



Can the ‘Ghosts’ Speak? Magic, Myths, and Trauma in Shehan Karunatilaka’s *Chinaman* and *Chats with the Dead*

C.M. Arsakulasuriya^{1*}, J.W.K.I.D. Jayasundara²

¹Department of English and Linguistics, University of Ruhuna, ²Department of Modern Languages, Times Campus, Nugegoda
*chandula@hss.ruh.ac.lk

The study analyses Shehan Karunatilaka’s novels *Chinaman* (2010) and *Chats with the Dead* (2020) in relation to the theme of representing trauma through the narrative style of magical realism. Shehan Karunatilaka as a writer has been acclaimed for his signature style in writing in diasporic/ postcolonial literary genre as reflected in his Sri Lankan English literary works. The present study aims to look at Karunatilaka’s works of fiction, through Ted Morrissey’s theoretical perspectives on trauma theory as an approach to analyse literary texts and Christopher Warnes theoretical perspectives on magical realism and postcolonial novel. The choice of *Chats with the Dead* as a textual reference, rather than analysing *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* is a political act of resistance to ‘re-orientalism’ as underscored by us as researchers. We identify that the re-publishing of *Chats with the Dead* as *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* as an act of ‘re-orientalism’ to appease the ‘global English reader’. We argue that Karunatilaka’s use of magical realism narrative strategy in representing trauma both in *Chinaman* and *Chats with the Dead* reflects both Sri Lankan social institutions and Sri Lankan English idiom. Karunatilaka’s representation of Sri Lankan culture in his novels involving supernatural elements and mythological narratives is a strong example of a unique postmodernist writing style emergent in Sri Lankan English literature, which demands the reader to be a ‘witness’ to sensitive socio-political themes. We also argue that Karunatilaka’s use of those narrative techniques has a semblance to the narrative style used by classical Sinhala prose writers, categorically the composers of the Buddhist Jataka Tales, which demands the reader/audience to be a witness to the universe created within the literary discourse.

Keywords: Ghosts, Magical Realism, Narrative style, Shehan Karunathilaka, Trauma

