater for a very long time; they have worked as mechanisms for explaining the most difficult-to-explain human emotion and experience. In Rajiv Joseph's plays, these tropes function strongly in ways that confront trauma, enabling character and audience to deal with pain and loss in ways unrealizable within the confines of realism. By using fantasy elements in his stories, Joseph amplifies the degree of emotional investment and builds a singular platform to explore aspects of memory, grief, and healing. Rajiv Joseph's play, Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo is examined in this study for its use of magical realism and fantastical aspects in addressing trauma. David M. Girard demonstrates that although the play "has a very specific setting—Baghdad, 2003—its ideas and themes are universal" (5).

2. Defining Fantasy and Magical Realism in Theater

While fantasy in theatre very often includes otherworldly elements which break the bonds of reality and send the audience off into a world where impossible things become possible, magic realism integrates magic into a realistic setting in such a way as to regard the extraordinary as quite ordinary. Operating in a different way from pure fantasy, magical realism doesn't create another world but rather adjusts reality to make profound statements.

In relation to trauma, both fantasy and magical realism form ways into the ineffable. They grant license to the playwrights for the representation of psychological fragmentation accompanying trauma. Through metaphorical expressions, surrealism and otherworldly functions provide ways in for the audience emotionally and psychically, and to grasp the trauma in its visceral and symbolic levels. According to Julia Marie Myatt, the play prompts contemplation of concepts like aggression, conflict and the "assumptions we make about people and nations" (1).

3. Trauma in Rajiv Joseph's Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo

Rajiv Joseph's play, "Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo," is intensely concerned with the consequence of trauma on the human cognition. The characters in the play often look at violence, loss and enquiry of existence right in the eye, positioning out the agony over disjointed timelines and strange confrontation. The author tries to use fantasy and magical realism to create a space where trauma may be presented as a continuous process that forms and disjoint identities and relationship. The play looks into the actors' minds through the use of persona and shadow theory to expose the complex results of genuine people to violent conflict, internal struggles and moral quandaries. Based on this terrible real-life event, Joseph wrote a heartbreaking story about the depravity in human nature. Joseph has gathered the most pertinent pictures, like Genevieve W. Foster says, "from deepest unconsciousness" and arranged them in "relation with conscious values... until [they] can be accepted by his contemporaries," giving our period a legendary quality, as Foster explains (568). For Joseph, the perpetrator's terror was a manifestation of the ghost's presence, and he used this to excuse the atrocities committed by American soldiers and their remorse over them. The traumatizing event, according to Erikson, happens when an outside force breaks through the mind's defenses and attacks the survivor (Erikson 183). Through the use of the ghost as a metaphor of the suffering that the troops went through, the playwright is able to portray the negative and damaging repercussions that the American invasion had on the Iraqis themselves. Both the justification of crime and the casting of aspersions on the United States of America are served by Joseph's inclusion of the spectre. The shadow is brought into play as a result of the terrible circumstances, which drive Kev to experience feelings of agony and sadness as he recalls his failed attempt to achieve it through peaceful means.

3.1 The Ghostly Tiger as Icon of Trauma

"Bengal Tiger," set in the Baghdad Zoo, is Rajiv Joseph's exploration of the aftereffects of violence and war through the eyes of a ghost tiger. The play set projected against Iraq invasion. The play was themed through the American soldiers who created trauma, brutality and the need to survive to Iraqi civilians. The tiger that was killed earlier in the play returns to haunt those alive in a form of ghost that personifies the moral and existential confusion of the actors. The theoretical framework employed in the play sets a link between the two parallel forces at work in the proposed conflict: the devastating effects of the war where men were dehumanized and human form and its internal motivations for the reason of the war which include power, greed, envy, fear and vengeance. The author Ken Hiltner, describes the city of Baghdad as an environmental catastrophe (130). Joseph's describes the picture accurately. He thought that the setting and aim categorically fitting since he applies a true-life back shop of a destroyed nation in the middle of a war. Joseph seems to use a play of hide-and-seek techniques when he planned his plays. But there are many ghosts throughout the play. On top of that, once one character dies, all the others trail the killer. This drama explores the ambiguities and complexities of war. It is a sobering reminder of how horrible war is that not even the beast survived. There is an argument for every main point in Joseph's play. Musa is a typical Iraqi person who is a victim of tyrannical governments. This American man type is personified by Tom, who was born into material society. Both Uday's tyranny and the American invasion bring Musa to his knees. Tom thinks it is his moral duty to seek compensation for his battle hand. Whether in this world or the next, Uday is a ruthless tyrant. Despite the fact that he tormented others, Uday shows no shame and describes his tactics with most relish, as if it were just a simple joke which describes a delicious and perfect recipe" (Joseph 36). He views his continued presence in Baghdad as an indication of his vigor, not a consequence, of his transgressions. He uses the tiger's account of the lions' breakout from the Baghdad Zoo as a springboard to bring attention to the beginning of the rebellion. Everyone knows that expressionism uses caricature to highlight real people's characteristics. Consequently, character sums, such as "tiger," must be used for ticket names The first motif, the outbreak of violence, is echoed by the multi-layered pattern that depicts both humans and animals. The presence of savagery and bloodshed is evident when lions run rampant through Baghdad streets. There is now a fresh historicist element because of how the event was covered in newspapers and news programs back then. Third, the animals are defeated by the

humans after Joseph instigates a violent conflict; humans prevail due to their superior hunting and slaughtering skills. In "Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo," Rajiv Joseph illustrates the destructive power of brute force when the Tiger charges at Tom.

This instance suggest that brutal aggression can have stern outcome. As the story develops, the author allows the tiger to change into a presumed ghost, which symbolizes how excessive materialism and attack lead to self-annihilation and a missed identity. The tiger accepts his downfall, and thus, states; I will not lie. When I feel hungry, I become stupid, I thought of twelve years ago. I just followed the aroma, grasp some bite and finally, flew” (Joseph, 148). To get an answer to this question, it becomes incumbent to compare the various specters used in ancient literature. The play can be considered as one of the best models to read for this study. The tiger in the play is used as a metaphor, where Joseph analyses the aspects of religion, aggression and meaning of life. The plays wild beast is showcased as a person terrified by the theme of death. Perhaps it may be used to describe the horrible crimes committed by the powerful people to oppress people around the world. Hence, they are compared with such monsters. As the tiger pass through revelation, the audience feel to share the spirit of existential struggle. The supernatural appearance of the tiger takes the place of constant reminder with regards to the violence that took place which disrupts the barrier between life and death. As just a ghostly observer, the tiger compelled the characters in the play to face the faith of their lives which serve as the consequence of war. For example, states that, the thing about killing is: it is quite easy. You can just do it and then you will bear it”. (Joseph, 19). This faces the audience with the very simplicity to face a war and accept the psychological consequence that follows it. His philosophical musings, such as, “there is an actual clarity that appears with being dead.

This specter presence of the tiger metaphor works like calm mediator for the silent truths of war, sieving through which the actors-and the audience must think on this wave of violence and the extent of the resonance lives on the human cognition. Joseph envisioned the ghostly figure of trauma as not an individual baggage, but one that is based on shared haunting between living and dead.

Along with the tiger, the spectators go through an existential crisis as he goes through the experience of revelation, he says: “The suicidal Polar bear ... bones and dust. It's disturbing, this seems like life after death. The so-called tigers are disbelievers. He adds “Shameless. So, why am I still flexing around? It is not fair. A dead cat entrusted to this damaging city, it is not just.” (Joseph 175)

The other figure in the play is Uday's vengeful ghost. His frightened demeanour and violent outbursts put him on par with the tiger. The play's message is emphasized by the ironic contrast between Uday and the tiger. Uday isn't human and doesn't care about anything, but the tiger is completely preoccupied with his conscience. So, it's safe to say that the play is a conversation between the dead. Jake Fruend and Marti Lyons interviewed Joseph who says: “Because my story starts with the description of the talking tiger being killed, his ghost serves as a necessary deceit to keep his actor alive.” They continue, “the drama followed the same trend. But in a much deeper level, I think ghost stories stay inside of war narration. I think America will be weird by this war longer than one might assume.” (Fruend & Lyons 2)

4. Magical Realism

Using magical realism, Rajiv Joseph's Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo captures deep thought about the fragmentation of memory and circular linearity as they relate to pain. Joseph believes his magical realism works will not strike a chord with American families who have suffered the tragic loss of loved ones in the Iraq War, according to Uttara Choudhury (2007) (8). Choundhury draws a parallel between the tiger, who rationalizes his brutality by citing his inherent nature and the fact that he needs food, and the Americans, who believe that killing is never acceptable. To elaborate, she says: "At one point in the story, the tiger is talking about his cruel past in the Sundarbans, when he killed two children and ate them, causing the parents misery. But he insists it wasn't cruel; it was lunch." In contrast, she says, "Now there are children being killed in Baghdad for reasons half as

good as lunch" (8) For example, Musa, an Iraqi translator, is haunted by appearances of his murdered sister. These apparitions blur the line between reality and imagination, symbolizing Musa's inability to reconcile with his violent past.

These memories are not just personal but also reflective of various traumatic occurrences that break into present, and failing to remain linear in its narrative form.

In one distinct scene, Musa's sister comes to him carrying his guilt grief as a result of her death. She repeats, "you created once, and now it has been destroyed by you" (Joseph, 54). With reference to Musa's life as a gardener before he was compelled into another life during the war. This is an absurd exchange that supports the tension between his passion for innocence and the permanent damage encountered by the disruptions surrounding him. She felt comfortable and torment; trauma is intrusive and cyclical.

The theory founded by Cathy Carath which states pain triggers an exploration of magical realism by the author is noticed too soon. And unexpectedly to fully acknowledged, and as a result remains haunting and unresolved (Unclaimed Experience 4). Musa's thought is finally served as a dramatization of the psychological occurrences. Which shows trauma keeps happening into the present time.

Likewise, ghosts serve as the channels of memory that forces the characters to face the unexposed truth. Musa vividly reflects, "I don't know if she is a memory or a mere curse" (62), the audience were informed how magical realism lets trauma to exist in such a way that both are deeply symbolic and emotionally occurring. Joseph indicates that trauma is a permanent and strange force. Musa speaks the deepest assertion: how could the past would simply fail to stay buried. Using this strategy, he looks deeper on how one recovers from the act of reconciliation and forgiveness when these psyche resist to go away.

Saddam Hussain, the leader, the oppressed occupiers, the wise man's words and the common victims who were agonized by the war because they are defenseless are all depicted by the writer. Perhaps, Joseph makes his position much clearer now. The actors' death as specters is one element of tragicomedy element in Bengal Tiger, while the personification of the animal can be considered as strange fully item. The drama basically aims at multifaceted reading in this very scene. This changes it iot a form of question-and-answer drama. A combination of real and fictitious events is highlighted in the drama. It helps the audience to ask the truth and fabrication of official narratives about the tragic war in Iraq. The new school of historical thought which queried the premise of perception common ideologies mainly through historical facts is represented in this fabricated historical narration.

4.1 The Purpose of Fantasy and Magical Realism in the face of Trauma

Appealing Distance and Emotional Interaction are some of the key functions of fantasy and magical realism. Joseph introduces appealing distance in the play so that his audiences will not suffer from cowed down while facing such topics that are harrowing to experience. The balancing of fantastic elements serves as a medium of raw facts and traumatic experience that can be directly placed and essentially through which the emotional echoes of general fears can be exposed.

There was a symbolization of the ghostly tiger in the Bengali Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo. The inescapable nature of loss and guilt while the strange injuries in dastard playground injuries presents the hidden injuries that shape the actors' lives. Joseph makes the disappeared to reappear again by given the form to the rare aspects of trauma.

In the initial scene, while Kev and Tom have a discussion, the zoo's caged tiger pronounces this to the audience.

This line exemplifies the predatory and destructive nature of the Tiger, which he will regret after his death, and it also suggests his afterlife, since he does encounter the outside world (and eventually becomes repulsed by it. Tiger says: "What if they attack my cage? What if, the traditional kaboom, there is a huge hole in my cage? What can I do then? Hang around the zoo." He adds: "Hunt

something. The people might be killed. Just kill everyone. Eat them mercilessly, Then I'd sleep a little. And then get up, kill some of the animals. Eat them. Sleep some more. But I think at that point, I'd perhaps step out. Into the world. Not like the lions did, but still, have to admit, I'm curious [...]". (Joseph 10)

Healing and Transformation in both plays, the use of fantasy and magical realism ultimately points toward the possibility of healing and transformation. The characters' encounters with the supernatural force them to confront their pain and seek meaning in their experiences. Though it is usually a very messy and incomplete process, it also shows the strength of the human spirit and post-traumatic growth. The Tiger delivers this speech while in his first spectral form after being shot. Given his belief that his life is "over," it suggests his initial atheism and stands in sharp contrast to his ultimate destiny. Dividers for rooms. Over time, you'll realise that both "ka-boom" and the regret of missing out on the "great wide open" were mistaken, he says: "I guess I was always going to die here. I think that was what predestined on me, from that part. But I would have thought perhaps I'd have one good day. A day like the Leos had." he adds: "A brief incursion into the great gap. But I am bigger and stronger than them motherfuckers. (Beat; he looks at his body.) So that's what I look like. You go your whole life never knowing how you look." (Joseph 12)

This is what Kev tells himself as he begins to cry after witnessing the specter of the Tiger in the Iraqi house. It depicts his guilt over killing the Tiger and the trauma he now faces as a result. His breakdown is also a pivotal moment for his character, as it puts him in the hospital, where he ultimately commits suicide: "I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I'm just gonna stand here...I'm just gonna stand here standing guard. Sir, yes sir...Sir, yes...sir...I'M SORRY! Man down! Man down! Man attacked by...Man attacked by...Man attacked." He adds: " I shot him, Tommy. I shot him. I fucking shot him. He's dead, Tommy, I killed him. I'm okay...I'm okay...I'M okay!" (Joseph 25)

While visiting Kev at the hospital, Tom and Kev had this conversation. This conversation highlights the anguish Kev feels from killing the Tiger and the weakness he exhibits under his originally macho exterior. In stark contrast, Tom is considerably more emotionally distant and ruthless; he cares just about the gold pistol and the money it can buy. Tom will express his sadness to Kev after his death and tell him he is "fucked up with guilt" (51).

TOM: Don't call me your friend.

KEV: Yes, you are. You are, man. And I need you, okay? I'm so scared. He's everywhere, you know? Everywhere I look is that stupid fucking Tiger.

TOM: Well, that's your mental issue, Kev. Not mine. Now, I have some gold left that I have to get before I leave here, and if I don't get the gun back from you, I'm gonna kill you. Got it? (Joseph 32-33)

The Tiger delivers this final monologue to end the play. It shows the essentially pessimistic view the Tiger takes toward God after wrestling with religion and His existence all through the play, ending with a belief in God but an absolute sense of anger and frustration over his continued nonpresence. The Tiger says: "This isn't enough. You have to say more than this. Explain yourself, for fuck's sake! You know what? You belong in a cage. We gonna kill you and cage you completely just as we do to other animals around the globe." he adds, "I can see it: God in a cage, right here. Eventually, get a look at You. All the great obscurities of creation could be exposed at the zoo. Come see the God exhibit! Come watch the beast play! And we, the lousy dead, would finally have our Holy Land...God in a cage in a garden in a burning city." (Joseph 69)

It also shows how the Tiger, having struggled with whether or not to atone for his sins, will ultimately carry on with his predatory ways and not feel guilty, as he prepares for the hunt once again.

Conclusion

Rajiv Joseph harnesses all the tropes of fantasy and magical realism to immense effect in his plays to focus a light into trauma, to create the ways through which healing can be envisioned. Joseph's blend of the fantastical and the theatrical to get complexity of human agony and resilience. The use of such elements adds both emotional, psychological and painful layers to his story in order to obtain reflections on their own pains and resilience among his fans. Even in the face of unpredictable odds, Joseph's idea to introduce Bengal Tiger to the scene of Baghdad shows the power of seems like a magical realism and the thought of illumination of the human situation and offer hope to the audience. There are a series of violent situations and the cutting off of a hand which take place during the play. Such instances are not restricted to the killing of Tom, Kev, The Tiger, Hadia, as well as the Tom himself, but it shows violence and the inescapable consequence of the conflict and they certainly help in exposing the major themes of the play at the defining moments of their wicked activities, which are corporeal expressions of power and greed. There, they face their own understanding limitations and undergo transformations similar to Kev and the Tiger.

In the midst of tragedy and conflict, Bengal Tiger investigates religious beliefs and practices, as well as concerns of God's existence and the nature of the afterlife. After becoming trapped in Baghdad as spirits, Kev and the Tiger are forced to confront God and the afterlife.

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