have not changed: the servants in their kitchen' (pp. 42-3). In this sense both book and film promote a traditional, middle-class ideology, unusual for a magical realist text, but seemingly comforting to the urban middle-class Mexican, whose position in society it reconfirms. Nacha, having dedicated her life to serving the family, has all but abandoned her own family but the text does not problematize this. She dies early in the text, leaving the younger Chencha as the only representative of her class and race. The film, with its wooden acting performances, further promulgates the stereotype of the intellectually inferior native, with the actress who interprets the part of Chencha portraying her to all intents and purposes as a simple, grinning idiot, a caricature of the uneducated Indian. In addition her speech is broken and grammatically incorrect, as we see in the example: 'Es aquí Felipe ya está aquí y dice que si petatió' (p. 89), contrasting to that of the white characters. Unfortunately, the English translation, 'Felipe has come back and he says he’s dead' (p. 89) does not convey the discrepancy between the grammatically correct Spanish of the other characters and the colloquial and grammatically incorrect Spanish of Chencha. Ultimately, no radical position is assumed with regard to the social conditions of the lower classes; rather than denouncing servitude and the despoliation and exploitation of indigenous subjects, it actually justifies it, by its stereotypical portrayal of contented servants who do not question their place in society.

Mexico and the Revolution: Revolutionary Discourse Denied

It is the middle sister, Gertrudis, who experiences the strongest effects of the petal sauce when she becomes so consumed by sexual longing that she is forced to run to the out-house to shower and cool down. The text describes how via the food that Tita has prepared 'a new system of communication' had developed, whereby 'Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and poor Gertrudis the medium, the conducting body through which the singular sexual message was passed' (p. 49). She sets the shower alight as the water turns to steam which rises off her trembling body. Her scent reaches a member of the Villista forces, who as if guided by 'a higher power' (p. 51), tracks her down and scoops her naked onto his horse. They ride off into the sunset together, enacting that most recognisable cliché of the Romance genre. From the above events it is clear that the narrative embraces the romantic style, which the film compounds as it is shot in hazy sepia tones, with images of sunsets and starry skies and a flowing musical score. The soldier who carries off Gertrudis has clearly inhaled the pheromones whereby 'Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and poor Gertrudis the petals' (p. 49), contrasting to that of the white characters. Unfortunately, the English translation, 'Felipe has come back and he says he’s dead' (p. 89) does not convey the discrepancy between the grammatically correct Spanish of the other characters and the colloquial and grammatically incorrect Spanish of Chencha. Ultimately, no radical position is assumed with regard to the social conditions of the lower classes; rather than denouncing servitude and the despoliation and exploitation of indigenous subjects, it actually justifies it, by its stereotypical portrayal of contented servants who do not question their place in society.

The arrival of this soldier and the episode at a later point in the novel when he brings Gertrudis home with his troops are the only two instances when the narrative is aware of the presence of revolutionary forces. They dance, drink and make merry but their arrival prompts no consideration of the Mexican Revolution. All we are told of the conflict is found in the words 'the rebel forces...engaged in a fierce battle' (p. 51), which reveal affinity to neither side, plunging the narrative into ideological ignorance. The struggle is taking place somewhere outside of the ranch but has little effect on its inhabitants' lives. Revolutionaries appear only in caricatured form. From this we may deduce that although the text contains a heavy dose of magic, and ordinary logic is consistently disrupted, it deliberately avoids engagement with Mexican history, politics or social reality, leaving the second element of the term 'magical realism' relatively redundant. An amusing incident the shower episode may be, it, nevertheless, deliberately eludes Mexican reality. Despite the story's situation in a moment of significant historical magnitude, the time of the Mexican Revolution, the ethics, purposes and day to day realities of the cause are all but glossed over, if read in the light of other narratives set in the time by other Mexican women writers, such as Los recuerdos del porvenir (1963) or Hasta no verte Jesús mío (1969).

In Como agua para chocolate magic defines Mexican-ness. Its inclusion portrays the Mexican nation as an enchanting 'other' to the industrialised West through its links with the folkloric and exoticism. Here, magical realism is denied its subversive potential, reinforcing the image of a primitive country that has been left behind by the narratives of modernity and scientific rationality. Promotional slogans that advertised the film in the U.S. used the phrase: 'Experience the Magic' as their selling point which suggests that the film's appeal to non-Mexican audiences was dependent on magic. Harmony H. Wu believes that here magic realistic has fixed a 'frozen identity of Mexican-ness' and 'becomes not a challenge to Western rationality and scientific discourse but rather reinforces their hegemonic position of power'. Mexico is hence imagined as a peripheral nation and, magical elements, rather than re-centralising Mexico as a nation with regard to the U.S., as other narratives of magical realism have done, merely serve to pigeonhole it as backward and pre-industrial. In short, the film does nothing to suggest that Mexican society has progressed and become urbanised and magic serves to marginalise Mexico from modernity, allowing the U.S. to define itself as the centre.

Similarly, natural medicinal remedies are given preference over scientifically elaborated ones in Mexico. Tita, treating Pedro's burns with egg whites and raw potatoes, turns to magical, natural remedies because 'these were the best ways she

15 Deborah Shaw, 'Seducing the Public'. refers to the 'stilled' performance of Marco Leonardi, who plays Pedro, p. 47.
but she has to cross AnCenters', Community. (Mexico City: charming, but in a backward way. Both book and film avoid addressing originally presented as a lecture in the Caracas Athenaeum on 22 May 1975 and was published in the above-mentioned Mexico's problematic role within the narratives of modernity or as a peripheral the works of Laura Esquivel and Alfonso Arau reveal more about the way in than the substance of magical realism.

Marvellous Real in America', that 'the novelists of Latin America' are the perceptive Mexican rural reality. As which Europeans, Americans and even urban, middle-class Mexicans wish to represent neighbouring Mexico, symbolises magic and myth, as two opposing world viewpoints are placed in juxtaposition. The backdrop of the laboratory in the film provides a dramatic contrast to the theories of Mexican magic, which will not be lost on the spectator.

Conclusion

As Tita seduces Pedro through food, magic seduces the reader and spectator. However, although magic happenings weave their way through book and film, they employ none of the 'political-consciousness-raising powers' associated with the magical-realist mode. Indeed, magic in the film merely reiterates (except maybe in the case of Gertrudis's sexuality) stereotypical and outdated representations of women, ethnic groups and the Mexican nation. The white patriarchy dominates, women's strength lies in their domesticity and Mexico is charming, but in a backward way. Both book and film avoid addressing Mexico’s problematic role within the narratives of modernity or as a peripheral nation in terms of the U.S., Europe and the West. The text shows no profound awareness of the political and social conditions operating during the Mexican Revolution, which becomes at best a flimsy backdrop to an essentialist and conservative love story. If we accept Alejo Carpentier’s claim in his essay, ‘On the Marvellous Real in America’, that ‘the novelists of Latin America’ are the ‘witnesses, historians, interpreters of our great reality’, then my contention is that the works of Laura Esquivel and Alfonso Arau reveal more about the way in which Europeans, Americans and even urban, middle-class Mexicans wish to perceive Mexican rural reality. Como agua para chocolate used the style rather than the substance of magical realism.


20 This essay, entitle ‘The Baroque and the Marvellous Real in America’, is reproduced in the above-mentioned Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community, pp. 89–108. It was originally presented as a lecture in the Caracas Athenaeum on 22 May 1975 and was published in Spanish in Alejo Carpentier, La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1981), ‘Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso’, pp. 111–32.

Not So Innocent – An Israeli Tale of Subversion: Dorit Rabinyan’s Persian Brides

Tsila (Abramovitz) Ratner

Persian Brides, a novel by the Israeli woman writer Dorit Rabinyan, takes place in the Jewish quarter of a small Persian village ruled by cunning ghosts, devils and strong-minded women, at the turn of the twentieth century. The plot revolves around the desperate journeys of two girls/women, that of the pregnant fifteen-years-old Flora who sneaks out of her mother’s house at night to look for her swindler husband who has deserted her, and that of little eleven years old Nazie, Flora’s orphaned cousin, who leaves the same house at dawn to seek the local mullah’s permission to marry her cousin Moussa.

The geographical and temporal location of the narrative and its focus on women’s stories places it outside the hegemonic Israeli discourse. It takes place in Persia in the pre-state era and thereby no critique of the Israeli narrative is apparent and its female perspective seems to avoid the national project and the male authority over it altogether. The combination of women’s issues and the oriental context at the heart of the narrative enhances a semblance of innocent marginality. It enables the hegemonic gaze of the western and male Israeli discourse to conceptualize it as a folkloristic tale, thus securing its marginality and attributing the novel’s popularity to its colourful ethnicity.

However, far from being innocent, Persian Brides disguises a deep subversion when under the semblance of ethnic folklore it exposes the Orientalist nature of

2 The exclusion of women, particularly of the non-European ones, from the national/history narrative is well documented, as in Henriette Dahan Kales’s ‘Oriental Women: Identity and Herstory’, in M. Shilo, R. Kark and G. Hasan-Rokem (eds), Jewish Women in the Yishuv and Zionism (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi Press, 2001) (Hebrew).

3 Ethnicity in the Israeli context used to employ the Orientalist discourse as it evolved around West/East issues. There is clearly a difference between the attribution of ethnicity to European communities, whose position is secured in the master narrative, and its attribution to ‘oriental’ communities, which are marginalized by it. Aziza Khasoom, ‘Turning into a Minority, Questioning Gender: Iraqi Women in the 50s’, in Hanan Hever, Yehuda Shenhav (eds), Mizrahim in Israel: A Critical Observation into Israeli Ethnicity (Tel-Aviv: Van Leer & Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002) (Hebrew).
though at least this is not the responsibility of any one mother figure. If anything, it falls to Crichton, as leader, to make sure everyone stays together – making the responsibility paternal rather than maternal. Necessitating from this, it is also unfortunate that, since the series is ultimately about John Crichton, everyone eventually ends up deferring to him. He is occasionally rescued, or wrong, but in the end, his plan saves the day. Despite moments of true partnership between Crichton and Aeryn, and her preliminary control, by season four she has lost her hold on the relationship and is more or less at Crichton’s mercy. There are still countless moments in the show to make a feminist wince – but there are also some truly empowered moments, and female characters that, even if she has lost her hold on the relationship and is more or less at Crichton’s mercy, there are certainly lessons here that can be learned – something is present that appeals to male and female viewers alike, and a solid blend of action and melodrama may be evolving as the successful television aesthetic of the future.

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Phenomenal Women: The Shape-Shifter Archetype in Postcolonial Magical Realist Fiction

Megan Musgrave

Now you understand
Just why my head’s not bowed.
I don’t shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing, it ought to make you proud.
I say,
It’s in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
The palm of my hand,
The need for my care.

‘Cause I’m a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman, that’s me.

- Maya Angelou

Due in part to the achievements of such prominent writers as Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie, the mainstream success of films including Like Water for Chocolate and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, and most recently the endorsement of Gabriel Garcia Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude by the crown jewel of the publishing industry, Oprah’s Book Club, the genre of magical realism has inspired a surge of popular and critical attention in recent years.

In fact, the term “magical realism” has become such a catch-all for any work which departs from accepted norms of reality that it has nearly ceased to convey any useful meaning; critical debates rage over the distinctions or lack thereof between magical realism, fantasy, surrealism, myth, and folklore. On the one hand, this discourse has shed light on some works which might previously have been overlooked or misunderstood. On the other hand, however, it obscures a key goal of most works bearing the label “magical realism”: not to perpetuate mainstream, “realistic” narratives of cultural histories, but rather to offset their hegemony with alternate, previously marginalized or unknown, narratives.

Historically, magical realist novelists who emerge from postcolonial Latin America and the Caribbean have developed narrative strategies which communicate their subjectivity by simultaneously acknowledging Western literary tra-
ditions and resisting the limitations of those traditions; some employ magical realism as a narrative tactic with which to convey the disjunctures between their own local, cultural, or national identities and those identities colonialism attempted to impose upon them. Magical realism is particularly conducive to creating a symbolic resolution of these disjunctures because the genre itself invites the convergence of apparently contradictory modes: realistic narrative and magical or mythical narrative. In this way many magical realist novels address Kenneth Burke’s assertion that the novel does more than simply represent conflict; the novel enacts a symbolic resolution of real world conflicts. Through the literary products of postcolonial nations, magical realist authors are “making concerted efforts to reclaim their cultural heritage through the reinscription of the cultural in literary production and thus to restabilize the cultural imbalance of power” as a response to Western critical colonization and homogenization of non-Western texts (Mehta 234). Clearly the narrative destabilization inherent in magical realism is inextricably linked to issues of postcoloniality and cultural and economic marginalization.

Many magical realist writers attempt to convey these issues through the form of the novel itself. Stephen Slemen defines the postcolonial writer’s use of magical realism according to precisely this tension between the concerns of the subaltern and the influence of imperialism:

In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the “other”, a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rendering them with gaps, absences, and silences. (409)

The oppositional narrative systems—the realistic and the magical—are historically related to the oppositional discursive systems of the colonizer and the colonized. While it is common for postcolonial narratives to construct a similar polarity between imperial and subaltern subjectivities, magical realism attempts to bring both together on the same narrative plane, forming a peculiarly syncretic and non-polarizing form of narrative. Jean-Pierre Durix argues that magical realist writers are “clearly sophisticated in the use they make of metafiction, intertextual references, and interweaving of the ‘realistic’ and ‘fantastic’ modes but also of an implicit questioning of the polarity on which such terms are based” (146). Magical realism does not reject reality; rather, it requires an expansion and a complication of reality. Therefore, the writer not only acquires the language of the colonizer in order to test its limits, in fact s/he questions the very boundaries which separate magic from reality. Elsa Linguanti suggests that the “central project of magical realism” is the marriage of these “apparent incompatibles” (268)—incompatibles which are both narrative and cultural.

Ironically, the current surge of critical interest in magical realism is replicating the polarity which the genre itself resists. Just as women and non-Western peoples have been, in Theo D’haen’s words, “excluded from the ‘privileged centers’ of culture, race, and gender, and therefore from the operante discourses of power” (200), women novelists have been excluded from the operative discourses of magical realism. While numerous critics discuss the work of Garcia Márquez, Carpenter, Rushdie, Wilson Harris and other male writers when attempting to define the genre, few women are ever mentioned as contributing to our understanding of magical realism despite significant works by women across a variety of cultures. Indeed, few women other than Isabel Allende and Toni Morrison are ever mentioned in magical realist scholarship. Even critics who do discuss female contributors sometimes imply that they are less relevant than their male counterparts. The “narrative pyrotechnics” D’haen attributes to the likes of Garcia Márquez and Fuentes are never attributed to the equally complex and explosive Leslie Marmon Silko or Ana Castillo. Durix, for example, suggests that women writers deal with “more ‘intimate’ or individual problems... Less strident but equally decisive, [these women’s] depictions of fragmented worlds seen from the point of view of individuals do not always strike the reader as much as Rushdie’s or Garcia Márquez’s fireworks displays” (23). With such dismissive turns of phrase, women’s writing has been relegated to the realm of the local, the “intimate,” and the personal, all of which are presumed “less strident”; those who construct complex narratives which convey the individual experiences of characters but also operate as allegories of cultural histories are overlooked.

What these critics miss are the ways in which magical realism becomes a valuable tool women use to craft revelatory narratives of feminine and postcolonial subjectivity. In order to reveal such innovations, I will focus on the work of two Caribbean women writers, and specifically on the importance of female shape-shifters in their texts. While the shape-shifter is not solely a Caribbean archetype—she also appears in the works of Native American novelist Louise Erdrich and Hispanic writer Roberta Fernandez, among others—she is a particularly useful example of Caribbean resistance to coloni
dominism. Brinda Mehta suggests that novels depicting these shamanic figures best represent the uniquely traumatic experience of the female subaltern. Historically, women were particularly vulnerable to the rupture enacted by coloni
zation because “they had to deal not only with the inequities of the white master but also with the destabilized psyche of their menfolk, anxious to re-member
Despite Narratives in which shape-shifters are involved necessarily rely on a deep knowledge of and reliance upon the ancient belief systems of the culture in question; in the case of Caribbean narrative, these mythologies are based on varying degrees upon West African spiritual traditions. Because these novels are so per-

meated with a sense of spirituality, these writers seem to reject Frederick’s 2005 view of the modern age as “a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the ‘spiritual,’ the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day” (67). Possibly as an acknowledgment of such views of modern materialism, Caribbean writers enact a return to ancient belief systems, thus simultaneously acknowledging and rejecting their own complicity in the “fundamental materiality” of modern Western culture.

The central concern of both novels I will discuss is the need to comprehend and overcome the transhistorical cycle of damage inflicted on a community by the institution of slavery. In Simone Schwarz-Bart’s Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle (The Bridge of Beyond, 1972), the shape-shifter Ma Cia helps guide one descendant of slaves, Télumée Lougandor, through the phases of her own self-actualization in the postcolonial wasteland of French Antillean Guadeloupe. The structure of this novel neatly fits Semon’s tripartite structure of magical realism narrative: first, the site of the text is “metonymic of the postcolonial culture as a whole” (411) so that Télumée’s personal quest for selfhood acts as a “collective autobiography and parable” for Guadeloupe as a whole (Garane 32). Second, history is foreshortened so that the time frame of the novel—during which Télumée experiences enslavement, poverty, violence, and meager financial independence—symbolically replicates the island’s history of colonization and its aftermath (Semon 411). Third, the text’s disjunctive language and use of magic reflect the “gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter” (Semon 412), so that elements of folk culture constantly derail an otherwise linear narrative. Magical realism is a logical narrative choice for Schwarz-Bart due to the influences of West African religious practices on the Antilles; they are the basis of a holistic culture in which “all forces of nature are united by a primeval Mother spirit” (Mehta 236). Community is grounded in a strong principle of interconnection between the animate and the inanimate, the animal and the human, as Télumée learns from her grandmother, Queen Without a Name:.

Picking up a dry branch, she started to draw a shape in the loose earth at her feet. It looked like a spider’s web, with the threads intersecting to make ridiculously tiny little houses. Then, all around, she drew signs resembling trees, and, pointing with an ample gesture to her work, said, “That’s Fond-Zombi.”

[... “You see, the houses are nothing without the threads that join them together. And what you feel in the afternoon under your tree is nothing but a thread that the village weaves and

Woman’s body, as a source of life and creation, has been fetishized by the male psyche in male-dominated societies. Considered to be an object of repulsion and intense attraction simultaneously, the female body has been subjected to a long tradition of physical aphasis destined to minimize its “destructive” effects. The female body is considered dangerous when it is capable of autonomous action, as is evidenced by [the shape-shifter’s] extraordinary ability to transcend human form. Her powers of transformation are based on a complete mastery of her body, displaying a sense of inner authority and creative energy. (Mehta 241)

Since few members of her community enjoy the self-actualization the shape-shifter has achieved, her “inner authority and creative energy” help her to bestow positive energies upon others, so that she is often also the community’s midwife and holistic healer. Because the shape-shifter possesses the essential qualities of a shaman—“a position of distinction, an altered state of perception, and the powers of transformation” (Mehta 232)—she cultivates a role as “preserver of the cohesiveness and structure of communities that have been faced with several historical and socioeconomic crises that have threatened the well being of the group” (232), namely, colonialism, capitalism, racism, and sexism. The role of the shaman is to help the community recover a sense of wholeness despite the work these “crises” have done to dismantle its collective identity. Narratives in which shape-shifters are involved necessarily rely on a deep knowledge of and reliance upon the ancient belief systems of the culture in question; in the case of Caribbean narrative, these mythologies are based on varying degrees upon West African spiritual traditions. Because these novels are so per-

their threatened manhood by replicating their own humiliations... and projecting them onto their women. As a result, the maternal principle suffered a double burial, necessitating the presence of the shaman to revive the lost heritage and create a healing space for women” (239). Shape-shifters are shamanic figures who, in this context, symbolically reveal the arbitrary nature of the boundaries created by the colonial system by transforming their shape at will. Like Benitez-Rojo’s vision of Caribbean culture, the shape-shifter “is always in transformation, since [she] is always looking for the way to signify what [she] cannot manage to signify” (20). These characters internalize Wilson Harris’s theory that magical realism requires an erasure of the codes and boundaries limiting the sphere of human existence with an ultimate goal of wholeness (Linguant 250). Importantly, these shape-shifters are female. Not only do they overcome the imposition of colonialist ideologies, Mehta argues, they also overcome the limitations placed upon them by men.
throws out to you and to your cabin." (84-5)

In this community the significance of the individual lies not in her uniqueness, but in the relationships she forms and nurtures with the people and the landscape surrounding her. Likewise, the health of the community depends upon the health of each individual. Schwarz-Bart’s approach to character development, then, is similar to Elsa Linguanti’s view of magical realism’s recreation of character. “The traditional conception of character is thus destroyed: he/she becomes complementary to others. Characters do not stand by themselves, but in a relationship to others who echo them, but without duplicating them. They flow into each other and into the landscape, in a series of relationships and role inversions” (251). The strength and empowerment of the community thus depends upon—though it does not privilege—the strength of the individual. This means of characterization runs contrary to the Western tendency to privilege individual achievement over group cohesiveness.

When Télumée first goes to live in the tiny village of Fond-Zombi with her grandmother, Queen Without a Name, she is in awe of the stories she hears. She is frightened but intrigued by the constant talk of magic, while the rest of the community considers it perfectly normal. Various women live with the spirits of their dead husbands, a number of men are haunted by devils, and all interactions with the supernatural are related in the narrative as commonplace. However, it is Ma Cia’s power as a shape-shifter which garners her special attention by the villagers. Télumée’s first introduction to her is through a story told by Old Abel, who claims Ma Cia is responsible for the scar on his arm:

He was coming back from a night fishing when two huge birds started hovering over his head. One of them had breasts instead of wings, and Old Abel recognized Ma Cia by her transparent eyes and the breasts he’d seen one day as she was washing in the river. As soon as he recognized her, Ma Cia circled down and alighted on the branches of a nearby flame tree, which began to move around Old Abel, followed by all the other trees, their leaves rustling. Then, as Old Abel didn’t give way, the trees withdrew and an enormous wave came down out of the sky, seething with foam, rocks, and sharks with their eyes full of tears… Then there appeared a horse the size of three horses one on top of the other. But Old Abel never flinched, and the horse galloped away. Before its final retreat, however, it lashed out with its hoofs, and it was then he got this gash. (33-4)

Abel implies that because she willingly transgresses gender and human norms by abandoning her female form for that of a bird and then a horse, she must be inherently evil and intent on attacking men like a bird of prey. Mehta argues that “this perception of woman in her Medusa-like form, capable of castrating her male victims, is, in fact, a backhanded compliment paid to Ma Cia and her exceptional powers of transformation” (241). Old Abel’s fear of Ma Cia, mostly expressed through anger, is representative of the view of most of the villagers. However, when Télumée asks her grandmother how she could have befriended such a creature, Queen explains: “It isn’t for anyone else to judge Ma Cia… It’s true people are afraid to talk about her, and that it’s dangerous to pronounce her name: But do they tell you what they do when they dislocate a bone, or have a muscle cramp, or can’t get their breath?” (34). Unlike others in the village, Queen resists judging the unknowable. Queen also points out the typically ironic relationship between a village and its shaman: the people fear her powers, but trust no one else to help them when their own bodies are in danger.

Before Télumée meets Ma Cia, the negativity of the people of Fond-Zombi oppresses her not because she understands its source, but simply because it pervades every aspect of the community: “… it had to exist, some way of dealing with the life Negroes bear so as not to feel it pressing down on one’s shoulders day after day, hour after hour, second after second” (30). She laments the “abused, vague, fallow minds of the Negroes” (48) and the inevitable futility of their lives on an island paralyzed by the skeletal remains of a plantation economy. However, when Télumée finally meets Ma Cia, “an ordinary-looking little old woman” with “a subtle face that spoke of ecstasy” (33), she summons the courage to ask why the atmosphere is so laden with grief, fear, and the spectre of slavery:

‘Ma Cia, dear, what is a slave, what is a master?’
‘If you want to see a slave,’ she said coldly, ‘you’ve only to go down to the market at Pointe-a-Pitre and look at the poultry in the cages, tied up, and at the terror in their eyes. And if you want to know what a master is like, you’ve only to go to Galba, to the Desaragenes’ house at Belle-Feuille. They’re only descendents, but it will give you an idea.’ (37)

In fact, slavery is the one problem that neither Queen nor Ma Cia can resolve. They are never able to reconcile the existence of God with the existence of slavery: “For a long time now, God has lived in the sky to set us free, and lived in the white men’s house at Belle-Feuille to flog us” (38). However, when Queen suggests that there is nothing positive to be redeemed in the aftermath of slavery, Ma Cia responds with a hint of optimism: “With your permis-
exists at the whim of fickle everything else, may have been simply some degree

Tulumee’s landscape is central: a direct criticism of the nature, and the belief that slavery, like

For the first time in my life I realized that slavery was not some foreign country, some distant region from which a few very old people came[...]. It had all happened here, in our hills and valleys[...] perhaps in the air I was breathing. And I thought of the laughter of certain men and women, and their little fits of coughing echoed in me, and a heart-rending music arose in my bosom. And I listened to the laughter again, and I pondered, and though I heard certain things, and I parted the leaves to see the world outside, the fading outlines, the evening rising up like an exhalation wiping out everything, first the cabin, then the trees, the distant hills, and the slopes of the mountain. The summit still shone in the sky, though all the earth was plunged in darkness, under the uneasy, unreal trembling of the stars, which seemed to have been put there by mistake, like everything else. (39)

Again, Tulumee’s original point of view represents that of the outsider; the fantasy that slavery could be “some foreign country” is a direct criticism of the distance the West places between itself and the Third World. This moment comprises Tulumee’s true initiation into the community of Guadeloupe. Not only does she fully comprehend her connection to the community and its landscape, but she perceives the tenuous nature of reality as she knows it. Her reverent description of her community and the “evening rising up like an exhalation wiping out everything” is very characteristic of Alejo Carpentier’s formulation of magical realism, in which the individual’s awed response to the landscape is central: “Marveling at the sight... the writers of America confront the “search for the vocabulary we need in order to translate it all” (104). Tulumee’s notion that creation is a “mistake” affirms both a belief that the world exists at the whim of fickle forces of nature, and the belief that slavery, like everything else, may have been simply some cosmic error. By questioning the degree to which humankind is responsible for history, Schwarz-Bart manages to strike a balance between grief and anger, between protest and blame—and the mysticism which brings her to this point is the essence of the metaphorical realism in the text.

From this moment, Tulumee’s narrative represents the social history of her slave ancestors. She works as a domestic servant for the white family at Belle-Feuille; she defends herself against the advances of her white master; she comes home to struggle against the economic decimation of her village; she is driven to madness by her abusive husband; against all advice to the contrary, she goes to work in the cane fields and watches as her lover is burned to death in a labor riot; and finally, she experiences both motherhood and the loss of a child. Eventually, Tulumee is driven to the margins of society by these experiences and takes up residence in La Folie, a makeshift village on the mountain where a group of rebel slaves, the maroons, fled in order to escape the plantation several hundred years before. Thus, Tulumee’s path through adulthood is a collapsed history of slavery on Guadeloupe; she gradually internalizes the experiences of her people and seeks to further this education by seeking spiritual wholeness. After the death of Queen Without a Name, Ma Cia continues to mentor Tulumee. Not only does she mobilize Tulumee to reclaim her place in the world by overcoming her suffering at the hands of men, she further empowers her spiritually by training her in holistic healing practices. Although tempted to learn the secret of transformation as well, Tulumee remains too attached to her human form to exchange it for another: “... whenever she was at the point of telling me the secret of metamorphosis, something held me back, something prevented me from exchanging my woman’s shape and two breasts for that of a beast or a flying succubus, and so the matter rested” (130). Unlike Ma Cia, who possesses a “multi-visioned, global perspective” on the black experience (Mehta 238), Tulumee struggles throughout the course of her life to gain a deep understanding of the experience of her local predecessors. She has been too attached to her individual experiences as a Negress and a woman to lose interest in her physical self as Ma Cia has; the fact that Tulumee is never able to achieve Ma Cia’s enlightenment symbolizes her generation’s inability to continue such ancient practices in the face of modernity.

However, Ma Cia’s wisdom reaches its limit when she contemplates colonialism; as she nears the end of her life, she becomes increasingly troubled by her inability to comprehend the cosmic purpose of slavery.

Have they succeeded in breaking us, crushing us, cutting off our arms and legs forever? We have been goods for auction, and now we are left with fractured hearts. You know” she’d add, with a deprecating little laugh, “what’s always worried me is slavery—the time when barrels of rotten meat were worth more than us. However much I puzzle over it, I cannot understand.” (130)
Given her holistic view of a world reliant on the interrelationships between all things, Ma Cia cannot comprehend a system designed by one group of people to dehumanize another group of people. Though all of her work has been aimed at regaining wholeness, she cannot deny that her people are "fractured," left incomplete by an institution which "cut off their arms and legs." Ma Cia’s final gesture in the novel is both a protest and a surrender; because she recognizes the limitations of the human form to heal itself of such wounds as well as the futility of her own efforts to understand the incomprehensible, she transforms herself into a black dog who keeps up her regular visits with Télumée until she finally disappears altogether. Mehta explains that Ma Cia thus reveals her ability to "transcend [her] mortal state without necessarily waiting for death... In this way, the shamanic act manifests a certain victory over death or, in other words, a coming to terms with death that is not finite" (245). Ma Cia’s resistance to the death of her human body is a rejection of slavery’s murder of the spirit. Mehta argues that with this final act, Ma Cia emphasizes her "universal messages of interconnectedness, unified resistance to oppression, sisterhood, and respect for the environment" as "important guidelines for all liberation movements aimed at autonomy" (246). There is no question that Ma Cia has stood for these principles in her life, however, I find it difficult to read her death as such an optimistic gesture. By taking a silent leave of life she is denying her movements aimed at regaining wholeness, she is similarly pragmatic in terms of her autonomy. Indeed, the symbolic resolution of the novel implies that one must abandon oneself to death. Ma Cia simply has a keen enough connection to the supernatural to understand that humanity has made mistakes which no magic can repair.

Ma Cia’s "coming to terms with death that is not finite" (Mehta 245), therefore, both provides the most dramatic instance of magic in the text and foregrounds magic’s inability to resolve the crises humanity has inflicted upon itself. Indeed, the symbolic resolution of the novel implies that one must abandon one’s physical self altogether in order to overcome the legacy of colonialism. Otherwise, the effects of that legacy on the body are insurmountable; Télumée, who does not choose metamorphosis, ends her life living in a novel and selling peanuts for pennies. She is the woman whose story is not a part of any literary tradition, whose wisdom is never revealed, whose voice is never known. Thus Schwarz-Bart provides not a protest, but a necessary complement to Western- or male-dominated narratives in which such women are never seen. As such, the magical realist elements at work in Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle serve to illuminate Guadeloupean folk life and beliefs, but do not challenge the "integrity" of the novel as a relatively linear retelling of the history of the island to the local perspective. This novel is exemplary of "traditional" magical realism in that it employs fantasy largely as a mode of mapping unique local experience against homogenizing Western histories of slavery and colonization.

Jamaican novelist Marcia Douglas, on the other hand, abandons traditional magical realism in Madam Fate (1999), instead using the genre to test the limits of the relationship between reader and text. If Linda Hutcheon is right that magical realism is "less a rejection of the realist conventions than a contamination of them with fantasy and with the conventions of oral storytelling" (208)—this is true, for example, in Schwarz-Bart—then it is clear from the first page that Madam Fate does not fall within the "traditional" canon of magical realism; Douglas rejects outright the linearity, unity of space and time, and identification with a protagonist which characterize realistic narrative. The novel is a pastiche of the stories, myths, songs, herbology, and even crochet stitches of a group of women living in and around a mental asylum and representing the gamut of the unseen citizens of Jamaica—from the pregnant teenager in the ghetto to the disillusioned immigrant to America to the elderly woman who is institutionalized for talking to herself on the street. The narratives which comprise the novel form a collage, providing a textual representation of Edouard Glissant’s idea that Caribbean reality "can only be understood as a collection of all its diverse potentials" which cannot be unified (qtd. in Durix, 169). As such, Madam Fate epitomizes the symbiosis between magical realism and postmodernism; in fact, it epitomizes Janelle Collins’s definition of postmodern literature:

"It combines fabulism and realism... rejects linear history in favor of a flattened, one-dimensional chronology of events, displays multiple angles of vision rather than either a first-person or omniscient perspective, presents a "decentered" subject rather than unified subjectivity... offers a labyrinth of events rather than a plot to follow, and rejects closure in favor of open-ended meaning." (36)

Indeed, Douglas’s novel is predicated upon the constant destabilization—and thus the imaginative participation—of the reader. If, as Douwe Fokkema argues, narrative "permutation"—"of possible and impossible, relevant and irrelevant, true and false, reality and parody, metaphor and literal meaning"—is the most subversive postmodernist device (95), it is also the device which is central to magical realism. Douglas challenges the hegemony of most every form of traditional narrative, including unities of time, space, and character,
and her resists all semblance of recognizable form by “permutating” this collection of voices with magic. In a much more overt manner than Schwarz-Bart, then, Douglas uses the structure—and indeed, the lack thereof—of her text to replicate the fragmentation of postcolonial Jamaican society.

Presiding over this “collection of diverse potentialities” is Bella, “the woman people call kin-owl, that woman who lives in her flesh by day, then takes off her skin, living in spirit by night” (4). Like Ma Cia, this shape-shifter acts as a unifying presence in the novel, loosely tying together the other women’s narratives with folktales addressing the historical relationship between women and slavery. However, Bella is a much more elusive figure than Ma Cia, and the way in which her voice sporadically interrupts this already-disjointed novel places greater demands on the reader’s capacity for imaginative participation in the text. Aside from piecing together each woman’s story from the fragments provided, the reader must also “translate” the characters’ various Jamaican dialects and determine when Bella is speaking in one of her many incarnations.

Durix’s reading of Wilson Harris’s narrative intentionality is helpful in explaining Douglas’s relationship with her reader:

Language tends to ‘die’ in the sense that words and sentences cease to have any definite meaning clearly identifiable by purely rational methods. The reader needs to work in depth, along the paradigmatic axis as well as along the more traditional syntagmatic one. He/she will be led to fill the numerous gaps in the text with representations which always remain partial steps along a progression which is constantly resumed and never completed. (Durix 184-5)

Indeed, Douglas radically resists linearity, clarity, and closure as a means of forcing the reader to “work in depth” to “fill the numerous gaps in the text” in order to comprehend the realities of these women. The characters themselves frequently problematize the reader’s work by directly mocking or criticizing the hegemony of Western discourse and literary tradition, as when Ida explains why she once spat in her teacher’s tea in grade school.

The hog, she deserved it, she rough me up in front of the whole class for reciting that poem (the one with all the nice behaving flowers) by that Wordswool or Woolwords (I can’t remember which) wrong. Tribulation. (17)

Ida’s mockery of Wordsworth’s poem “Daffodils,” which she appreciates because of her passion for herbology rather than for his mastery of form, exemplifies the Jamaican distaste for Western aesthetic standards which permeates the novel as a whole. However, Ida’s comment reveals more than a dismissal of the Western canon; the punctuation of the above sentence foregrounds and challenges the reader’s unconscious assumptions about syntax. She disrupts the linearity of the basic sentence with awkwardly-placed parenthetical phrases in order to interrogate its authority. “Sentences cease to have any definite meaning,” thus even the smallest unit of the narrative, the sentence, is condemned as emblematic of Western hegemony. Similarly, the capitalist perception of Jamaica as a desir able tourist destination comes under scrutiny as Ida mocks its international image as an island paradise:

Mrs. Johnskin say she spend three months over in foreign, and the white people she work for just couldn’t believe she live in Jamaica all her life and never swim in the Caribbean. Lord help us, but you know what? The this is the part I want you to understand: Some of us ole people don’t know swims, but plenty us can walk on water (21)

Douglas dramatizes the gap between the sanitized Western view of Jamaica and its citizens’ view of the life of poverty through a lens of folklore and magic. Mrs. Johnskin’s white employers value Jamaican life based on their Western romanticized view of the Caribbean, while Mrs. Johnskin’s appreciation of Jamaica is entirely due to the mythic power of its people. The primacy of Jamaican folk life is not only underscored by the meaning of Ida’s words, but also by their orality, which acts as a syntactical foil to both the white people in the story, and the presumed white, Western reader. Douglas’s writing is overtly self-conscious; she is constantly aware of her participation in the Western literary structures she wishes to resist.

The tension Douglas establishes between outsider and insider perceptions of Jamaica is a microcosm of the metatextual relationship of symbiotic resistance between the novel and its reader. Just as Bella the shape-shifter flirts with her audience but refuses to reveal her true identity, the text, which seems to have a disarming degree of autonomy, eludes capture by the reader, who is continuously frustrated and intrigued by the narrative’s resistance to closure. For example, when Ida tells young Gracie a long, drawn-out tale about a woman who makes her living by posing riddles no one can answer, she draws the reader too, into the riddle. Just as she is poised to reveal the fate of the characters in her story by answering the riddle, Ida stops and declares, “Is your story now—finish it any way you want” (146). This challenge applies to Gracie and reader alike; it forces us to confront the uncomfortable knowledge that the purpose of the text is not to provide truths but to perpetuate a tale. The relationship between storyteller and listener, the primary relationship in West African storytelling tradition, is privileged over the satisfactory sense of closure West-
The magical realism of the novel produces this trickster performative stories it replicates, the novel is steeped in folklore and subjects as the idea of a novel without an ending is to a Western-trained consciousness of the contemporary woman. In this case, slave ancestors appear and speak to the women who are able (i.e. willing) to see and hear them. Ida is one of the willing; at one point she tells the story of the rolling calf, an apparition with a chain around its neck which represents the spirit of a slave. The calf appears to her, dragging its chain around her in a circle and suddenly transforming into "a young boy, about fourteen or so, naked from the waist on up, an iron collar around his neck, and a chain that dangle all the way to the ground" (19). Because no moment in time has primacy over any other in the novel, Ida's story of her childhood vision of the slave boy prompts Bella to interrupt Ida's narrative with an ancient story of a young slave girl on the auction block:

The periwinkle say... When the auctioneer stepped forward, his voice, boomed, ONE STRONG MANDINGO WENCH, ONE-EYED, BUT SOUND AS A POUND, and the crowd pressed closer, but the periwinkle remember that the girl appeared distracted, seeming not even to notice the growing throng, much less hear the voice of the auctioneer. With her one good eye, she was looking way past them[... ] her eye was focused someplace past the sugarcane fields and dirt roads, and even past where the land again met the sea on the other side of the island[... ]

This is what the periwinkle remember: the girl, suddenly bursting into uncontrollable laughter, her head flung back, one arm raised, a long dark finger pointing at something in the distance which only she could see. They all followed her
concerns; on the contrary, that stories of all women, she has kept all of her beads from and scattering can reality and the tradition of the realism is not alone in contemporary literature in foregrounding meta fictional achieve what Vicki Noble the resolution, it is her superior powers of transcendence to reclaim the heritage by decentering "keeping herself, she is much more able to change the world effectively (5)." It remains unclear whether any of the women in this novel "change the world"; as I said previously, any neat resolution or conclusion to their stories would be disingenuous in light of Douglas's desire to represent both Jamaican reality and the tradition of the infinite story cycle. If the novel offers any resolution, it is Bella's satisfaction that in telling her tale, which comprises the stories of all women, she has kept all of her beads from "falling off their string and scattering."

Because it is clearly more concerned with its metamnarrative than with the fates of its characters, Madam Fate exemplifies Faris's statement that "magical realism is not alone in contemporary literature in foregrounding metafictional concerns; on the contrary, that it does so joins it with other modern and postmodern writing. But it tends to articulate those concerns in a slight, to emphasize the magical capacities of fiction more than its dangers or its inadequacies" (176). For while Douglas clearly resists traditional approaches to narrative, this resistance seems grounded more in a desire to explore the "magical capacities of fiction" rather than simply to protest Western literary hegemony. She challenges our perceptions of literature only to foreground the futility of attempting to separate magic and folklore from everyday consciousness. Unlike in Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, for example, in which magic occurs as an occasional ironic or critical commentary on human actions, in Douglas every aspect of the written word has the capacity to convey magic. Every periwinkle flower may begin to speak at any moment; every lizard or bird may be a woman waiting to choose her next incarnation. The fact that this narrative ingenuity emerges in a form quantifiable as "postmodern" only reveals the lack of critical terminology to describe a work that is more preoccupied with crafting an expression of the inexpresible than with being measured against the standards of any literary tradition.

The narrative hybridization symbolized by the shape-shifter becomes an ideal metaphor for the postcolonial quest for a narrative style which interrogates—but is not mediated by—colonialism, capitalism, racism, and sexism. The shape-shifter is able to experience each of these forms of victimization, and indeed gains wisdom and empathy by internalizing their effects. However, her empowerment to escape them suggests the potential of all postcolonial subjects to resist being defined (or defining themselves) in such limited and dehumanizing terms. Her experimentation with various physical forms likewise mirrors the writer's experimentation with alternatives to the "privileged narrative center"—even when that center, in this case magical realism as it is perceived by the academy, already appears to run counter to traditional narrative discourse. Both Schwarz-Bart and Douglas encourage a resistance to temporal and spatial narrative barriers, but while Schwarz-Bart uses magical realism to convey such resistance in the context of a specific locality, Douglas has a more radical metatextual agenda. Just as magical realism functions as an allegory for the syncretic nature of Caribbean culture, for Douglas the shape-shifter in the text functions as an allegory for magical realism itself Madam Fate is a narrative hybrid of magical realism, myth, and oral storytelling which represents quite a radical expansion of contemporary critical conceptions of magical realism; Douglas shifts the shape of magical realism in order to test its capabilities as an expression of the postcolonial woman's particular need to be heard and understood. In Douglas, the phenomenal potential of the shape-shifter, and of magic as a narrative strategy in woman's texts, is a promise of the ways in which the postmodern novel can simultaneously acknowledge, depart from, and not only resist but reinvent its origins in Western literary tradition.
1. See Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action. Furthermore, in Healing Narratives, Gay Wilentz makes the more specific claim that the novel has the capacity to heal the kinds of cultural traumas inflicted by colonization.

2. Probably because they share the Latin American roots of Gabriel García Márquez and also due to popular film adaptations of their novels, Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel, to a lesser extent, have received the bulk of critical attention as women writing magical realism. Among the less-acknowledged are American women writers other than Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, Paule Marshall and Ntozake Shange have all garnered varying degrees of critical attention, though their use of magical realism has received minor acknowledgment. Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich invoke magical realism in representing Native American oral storytelling tradition in written form. Sandra Cisneros, Julia Alvarez, Ana Castillo, and Roberto Fernández all incorporate the supernatural in Hispanic American novels and short story cycles. Caribbean women who employ the form include Maryse Conde, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Edwidge Danticat, Jamaica Kincaid, Marcia Douglas, and Michelle Cliff. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris’s comprehensive edition Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community is a good source for more information on contributors to the genre, both from within the Americas and from without, however, like most other sources, discussions of women authors other than Morrison, Allende, and Angela Carter of Britain are few.

3. Shape-shifters are known in various cultures by any number of names, including witch, sorceress, kin-owl, shaman, conjure-woman, and priestess. Their powers vary greatly depending upon cultural context, but the key attributes I discuss in this paper—the ability to change the shape of or shed their human form, the ability to commune with the spirit world, and their tendency to inspire both fear and respect in their community—are common to all shape-shifters. For definitional purposes I rely largely on Brinda Mehta’s excellent discussion of shamanic figures, for many of whom shape-shifting is a principal ability. Mehta discusses at length the idea that “the strong presence of female spiritual models, sensitive to the particular concerns of women in traditional male-centered societies, is a vital key in the process of female actualization” (233). Mircea Eliade’s Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy is another helpful reference.

4. One of the important lessons Télesmée learns from the “line of noble Negresses” who educate her is that a woman must act as a role model for others; she must know how to bear happiness well, but just as important, she must learn to bear suffering well. Queen Without a Name, formerly Toussine Lougandor, earns her “name” by surviving the traumatic death of her daughter, who is fatally burned in a house fire. When Toussine emerges intact from the retreat where she had spent three years mourning, her community rejoices: “Toussine was a bit of the world, a whole country, a plume of a Negress, the ship, sail, and wind, for she had not made a habit of sorrow” (14). When Toussine gives birth to another daughter, she names her Victory—a tangible symbol of her victory over suffering—and the people give her a new name:

“In the days of your silks and jewels we called you Queen Toussine. We were not far wrong, for you are truly a queen. But now, with your Victory, you may boast that you have put us in a quandary. We have tried and tried to think of a name for you, but in vain, for there isn’t one that will do. And so from now on we shall call you “Queen Without a Name!” (14-15)

Indeed, throughout her life Queen Without a Name sets a positive example of survival for a community dredged in negativity. If Durix is correct that naming “parallels a writer’s attempt to recover her cultural identity” (124), the import of “Queen Without a Name” is paradoxical. On one hand, it is a title of great distinction, and the fact that Toussine earns the name by living through both trauma and victory as a mother clearly reveals the cultural primacy of motherhood. On the other hand, the name itself suggests that as a product of Guadeloupean postcolonial trauma, the cultural identity of Queen, and by parallel that of Schwarz-Bart herself, is irrecoverable. Instead, the respect conveyed by the name may represent the greatest validation the writer can wish for or achieve.

5. Linguanti’s discussion of character is derived from Wilson Harris’s Tradition, the Writer and Society.

6. In one chapter, Muriel teaches her daughter to crochet while telling the story of how she met her husband. The epigraph to the chapter is an “Excerpt from Practical Crochet: A Woman’s Unabridged Dictionary of Abbreviations & Symbols”:

| B. | = | Bride |
| dB. | = | Demi-bride |
| DB. | = | Double bride |
| TB | = | Triple Bride |

…and so forth. Muriel tells her story as she completes row after row of stitches, each portion of narrative being punctuated with lines from her crochet pattern:

Is Franklin you look like you know, not me. I look at him and I see you—those eyes just like a chile.
Muriel’s story is another example of the ways in which Douglas challenges the hegemony of linear narrative. Note that as I have shown here, Douglas even defies publishing conventions by constantly changing the font and size of the text. Most importantly, this literal interweaving of women’s life stories with women’s creative acts also foregrounds the primacy of narrative among these women; the storytelling is performed in concert with every other aspect of their daily lives, from crocheting a potholder to planting a garden to cleaning a house.

8. Collins presents this concise and useful summary of common elements in postmodern fiction in the context of her discussion of Toni Cade Bambara’s The Salt Eaters.

9. In the text, Bella’s interruptions are usually, though not always, indicated by a change in font.

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Why are Europeans and North Americans Obsessed with Magical Realism?

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THE SITUATION OF CONTEMPORARY Latin American literature, what
it is like, and who writes it, reminds me of the story of the blind
men and the elephant; the description of the beast varies consider­
ably depending on what part of the elephant you happen to touch. As
critics we are all blind, but it seems to me that in the United States,
Europe and Latin America we often seem to be touching different parts
of the elephant.

As a professor of Latin American literature at a North American
university, I often feel bewildered by the perceptions of my field.
Working in contemporary literature, I naturally expect for the ground to
be moving constantly under my feet, as the field is always in the process
of being defined. Among specialists in the United States, I find that there
is surprising agreement when it comes to deciding who is, at least
 provisionally, canonical. Beyond the walls of Spanish departments and
Latin American Studies programs, however, the proverbial elephant
begins to assume shapes that are curioser and curioser. English and
comparative literature departments, which in the name of cultural
diversity are increasingly looking south of the border, have developed
a working canon that is significantly different from that in force among

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Hispanists. Jorge Luis Borges’ anglophilia is understandably reciprocated in English departments and Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude has become a staple. Some works of Carlos Fuentes come up frequently, in particular Old Gringo, and Mario Vargas Llosa’s Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter has become a favorite. Of the women writers, Isabel Allende is best known for The House of the Spirits. In the context of these departments the term “magical realism” is used so often and indiscriminately as to almost become a synonym for Latin American literature. The situation becomes grotesque when one begins to look at the publishing industry.

When I observe what Latin American works and authors are published in translation in the United States and abroad, the list of names lengthens but certain patterns also emerge. Although it hardly constitutes a statistical study, a glance at two virtual bookstores which sell giga-quantities of books in the United States, at least gives an impression of what passes for Latin American literature in this country beyond academia. I have adjusted the lists to make them more uniform.

**Barnes and Noble**

1. Gabriel García Márquez
2. Isabel Allende
3. Jorge Luis Borges
4. Paco Ignacio Taibo
5. Carlos Fuentes
6. Tomás Eloy Martínez
7. Julio Cortázar
8. Manuel Puig
9. Mario Vargas Llosa
10. Ariel Dorfman

**Amazon**

1. Jorge Luis Borges
2. Gabriel García Márquez
3. Isabel Allende
4. Mario Vargas Llosa
5. Julio Cortázar
6. Juan Rulfo
7. Carlos Fuentes
8. Ariel Dorfman
9. Manuel Puig
10. Antonio Skármeta

The top three bestsellers in both lists are Isabel Allende, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez, the authors most associated in the United States with magical realism. Several of the great writers of the Boom appear on the list: Juan Rulfo, Alejo Carpentier, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, José L.

With the notable exception of Isabel Allende Laura Esquivel whose Like Water for Chocolate and Angeles Mastretta whose Tear this Heart Out, success, relatively few contemporary writers published in the United States. Avid North American readers could reason they learn from the media and see in the shell and virtual) that the supply of exciting Latin American literature has petered out. That this is hardly the case is borne out by the works from Latin America translated and published in Italy and Germany leading by far.

**The View from the United States**

A steady diet of Borges, García Márquez, Fuente, and Vargas Llosa convinced many readers in the United States of the magic of Latin America in which the Boom seemed to define what is Latin American, and it is dismissed as inauthentic. A North American years ago to stop wasting my time and to devote myself to the “real” Latin American literature.

Magical realism is a new avatar of the readers in the United States to see the best of cases as someone who is more attuned to the premodern modes of thought, worst of cases as someone who is primed to return to comedian Bill Dana’s character.

While the patriarchal saga of the Bue Solitude and Isabel Allende’s matriarchals House of the Spirits were consuming the United States and confirming that reality was ma
Maria is understandably reciprocating Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude. Some works of Carlos Vargas Llosa, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Mario Vargas have become a favorite. Of the staple, Some works of Carlos Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso. Of all the writers who died, seven are dead and no writers born after 1949 are represented.

With the notable exception of Isabel Allende and to a lesser degree Laura Esquivel whose Like Water for Chocolate (novel and film) and Angeles Mastretta whose Tear this Heart Out have enjoyed commercial success, relatively few contemporary writers from Latin America are published in the United States. Avid North American readers in search of more Latin American novels could reasonably conclude from what they learn from the media and see on the shelves of their bookstores (real and virtual) that the supply of exciting Latin American novels has just petered out. That this is hardly the case is borne out by comparison with the works from Latin America translated and published in Europe with Italy and Germany leading by far.

The View from the United States

A steady diet of Borges, García Márquez, Fuentes, Allende, Esquivel, has convinced many readers in the United States that Latin America is the land of magical realism. This view is reinforced by the older anthropological view of Latin America in which the indigenous exclusively is seen to define what is Latin American, and European or syncretic aspects are dismissed as inauthentic. A North American anthropologist advised me years ago to stop wasting my time on the literature I was studying and to devote myself to the “real” Latin American literature, that of the Native Americans.

Magical realism is a new avatar of that view which permits the readers in the United States to see the Latin American as other. In the best of cases as someone who is more authentic because supposedly in touch with premodern modes of thought and a way of life, and in the worst of cases as someone who is primitive, gullible but amusing, a return to comedian Bill Dana’s character José Jiménez.

While the patriarchal saga of the Buendias of One Hundred Years of Solitude and Isabel Allende’s matriarchal saga of the Trueba family in The House of the Spirits were consuming the attention of readers in the United States and confirming that reality was magical south of the border, great
changes were occurring in Latin America as a number of fragile democracies fell prey to dictatorships.

Although Isabel Allende, a niece of the assassinated Chilean president Salvador Allende, wrote *The House of the Spirits* in exile and chronicles in that novel the fall of democracy (in a country that is never named but which is clearly Chile) and the rise of a brutal repression that eventually touches even those who had favored the coup, North American readers primarily read the novel as magical realist. It must be admitted that Isabel Allende herself has wittingly or unwittingly encouraged this reading of her work by amusing audiences in the United States with statements about otherworldly communication and tales about incredible but real natural and social occurrences in Latin America.

Nevertheless, her novels *Of Love and Shadows* and *Eva Luna*, while never abandoning those elements, also carefully depict harsh socio-economic and political realities. The disappeared and the discovery of a mass grave are central events in *Of Love and Shadows*, and *Eva Luna* is the picaresque novel of an underclass woman who makes something of herself despite her poverty and the political repression in Venezuela. Both novels also pioneer the positive portrayal of homosexual men who display moral courage. Yet it is the magical realism in her novels that is mentioned most. Her novels follow a recipe that never fails to win with well-meaning liberal audiences. It is therefore not surprising that her works are so widely read in Europe (especially in Spain and Germany) and in the United States.

It is significant, however, that she is read far less in Latin America. At a recent encounter of Spanish-speaking writers and critics held in Monterrey, Mexico I was struck that among the dozens of names of contemporary women writers mentioned by novelists, journalists and critics the name of Isabel Allende did not come up once! The same would have been unthinkable in the United States or Spain.

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**The Problem of Political Correctness**

At the very point in history when many I recovered democracy and unprecedented States, pressured from the political right inching its way to self-censorship and eer and racial matters. This atmosphere of vness” has hurt the dissemination of work. Curiously female writers have fared better, the prevailing double-stan: writers to depict graphic violence again: depiction when done by male writers.

North American publishing houses, in siege, take note that the readership for primarily female and go to great lengths that readership.

**The Situation in Spain**

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THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND CENSORSHIP

at the very point in history when many Latin American countries have
covered democracy and unprecedented freedom of speech, the United
states, pressured from the political right as well as the left, has been
ching its way to self-censorship and censorship, particularly in sexual
ral and racial matters. This atmosphere of what we call “political correct-
has hurt the dissemination of works by Latin American authors.
uriously female writers have fared better than male writers, since for

example, the prevailing double-standard in the U.S. allows female
riters to depict graphic violence against women but balks at the same
depiction when done by male writers.

North American publishing houses, in a permanent state of financial
ig, take note that the readership for fiction in the United States is
rimarily female and go to great lengths not to offend any segment of
that readership.

THE SITUATION IN SPAIN

The Boom of the Spanish American novel coincided with the last decade
and a half of Franco’s dictatorship, and due to the inconsistencies of state
censorship during what some Spaniards have called “la dictablanda,” a
play on the word “dictadura” dictatorship signifying a relative softening
“blanda” (soft) versus “dura” (hard), works by Spanish American
authors were subjected to less inquisitorial scrutiny than those by
Spaniards. Consequently, a whole generation of Spanish readers were
avid consumers of the novels by Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar,
ario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso, Guillermo Cabrera
Infante, José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy and Manuel Puig among
others. An anecdote told by José Donoso illustrates this phenomenon.
Exasperated by his constant requests for figures on the sale of his books
in his native Chile, his Spanish publisher finally replied: “Stop busting
my balls Pepe, I sell more of your books in a provincial capital in Spain
than in all of Chile.”

The new generation of Spanish writers grew up on a steady diet of
Spanish American novels. Antonio Muñoz Molina, Rosa Montero, and
others like them, who have repeatedly stated that their models were the writers of the Latin American Boom, now understandably claim the, increasingly, undivided attention of Spanish readers. While the appearance of the latest works of the established masters of the Boom continue to be publishing events duly covered by the Spanish media and welcomed by Spanish readers, few new Spanish American writers are being published and read in Spain. Spain’s attention is focused on its own novelistic boom.

**The Spanish American View**

Meanwhile in Latin America a new generation of writers, who had also come of age reading and learning their craft from the writers of the Boom, had begun to change the face of the Spanish American novel. Less interested in myth and archetypes than their forebears, they crafted their works with a keen awareness of their cultural dependency on both high and low United States culture. Theirs is a Latin American practice of cultural production based on bricolage. Their novels frequently engage in a passionate dialogue with the works of U.S. novelists (mostly modernists) as well as with U.S. popular culture. Following in the footsteps of Horacio Quiroga, Borges and Cortázar who reread and in some cases subverted the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, contemporary authors in Latin America have reread, appropriated and parodied the U.S. authors they love and admire. The Uruguayan novelist, Tomás de Mattos, has rewritten Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* from the point of view of the slaves, and the Argentine Sylvia Iparraguirre has rewritten Darwin’s *The Voyage of the Beagle* from the point of view of a native Patagonian.

Borges parodies his beloved Poe together with the rationalist detective story in his story “Death and the Compass.” But it is the hard-boiled detective novel as practiced by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, and Chester Himes that has claimed the interest of writers like Osvaldo Soriano and Mempo Giardinelli. In *Triste, solitario y final*, a novel whose characters include Stan Laurel, Charlie Chaplin, and Chandler’s detective Philip Marlowe, Soriano subverts Chandler’s rugged individualist Philip Marlowe to solidarity when he must team up with the author’s name. Thus Soriano pays homage to the films of Laurel and Hardy and hard-boiled detective stories simultaneously corrects the latter by expanding the model in *As I Lay Dying* by politicizing the multi-voiced narrative structure not just to offer a counter-story to replace the official hand. Giardinelli’s thriller *Salt*'s trappings of North American hard-boiled detective stories under the military junta. A *memoria* (Holy Office of Memory), adapts the model of *As I Lay Dying* by politicizing a multi-voiced narrative structure to get a higher degree of psychological verisimilitude. In his novels dealing with Jewish immigration into mainstream Argentina, Szichman punctures the national Argentine conception of the Jews into mainstream Argentine society beyond the liberating catharsis of his book *As I Lay Dying*. Szichman’s novel *Imposible equilibrio*, whose structure is bricolage or hybrid, creates an immigrant working-class model in modern Argentine in the twentieth century from the multi-ethnic ecological system of his country. The fact that the voices of women direct. More recently Giardinelli has written about his encounters with magic realism in a novel “not a Magic Realist” he tells the story encountered in the United States when

When I was just starting out as a writer in the late 1980s, the nation’s premiere poet, late last year, invited me to participate...
ated that their models were the Spanish readers. While the established masters of the Boom were by the Spanish media and Spanish American writers are understandablyclusion. Mempo Giardinelli's thriller Sultry Moon likewise takes on the trappings of North American hard-boiled fiction to depict life in Argentina under the military junta. A later work, Santo Oficio de la memoria (Holy Office of Memory), adapts and expands on Faulkner's model in As I Lay Dying by politicizing it, while Faulkner's choice of a multi-voiced narrative structure is not primarily ideological/political but rather a bold modernist attempt to get realism "right" by achieving a higher degree of psychological verisimilitude. By injecting the multiple-voiced narration with an ideological component, however, Giardinelli subverts the official history of twentieth-century Argentina.

In his novels dealing with Jewish immigration to Argentina, Mario Szichman punctures the national Argentine myth of the easy assimilation of the Jews into mainstream Argentine culture and society. But beyond the liberating catharsis of his black humor Szichman does not offer a counter-story to replace the official story. Giardinelli on the other hand creates an immigrant working-class saga which tells the story of Argentina in the twentieth century from a non-hegemonic point of view. The fact that the voices of women predominate also points in this direction. More recently Giardinelli has applied chaos theory to depict the multi-ethnic ecological system of his native Chaco region in the novel Impasible equilibrio, whose structure is based on road movies.

Alberto Fuguet, the Chilean author of the novel Bad Vibes, has written about his encounters with magical realism. In his article "I am not a Magic Realist" he tells the story of the difficulties his fiction encountered in the United States when it did not meet expectations:

When I was just starting out as a writer at home in Santiago, Chile, in the late 1980s, the nation's premier writer, Jose Donoso, who died late last year, invited me to participate in a workshop to be held at
his house, and he eventually became something of a mentor to me. I usually took whatever advice he had to offer. Donoso had taught creative writing at the University of Iowa in Iowa City during the 1960s and always talked about it with great nostalgia and respect. He encouraged me to apply to the International Writers Program there, and after a couple of letters and some string-pulling, I got in, arriving at Iowa from Chile in the summer of 1994 with high hopes.

I had a secret agenda that wasn't really a secret at all: I wanted to take advantage of my being in the heart of the heart of the literary land. And I also wanted to get published in the States, the home of so many writers and artists who had inspired me. To be published in English, in a sense, was like joining that group. Iowa City, to me, was the promised land. I felt like a true literary pilgrim, and it seemed altogether appropriate that my dorm was called the Mayflower. I felt I had arrived at last, but I soon found that I still had a long way to go. Unlike most of the other participants, I wasn't out to write a book or get my first novel published. I already had three under my belt. The problem was: They were in Spanish.

My first afternoon at Iowa proved to be a sign of things to come. I was invited, along with the other foreign writers, to a welcome reception. There were people from Nigeria, India, Syria, Malaysia, Burma, Poland and Israel. One of the program coordinators casually suggested it would be great to see everyone in their "native outfits." So, following his suggestion, I went down in an MTV Latino T-shirt (sent to me by a VJ friend), baggy shorts and a pair of Birkenstocks. The coordinators were disappointed, to say the least.

After a few weeks, I began to suspect that I might actually have a chance at getting published in English, even if I didn't have the right outfit. After all, I was Latino, and everything Latino was "hot." Bookstore shelves were peppered with Latino names and colorful dust jackets: Santiago, Alvarez, Cisneros, Anaya, Esquivel, Castillo, Allende, Rodriguez, Viramonte.

I couldn't believe my luck. I figured someone to translate something speak for itself. A student translator eagerly invited me some nachos with sabean tape (Rodriguez is a pro-Castro make me feel "at home." She opinion: She really enjoyed it lacked "magical realism." We w and the obsessively constructed work. Weeks later, the Iowa submitted to them. In a polite letter what they were looking for. In easily have taken place right he.

I got the message. I knew I had the sinking feeling that my Nori an end before they had even go a dash of tropical heat and corn heard. So I went back to th those novels with Hispanic a formula. They had done their "color-by-numbers magical real oped. Sagas of sweaty migrant derstood political refugees or decent themes, of course, but q metropolitan Chilean existens Latin American, all right --I just can dreams came to an abrupt

Fast forward: Things happened
something of a mentor to me, to offer. Donoso had taught me in Iowa City during the great nostalgia and respect international Writers Program, some string-pulling, I got in, of 1994 with high hopes.
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 that I might actually have a , even if I didn’t have the right every thing Latino was “hot.” th Latino names and colorful ros, Anaya, Esquivel, Castillo, Allende, Rodriguez, Viramontes. There seemed to be a Spanish-language wave that I wanted to ride on my South American board. I couldn’t believe my luck. I figured that all I had to do was get someone to translate something I wrote, and then my work would speak for itself.
A student translator eagerly invited me to her house one day. She served me some nachos with salsa and put on a Silvio Rodríguez tape (Rodríguez is a pro-Castro Cuban troubadour) in an effort to make me feel “at home.” She began our work session with her opinion: She really enjoyed my work, but somehow, she felt, it lacked “magical realism.” We worked on it, but the flying abuelitas and the obsessively constructed genealogies didn’t seem to fit in my work. Weeks later, the Iowa Review rejected the first story I submitted to them. In a polite letter, I was gently told that it wasn’t what they were looking for. In fact, the story I had written could easily have taken place right here, in America, they said.
I got the message. I knew I had done something wrong, and I had the sinking feeling that my North American glory days had come to an end before they had even gotten started. Add some folklore and a dash of tropical heat and come back later. That was the message I heard. So I went back to the bookstores and took a closer look at all those novels with Hispanic authors. Sure enough, they fit the formula. They had done their homework. Each book offered either color-by-numbers magical realism or the cult of the underdeveloped. Sagas of sweaty migrant farm laborers, the plight of misunderstood political refugees or the spicy violence of the barrio. All decent themes, of course, but quite removed from my middle-class, metropolitan Chilean existence. All of a sudden, it hit me: I was Latin American, all right -- I just wasn’t Latino enough. My American dreams came to an abrupt end.
Fast forward: Things happened, and a combination of luck, good
timing and the right people came into my life. My first book, "Mala
Onda," was finally accepted for publication in the United States by
a large New York publishing house. Luckily, I found an editor who
felt as I did: He was fed up with García Márquez wannabes and is
a true believer in cultural realism, a sort of NAFTA-like writing that
he felt I exemplified. Great. However, I realize now more than ever
that I still somehow don't feel part of the Latino canon. And I
wonder if I ever will. But what can I do? My language is Spanish
and my home is in South America. How much more Latino can you
get?

The thing is, I get suffocated by thick, sweet, humid air that smells
like mangos, and I get the munchies when I begin to fly among
thousands of colorful butterflies. I can't help it; I'm an urban dweller
through and through. The closest I'll ever get to "Like Water for
Chocolate" is cruising the titles at my local Blockbuster. [...] 

Exactly. Unlike the ethereal world of García Márquez's imaginary
Macondo, my own world is something much closer to what I call
"McOndo" -- a world of McDonald's, Macintoshes and condos.

Too busy in their quest for a compensatory other, many U.S. readers
are passing up the opportunity to witness the homage and critique of
their own culture offered by Latin American writers. It is to be hoped
that they will, in the future, enter into the lively dialogue the other
Americans have been carrying on for years about their culture. Latin
Americans seem to have learned much about the U.S. and about
themselves from their study of U.S. culture, perhaps it is time for U.S.
readers to reciprocate. Isn't it high time to kick the magical realism
habit?

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to kick the magical realism
Initiated by the “voice in the desert” study by Angel Flores in 1955, almost everyone has labeled one short story or another as realismo mágico. Also, the ensuing critical studies treating magical realism have complicated even more an understanding and a definitive definition for the apparently catch-all phrase. Luis Leal, basing his study on that of Flores, largely refutes the pioneering article. Alejo Carpentier has chosen not only to redefine realismo mágico but rename it real maravillos. A recent book that is primarily a compendium of previous studies is “Realismo Mágico” by Juan Barroso VIII. However, it seems that despite all the critical effort, magical realism has yet to be understood fully and adequately defined. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to offer yet another conception of the term and apply it to “La noche boca arriba” by Julio Cortázar in order to illustrate better, and more concretely, what magical realism is not and what it is.

Realismo mágico is actually nothing more or less than its name implies. It is mainly realism, but with the aid of magic additional planes of reality are possible—but always realistic. Realismo mágico is not marvelous or fantastic in the sense of fantasy. That is to say, everything that happens in the story remains within the realm of reality. However, many times that which transpires would ordinarily not occur were it not for the magic that allows such a development. For example, the events of “La noche boca arriba,” although unusual, are totally within the realm of what is generally considered the real world. One unnamed individual lives two normal lives simultaneously in the same place but in two different time periods, centuries apart. Even though he moves, apparently while dreaming, from one time period to another, everything happens normally within the respective centuries. An important difference is readily perceived in fantastic feats such as those performed by superman and other fictitious characters in marvelous and fantastic literature.

More serious literature in the area of fantasy is that of an important Spanish-American cuentista, Jorge Luis Borges. Borges, widely recognized as a writer of fantastic literature, states in Nueva antología personal that Coleridge adequately captured the essence of fantastic literature. Borges writes that Coleridge defined literatura fantástica in this way: “Si un hombre atraviesara el Paraíso en un sueno, y le dieran una flor como prueba de que habia estado allí, y si al despertarse encontrara esa flor en su mano...” An example of the fantastic aspect of the prose of Borges can be seen in “El milagro secreto.” As is well known, time is frozen for an entire year to allow Jaromir Hladik to complete mentally his drama in verse. The instant that the work is finished, time resumes, and he is shot dead. The freezing of time is unusual; it is something that does not happen in the realm of reality, and is therefore incredible and fantastic. Nevertheless, all of the cuentos of Borges are not fantastic because at least “El Sur” can be classified as magical realist using the criteria for realismo mágico offered in this study. However, despite this example, it is contended here that Borges writes mainly fantastic cuentos.

Since the general acceptance and use of the term realismo mágico in 1955, three different groups of critics have variously categorized Carpentier. He has been admitted as a magical realist writer (Angel Flores); termed a magicroalista writer with no mention of his lo real maravilloso (Gómez Gil, Jean Franco, Carlos Fuentes); and the third group (Fernando Alegría, Luis Leal, Emir Rodríguez Monegal) use the two terms interchangeably in reference to Carpentier. Barroso, in the study already cited on realismo mágico and lo real maravilloso, distinguishes one term from the other and suggests that realismo mágico has a more universal connotation while Carpentier’s lo real maravilloso is more criollist in the sense that it is magical realism that pertains solely to America. He writes: “Cuando los temas tratados son americanos, se ofrece la variante de lo real maravilloso” (p. 65). Therefore, Barroso does not allow the interchange of the two terms as has sometimes been the case, and further, he distinguishes one from the other. Unfortunately, however, and despite his revealing statement, “al haberse hallado deficientes las definiciones [of realismo mágico] hasta ahora aportadas por los críticos,” his own definition is somewhat vague. For example, he defines magical realism as “la combinación de temas que reflejan la realidad dentro de una exactitud y hondura detallística con técnicas que aunque rompen con las leyes de causalidad [sic], acopian apropiadamente los temas dentro de la unidad total de la obra.” (p. 65)

Again, the main purpose here is to illustrate with “La noche boca arriba” that realismo mágico is primarily realistic. It is not marvelous or fantastic, but without the pinch of magic the various planes of reality would probably not occur. Nevertheless, that which does happen is always realistic.

In “La noche boca arriba” there are two clearly perceptible realities that occur simultaneously. In order to 1Angel Flores, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction,” Hispamica, XXXVIII (May, 1955), 187-192.
4Juan Barroso, Realismo mágico y lo real maravilloso en El reino de est mundo y El siglo de las luces (Miami, Fla.: Ediciones Universal, 1977).
5This statement would be additionally substantiated by the comments found in Otros mundos otros fuegos; fantasía y realismo mágico en Iberoamérica (1975), the published proceedings of the “XVI Congreso del Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana” held at Michigan State University in 1973.
6The text of “La noche boca arriba” used in this study is taken from Cinco maestros: cuentos modernos de Hispanoamérica, ed. Alexander Coleman (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969). Future references will be indicated by NBA and the page number within parentheses.
differentiate one from the other the contemporary events are designated "Reality-A" and those that occur in Aztec times are "Reality-B." In "Reality-A" there is an accident which results in the victim's being "boca arriba" in a hospital bed in the twentieth century. An apparent hallucination or dream, induced by the anesthetic, allows the reader to enter into "Reality-B" where the same young man is "boca arriba" on an Aztec sacrificial altar. This is one of a series of comparable events in the respective time periods and prompts one not only to consider the realities as simultaneous but interchangeable as well. The following paired examples illustrate the similarities between the two sequences—"Reality-B" is given first followed by "Reality-A":

*La pesadilla,* Tenochtitlán/Mexico City; death/accident which results in death. Each of these pairs will be considered more fully. It is imperative to note that all of the events of both realities develop in a normal fashion and consequently must be classified as realistic. Additionally, the surprising twist comes when it is learned that the actual time of the story is the Aztec period and that the initial events in the metropolis are dreamed by a person living hundreds of years earlier. This is a further instance of the "pesadilla," then, as the reality, and what is initially considered the real world is perhaps a modern concept of Calderón's "la vida es sueno y los suenos suenos son." It seems that the person is dreaming a future reality similar to what happens in "Las ruinas circulares" by Borges. The fact that the same person is living simultaneous lives centuries apart in time can by justified not only by the magic part of Realismo Mágico but as well by a particular time concept.

Chronological, or at least linear time, would preclude such a development as that found in "La noche boca arriba." However, the events of the *cuento* can be explained by using a concentric time concept; that is, time reckoned as rings within rings similar to the effect produced by throwing a stone into a pond. This claim can be substantiated by the events and geographical aspects of "La noche boca arriba." Since the real, or at least original reality, take place in Aztec times, it logically follows that the unnamed twentieth-century metropolis is Mexico City that is built on the ruins of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán. The young man of "Reality-B" is attempting to avoid capture and accidental death by living hundreds of years earlier. The *pesadilla* is thus a further example of the concentric time concept; that is, time reckoned as rings similar to the effect produced by throwing a stone hitting a body of water suggests the soul's initial formation. and each successive ring represents each of the various lives as the individual soul is reincarnated. All this conjecture, occasioned by the magic part of magical realism can actually be more definite or concrete in "La noche boca arriba." For example, shortly preceding each of the alternation sequences a smell is mentioned. An odor then is the concrete magic ingredient in "La noche boca arriba." This idea has been treated by Bienvenido de la Fuente, who writes that "... el paso de una realidad a otra en las distintas secuencias [he designates them as Vigilia/Sueño] está perfectamente marcado por una sensación olfativa" (p. 574).

Upon considering all the incidents discussed so far, the terms understandably called to mind are fantasy, fantastic, marvelous, and so on. However, all of this is accounted for easily enough by magic which is, after all, a part of the term realismo mágico. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a careful reading of "La noche boca arriba" reveals that everything that happens is realistic. A case in point is that which follows the reader's disabusal regarding the original time period. What the reader perceives as reality—the dream— is also apparently quite real to the protagonist because he strives mightily to "awaken" in order to return to what proves to be, in the final analysis, a dream. In other words, the magical product, his dream, is realistic enough to convince the dreamer that his true reality, until the last moment, was the dream. This is made evident in the closing lines of the *cuento* when the reader, along with the protagonist, learns the startling truth as explained by the narrator:

Con una ultima esperanza apretó los párpados, gimiendo por despertar. Durante un segundo creyó que lo lograría, porque otra vez estaba inmóvil en la cama, a salvo del balanceo cabeza abajo.

A few lines later the narrator continues in a similar vein:

Alcanzó a cerrar otra vez los párpados, aunque ahora sabía que no iba a despertarse, que estaba despierto, que el sueño maravilloso había sido el otro . . . .

(NBA, p. 96)

Nevertheless, many of the events of "La noche boca arriba," based on what is generally held to be real, probably would not occur. But, notwithstanding the dubious likelihood in our daily lives of such occurrences, realismo mágico offers the reader an opportunity to search for a reality more profound than that normally experienced by the average person reading a more traditional and limited approach to reality perception. With the acceptance of the pinch of magic that allows such developments in magical realist literature, everything else is normal and is not marvelous or fantastic as a first reading of "La noche boca arriba" might suggest.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the understanding of realismo mágico as advocated above is too restrictive to be applied to many *cuentos* heretofore categorized as magical realist works. This is precisely the thesis here: that many short stories are better classified under Carpentier's real maravilloso than realismo mágico, and yet others demand additional terms. Nevertheless, meeting certain criteria, many short stories are magical realist, and "La noche boca arriba" is but one example.

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MAGICAL REALISM: A PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

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Abstract

In 1925 Franz Roh coined the term ‘magical realism’ in reference to a new artistic tendency he saw appearing in European painting. It is unlikely he could have realized how far his notion would travel in both geography and interartistic debate. It has since formed part of Latin American literature, Post-colonial studies, and can now be found in criticism related to India, Africa and beyond; however despite so many people using the term, it still remains obscured with few venturing a definition. This confusion stems from an early separation of Roh’s original notion from the term which later resulted in many critics using the words ‘magical realism’ in the same forum to refer to different notions. This paper attempts to trace magical realism’s genealogy, showing where the confusion began, and uses Roh’s original ideas as a crux for navigating through the complicated criticism up to today.

Magical realism has been part of intellectual discussion since 1925. It was in that year German art critic Franz Roh published a book applying the term to a certain Post-Expressionist art he saw flourishing around Europe. It is difficult to imagine Roh comprehended the extension and debate magical realism would cause, which probably helps explain why his presence has not always remained a constant in the search for a definition of the term. Nevertheless, Roh’s original idea is important because, as this paper will attempt to show, the further his concept was from the term, the more confusing the debate about magical realism’s meaning became.

The following is divided into four sections. The first, Early Historical Context, looks at Roh’s historical situation and gives a profile of magical realism under its original conception. The second, Latin America: A Trip into Confusion, follows the term to Latin America and analyzes how it became separated from Roh and the consequences of this disconnection. The third, Out of Confusion and Towards Hybrid Societies, shows a developing reconnection of Roh’s
ideas and his term as well as magical realism's move outside Latin America and into the Post-Colonial debate.

1. Early Historical Context

Roh's book was published in Lipzig by Klinkhardt and Bierman and consisted of 134 pages of text followed by 87 reproductions of paintings. The first 14 were comparative pairings between Expressionism and magical realism; Kandinsky with Carrà, Delaunay with de Chirico and Citroen, Metzinger with Schrimp, Schmidt-Rottluf and Macke with Mense, and Uhden with Haus am Teich. The rest were presented as "magical realists" including Severini, Funi, Oppi, Räderscheidt, Davringhausen, Kanoldt, Dix, Grosz, Scholz, Spies, Metzinger, Sköld, Ernst, Dersin; as well as a painting at the beginning by Rousseau. The title of the book literally meant "new thingness" and "magical realism" was only the subtitle. Roh's work was centered on painting with little of the content wavering from this focus (Roh 1925).

The art movement discussed in the 1925 book had begun several years earlier and became popularly known by two different names. Roh named the new art 'magical realism', however Gustav Hartlaub also coined a term which his contemporaries considered more appropriate - Neue Sachlichkeit or as it is known by its English translation: New Objectivity. Hartlaub's term was first used in 1923 when he announced an exhibition which would travel Germany in 1925 bringing the new art into the public domain. It became so widely accepted after World War II that even Roh himself used it as the nomenclature for the new art in his 1958 book Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart (Menton 1983, p. 18).

Despite Roh's term being substituted by another within the world of painting, it later became an important element in twentieth century literature. In order to understand how this occurred it is worthwhile to trace magical realism's development from inception to the present day. As a name Roh did not consider magical realism to be of much importance. In his prologue he mentioned adding the term when he finished writing because he needed a name he could place next to the new movement he saw appearing around Europe. Other terms such as Ideal Realism, Verism, and Neoclassicism were expressions which only defined parts of the whole and therefore incomplete (Roh 1995, p. 16). Irene Guenther located magical realism as first coming from the German Romantic philosopher Novalis who Lois Parkinson Zamora pointed out used it to "describe an idealized philosophical protagonist capable of integrating ordinary phenom-
ena and magical meanings” (Guenther 1995, p. 34; Zamora 2005, p. 28). There is no evidence showing Roh was influenced by Novalis, but the philosopher’s notion is useful as a starting point because it contained the amalgamation of two key elements: realism (ordinary phenomena) and magic.

Roh described the realist component of magical realism in contrast to Expressionism’s way of seeing the world. Expressionism was a departure from the artistic tradition of realism presenting what Roh called a “fantastic dreamscape” (Roh 1995, p. 17). This view of Expressionism was held by other critics such as M.H. Abrams who understood the movement as depicting “powerful emotional states of mind” (Abrams 1993, p. 61). The art critic Frederick S. Levine also echoed Roh in writing that Expressionism sought the personification of “inner reality” and wanted “to project emotional needs, psychological pressures, and private obsessions” (Levine 1979, p. 2).

For Roh, magical realism reacted to Expressionism by producing a space where “our real world re-emerges before our eyes” (Roh 1995, p. 17). Germany’s reality in 1925 was not necessarily a beautiful one and magical realism depicted this by often showing “the inextinguishable horrors of our own time” (Roh 1995, p. 17). Roh celebrated magical realism’s return to reality after Expressionism’s exaggeration and distortion of realism.

Magical realism’s second component, the magic, identified it as more complicated than traditional realism. Irene Guenther has shown Roh believed the artists used a “cold cerebral approach” concentrating on objects which were shown down to their last detail appearing as “strange shadows or phantoms” bringing to the surface their “inner spiritual texture” and “clarity” (Guenther 1995, p. 35). The art Roh described does not “reproduce” like a photo, but “recreates” through a reconstruction of “spiritual phenomena” (Guenther 1995, p. 35). This “spiritual reconstruction” was the product of what Roh saw as mankind’s constant pendulum swing between “devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality” (Roh 1995, p. 17). He saw Expressionism as a sort of existential flight which sought to delve into our world from an almost mystical perspective, while magical realism was a return to the real world, producing once again “a profound calm and thoughtfulness” (Roh 1995, p. 17). Recognizing that the new art was almost as different to the world as Expressionism, Roh noted it was “still alien to the current idea of Realism” (Roh 1995, p. 17). It was a movement of “decantation and clarification” which endowed “all things with a deeper meaning and reveal[ed] mysteries that always threaten the
secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things” (Roh 1995, pp. 17-18). Thus magical realism was a return to reality, but not simply going back to the realism which existed before Expressionism—a homecoming which carried with it the baggage from the trip through Expressionism’s existential voyage, a mix of wild flights and anchored reality.

It is important to comprehend that the new art was based on the presentation of the object. It tried to dissect it, renew it in a cold, clinical style while presenting it in such a way that the normal became unfamiliar. It is impossible to ignore the similarities between this notion and the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky’s idea of “defamiliarization” which sought to present an object in an unfamiliar way so the reader/spectator did not become accustomed to its presence and ceased “experiencing the artfulness of an object” (Shklovsky 2001, p. 50). Shklovsky was writing in 1919, more or less at the same time this new art was taking form; both were trying to produce a feeling described by Roh quoted in Guenther’s article where “one was so in awe of objects that they received new, secret meanings... Objectivism as spiritual creation” (Guenther 1995, p. 36). Thus magic was combined with realism to produce an oxymoron which aptly described the new art.

Philosophically speaking Roh saw magical realism as a middle ground between two extremes. On one side were the nineteenth century Realists and Impressionists who represented the world through “vague sensuality” and “ingenious realism” (Roh 1995, p. 23). On the other were the Expressionist who reacted against the former by using “highly structured schematics” and “exalted idealism” (Roh 1995, p. 23). For Roh the former was the type of person who “contemplates and knows” and the latter was a “man of action... who constructs the future according to preconceived plans, a utopian who scorns mere knowledge... [the] kind of man who truly moves the world... in the direction of its evolution” (Roh 1995, p. 23). In the middle of these two was the magical realist who, while not “losing any of his constructivist ideals”, knew how to reconcile them with “greater respect for reality” and a “closer knowledge of what exists” (Roh 1995, p. 23). The magical realist was neither the practical “Machiavellian politician nor the apolitical man who listens only to the voice of an ethical ideal, but a man at once political and ethical” (Roh 1995, p. 23). For Roh this middle ground was important and it was what he saw being represented in magical-realist art.

To further understand magical realism in its original formulation it is also worth examining what happened to the new art under its
other name: New Objectivity. Hartlaub divided New Objectivity into two groups. On the one hand was the Neoclassicist conservative group which concentrated chiefly on aesthetic concerns and included French artists such as Picasso's 1916–1924 work, André Derain, and Auguste Hebin, as well as Italians like Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà. The Germans Georg Schrimpf, Carlo Mense, and Alexander Kanoldt also belonged to this conservative group. Once Hitler came to power some of these artists became Nazi propagandists and one in particular, Adolf Ziegler, was named president of the Third Reich's Chamber of the Fine Arts and counted among Hitler's favorites. His constant representations of nude women earned him the crude nickname of "Reich Master of German Pubic Hair". On the other hand were the Verists, who included artists like Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Rudolf Schlichter. This second group focused on social issues in their art, representing the tortured era Germany was experiencing after World War I. Many of them became politically active in Germany's Communist party, the KPD, which, of course, brought them problems once Hitler came to power. Their art was often declared to be "degenerate" and in the worst cases, it was burnt. Roh himself was accused of being a "cultural bolshevik" and was sent to the Dachau concentration camp in 1933 where he probably would have died if art historian Wilhelm Pinder had not intervened on his behalf.

For Guenther, especially in Germany, this was an art which represented its time: urban life, dirty cities, machines, factories, all concentrating on the individual lost in a world he could neither understand nor control. It was the art of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), a Germany suffering the depression of absolute defeat in World War I, the economic inflation where in 1924 one dollar was worth more than 40 trillion marks, and the festering anger, cynicism, and social division which would eventually lead to the rise of a tyrant and the Second World War.

2. Latin America: A Trip Into Confusion
In 1927 magical realism had already made an unexpected turn away from German painting, into Spanish literature, and onto Latin America by being translated in José Ortega y Gasset's *Revisía de Occidente*. Despite being based in Madrid Ortega's magazine had an international flavor. When writing upon Ortega's death in 1955, Alejo Carpentier tried to explain what the Spanish philosopher meant to "los hombres de mi generación en América Latina" by saying Ortega's magazine was the "faro y guía" which "estableció un
nuevo orden de relaciones intelectuales entre España y América Latina" (Carpentier 1983, pp. 222-223). In a recent sounding of early twentieth century literary magazines in Spain, Fernando R. Lafuente called Ortega’s publication “el referente intelectual de una España necesitada de hacer viajar a las ideas” (Lafuente 2004, p. 36). Lafuente reminded us Ortega wanted to be remembered as “Ortega el americano” and his Revista de Occidente was a manifestation of this desire since it exercised great influence in Latin America, particularly Buenos Aires (Lafuente 2004, p. 37). A testament to Ortega’s influence is the speed with which the translation of Roh’s text reached that Argentine city where Enrique Anderson Imbert recalled having heard a friend tell him as early as 1928 in one of the popular literary cafes that Jean Cocteau’s novel Les Enfants terribles was completely magical-realist (Anderson Imbert 1975, pp. 11-12).

The Revista de Occidente version of Roh’s text was in the April, May, June 1927 edition occupying pages 274-301. It completely eliminated Roh’s original title and instead used the ‘Realismo Mágico’ subtitle as its heading. The translation also erased the preface which, despite being only a paragraph, is where the German critic actually used the words ‘magical realism’ (Roh 1995, p. 16). Only 4 of the 87 paintings were reproduced in the Spanish translation; they are by Chirico, Severini, Schrimpf, and Spies. Despite Roh’s text sharing space in the magazine with an article about Goya-and translations of scientific writings such as Einstein’s “La mecánica de Newton y su influencia sobre la física teórica” the main focus of Revista de Occidente was literary. In the same edition where Roh’s text can be found there are articles and translations by various hands: “Un artista del hombre” by Franz Kafka, “Notas sobre la grandezza y decadencia de Europa” by Paul Valery, and others by Benjamín Jarnés, Ramón Gomez de la Serna, and Francisco Ayala. In fact almost all of the 32 texts in the magazine are advertised on the cover except Roh’s translation, a fact which probably reflects the magazine’s primarily literary readership.

Imbert’s anecdote about Cocteau’s book quoted above is interesting because it shows how far Ortega’s translation had already brought magical realism away from Roh: geographically it had left Europe and crossed the Atlantic and artistically it had been transferred from painting to literature. The fact magical realism was used to describe a European novel indicates the term was not considered, in 1928, to be a Latin American phenomenon. Moving magical realism away from Europe and into a strictly Latin American context
Magical Realism

would not occur until 1949 when Arturo Uslar Pietri used it in his book *Letras y hombres de Venezuela*.

However, before discussing Uslar Pietri's use of the term it is important to establish what happened in Latin America in the 21 years between Imbert's anecdote and Uslar Pietri's text. Uslar Pietri has stated that when he first used the term he did not remember its connection to Roh and that it came from the "oscuro caldo del subconsciente" (Uslar Pietri 1985, p. 140). He wrote in 1985 that he had encountered the term "al final de los años 20" in a translation of Roh's book (Uslar Pietri 1985, p. 140). José Donoso's *Historia personal del "boom"* painted an image of a Latin America during the beginning of the twentieth century until 1960 sharply divided by borders; each country existed as an isolated island unmeshed by influence from other parts of the continent. He wrote:

"Antes de 1960 era muy raro oir hablar de la 'novela hispanoamericana contemporánea' a genio no especializado; existían novelas uruguayas y ecuatorianas, mexicanas y venezolanas. Las novelas de cada país quedaban confinadas dentro de sus fronteras, y su celebridad y pertinencia permanecían, en la mayor parte de los casos, a un to local" (Donoso 1983, p. 18).

It is not surprising then, that, in an intellectual atmosphere where it was difficult for ideas to cross borders, magical realism would be largely forgotten.

However, the intellectual separation of the Latin American countries did not last and the period when Uslar Pietri recovered magical realism from what he called his "subconsciente" was marked by the increasing interest in a new kind of writing unifying the continent. Elżbieta Sklodowska described the time up until 1950 as an era when "el intento por redefinir la realidad latinoamericana en términos propios del continente es el denominador común" (Sklodowska 1997, p. 480). Luis Harss made a similar point when he argued that Latin America was united "en busca de su identidad cultural" (Harss 1969, p. 17). It is therefore not surprising that in a Latin American centered atmosphere Uslar Pietri was not thinking about Roh when in 1949 he sought a term to describe "esa nueva manera creadora" (Uslar Pietri 1985, p. 140). He wrote: "lo que vino a predominar... y a marcar su huella de una manera perdurable fue la consideración del hombre como misterio en medio de los datos realistas. Una adivinación poética o una negación poética de la realidad. Lo que, a falta de otra palabra, podría llamarle un realismo mágico" (Uslar Pietri 1985, p. 140). As already pointed out, Uslar Pietri did not mention Roh in 1949, but many years later, in 1985,
recognized that the term came from the German art critic (Uslar Pietri 1985, p. 140). This unintended separation between magical realism and Roh brought the original concept still further from its source and became the spark for confusion, not only because it was launched in Latin American literature at a point when bridges were being constructed across borders, but also because in the same year Alejo Carpentier published his famous prologue to *El reino de este mundo*.

Carpentier and Uslar Pietri had similar intentions. The latter has stated both of them were concerned with "la noción de una condición peculiar del mundo americano que no era posible reducir a ningún modelo europeo" (Uslar Pietri 1985, p. 135). They had recognized that Latin American literature was veering away from its European influences and had begun to document the flora and fauna of the American continent. Carpentier believed the fantastic was not to be discovered undermining or surpassing reality with theoretical structures and manufactured images (such as in Surrealism). Instead, he argued, it was natural to Latin America's history, geography, people, and politics that unlikely combinations of events occurred producing marvelous results. He called this phenomenon "lo real maravilloso" and said it was "the heritage of all of America... found in every man" (Carpentier 1995, p. 87). Magical realism was not immediately associated with Carpentier, but the fact both he and Uslar Pietri published their ideas—their ideas—which were similar—in the same year when Latin America was beginning to form its particular literary identity would cause Uslar Pietri's adopted term to be linked to Carpentier, thereby, furthering the distance between magical realism and Roh.

Angel Flores gave a fillip to the confusion surrounding Roh's term with the publication of his essay "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" in 1955. Flores argued in his closing remarks that magical-realist writing signaled "the inception of a genuinely Latin American fiction" and therefore "Latin American now possesses an authentic expression, one that is uniquely civilized, exciting and, let us hope, perennial" (Flores 1995, p. 116). In Amaryll Chanady's convincing reading of the text she argued Flores's main concern was "to reject the hierarchical dichotomy between civilization and barbarism... by demonstrating the acceptability of Latin American literature in its present state of evolution within the universal canon" (Chanady 1995, p. 128). Chanady believed Flores was appropriating the imaginary for Latin America and I would take this a step further to say he was 'territorializing' magical realism.
Magical Realism (Chanady 1995, pp. 130-131). Flores's essay, in effect provided, the institutionalized confirmation of Uslar Pietri's separation of magical realism and Roh. Furthermore, he also institutionalized the idea that magical realism was the proper nomenclature for referring to the new Latin American literature. Lastly, his essay included references to a wide variety of texts from different areas of literature which may have functioned within his purpose of promotion, but only served to cloud the meaning of magical realism.

At this point a series of articles were published which merit mention because they helped connect magical realism to Latin American literature and separate it from Roh. In 1957 J.E. Irby published La influencia de William Faulkner en cuatro narradores hispanoamericanos where the author appeared to follow Flores's ideas by arguing magical realism was distinctly Latin American in its combining of the fantastic with realistic literature. Ray Verzasconi also argued that magical realism was a particularly Latin American literary movement in his 1965 doctoral thesis "Magical Realism and the Literary World of Miguel Angel Asturias" which combined European reality and anthropological aspects of America. A thesis by E. Dale Carter titled "Magical Realism in Contemporary Argentine Fiction" followed Flores's ideas by accepting his definition as the appropriate starting point for a study on this new era in Latin American literature. These texts are not often discussed, but they offer a valuable vantage point in that they see magical realism as an expression of a particularly Latin American reality. Furthermore, they demonstrate that Uslar Pietri and Flores's elimination of Roh from the discussion produced a notable change in how the term was used.

In Luis Leal's 1967 essay, magical realism took a large step back to Roh, but also turned towards Carpentier's 'lo real maravilloso'. Leal refuted Flores's essay, but almost stole his title by translating it into English; "Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature". His essay was important because he sought to reestablish magical realism to what he saw as its proper place by re-inserting into the discussion the Roh Uslar Pietri-Carpentier genealogy. Leal went further by establishing that magical realism is not a strictly prose phenomenon as Flores would have had us believe, noting it includes "pictorial output" and "poets" such as Nicolás Guillén (Leal 1996, pp. 120-121). In reestablishing both Roh as the originator of the term and amplifying the definition to include painting, Leal helped re-position magical realism within its proper genealogy. However, he also wrote that Carpentier is who "has paid this phenomenon the
most attention’ in Latin America with his ‘lo real maravilloso’ (Leal 1996, pp. 120). These words linked magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’, a juxtaposition which would soon further confusion.

After Leal’s contribution the discussion about magical realism grew in both intensity and confusion. Angel Valbuena Briones, in 1967, briefly referred to it and considered it the same as ‘lo real maravilloso’ in reference to Carpentier’s novel Los pasos perdidos by writing “… una fórmula fantástica… de Carpentier que supone que en Hispanoamérica la realidad es maravillosa” (Valbuena Briones 1967, p. 486). In 1968 Orlando Gómez-Gil in the glossary of Historia crítica de la literatura hispanoamericano mentioned the term came from Roh and also gave a definition:

“La realidad es tratada por el autor subjetivamente… los símbolos… crean una cuesta de misterio, que dan la impresión… de un sueño en que las cosas y objetos de todos los días aparecen envueltos en una atmósfera extraña, aunque reconocible” (Gómez Gil 1968, p. 762).

Gómez Gil included Uslar Pietri and Carpentier as magical-realists, but did not think the real world was marvelous and that Carpentier incorporated “leyendas y mitos” (Gómez Gil 1968, pp. 677-686). In two years Leal and Valbuena Briones accepted Carpentier’s ‘lo real maravilloso’ and magical realism as being the same thing. Gómez-Gil also accepted Carpentier as a magical-realist, but considered his theory of Latin America being marvelous as based in legend and myth.

The next year, 1969, Jean Franco included a brief section on magical realism in her book An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature. It considered the 1940s to be a period in which Latin American writers began using “new techniques” learned from authors such as Joyce in the 1920s. However these authors, of which she included Miguel Angel Asturias and Carpentier, produced “work which differs greatly from their predecessors of the ’20s” and a “discussion of influences no longer has much meaning in relation to their work” (Franco 1969, p. 310). Franco made no connection to Roh and seemed to suggest magical realism appeared as a unique Latin American phenomenon. Her definition of magical realism is brief and only provided in a note at the end of the text: “This term has recently been coined to categorize novels which use myth and legend” (Franco 1969, p. 374). Franco considered Carpentier magical-realist, but did not seem to think his notion of marvelous reality was true. However, for this paper, the most notable feature of her
contribution is the exclusion of Roh from the discussion and the suggestion that magical realism came into being in Latin America.

Also in 1969, Angel Valbuena Briones published another essay on magical realism called "Una cala en el realismo mágico". He cited Roh as the first person to use the term and gave a brief summary of the art Roh considered magical-realist. He saw the fantastic, 'lo real maravilloso' and magical realism as being parts of the same "corriente estilística" and that magical realism was different from the others because "la elaboración del realismo mágico presupone la visión de un mundo sorprendente, de una realidad en la que la fantasía y el mito forman parte de ella" (Valbuena Briones 1969: pp. 233-236). Valbuena Briones did not consider magical realism to be strictly Latin American, but he did seem to suggest its existence in that part of the world was only related in name to the European contribution.

In 1974 Roberto González Echevarría published "Isla a su vuelo fugitiva" which concentrated on the biographical and literary evolution of Carpentier. In it, Echevarría summarized Carpentier's work by writing his words were "una búsqueda de vínculo entre la escritura y la condición americana" (González Echevarría 1983, p. 145). Echevarría associated magical realism with this Latin Americanist thesis by considering it to be the essentially the same as 'lo real maravilloso'; the latter only differing because of its Surrealist roots and the former being more "fenomenológica" (González Echevarría 1983, p. 152). He recognized Roh as the source for the term and summarized the German critic's ideas, but in the end concluded "Las teorías de Roh no tienen mayor impacto sobre el escritor hispanoamericano" (González Echevarría 1983, p. 154). Echevarría considered magical realism and 'lo real maravilloso' to be the same thing and he argued it as a Latin American phenomenon therefore diminishing Roh's participation.

Perhaps the high point (or low point) of this deliberation was the 1973 (published in 1975) Congreso Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana held at Michigan State University. The declared intention of the conference was to resolve once and for all the question of magical realism's definition and its role in Latin American literature. Emir Rodríguez Monegal's opening remarks famously referred to the "diálogo de sordos" which had developed around magical realism where many critics were using the same term, within the same forum, but in reference to different notions (Rodríguez Monegal 1975, p. 26). Many years later Seymour Menton recalled that at the conference "many papers were read, heated
discussions ensued, and some scholars even argued that, because of
the lack of agreement, the term should be eliminated completely”
(Menton 1983, p. 9). However the term endured and in the same
year the conference was published Enrique Anderson Imbert pub­
lished El realismo mágico y otras ensayos where he disagreed with
Carpentier arguing Latin America does not have any particular
magic, but that within the literature reality is represented as if it
were magic.\footnote{Lucila-Inés Mena also published during this year
criticizing Flores for the breadth of his definition: “[Flores] define
como realismo mágico todo el movimiento literario que, efectiva­
mente, empezó a vislumbrarse en Hispanoamérica hacia la década
del treinta” (Mena 1975, p. 397). She gave a brief definition
of Roh’s notion of magical realism, but then continued by associating
it with an aspect of Todorov’s fantastic: “hay una gran correspon­
dencia entre lo realismo mágico de Roh y lo maravilloso de Todo­
ro” (Mena 1975, p. 406). Lastly, she wrote that magical-realist
authors “cultivan una temática que enfoca insistentemente la reali­
dad americana a través de sus mitos y de su naturaleza” (Mena
1975, p. 407). 1975 was an important year for magical realism in
Latin American literature with most critics recognizing the “diálo­
go de sordos” while also arguing it was a Latin America
phenomenon with little or no relation to Roh.

1975 still held one more important moment which further illus­
trated the confusion. Many critics considered Carpentier to be a
magical-realist, but he did not. He differentiated himself from magi­
cal realism in a lecture titled “The Baroque and the Marvelous
Real” given in the Caracas Anthenaeum on May 22, 1975. Carpen­
tier incorrectly affirmed that what was described in Roh’s text “is
simply Expressionist painting” which has “nothing to do with con­
crete political agendas” (Carpentier 1995, p. 102). In truth, Roh’s
book described magical realism as a reaction to and departure from
Expressionist painting. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned
above, several of the artists involved were politically active. In his
speech, Carpentier stated that Roh used Chagall as an example of
magical realism (Carpentier 1995, p. 103). This is also incorrect
because Roh did indeed mention Chagall, but did so in order to
celebrate that magical realism had moved away from such Expres­
sionist art as that typified in Chagall’s work. This contribution to
the debate showed how little Roh’s work was comprehended by
Carpentier and how much of a “dialogue of the deaf” the debate
had become.
3. Out of Confusion and Towards Hybrid Societies

Fortunately Carpentier’s words did not have much effect, because at this point the discussion began to separate from ‘lo real maravilloso’. In 1977, Emir Rodriguez Monegal published a short article which outlined Latin American criticism’s efforts to name the “new narrative” (Rodriguez Monegal 1977, p. 27). For him, the various attempts which included magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’ had something in common: “they all attempt to offer a formula to overcome the limitations of mimetic realism” (Rodriguez Monegal 1977, p. 26). However, magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’ differed because Roh “was more interested in the phenomenological activity of ‘seeing’ reality” while Carpentier “substituted Roh’s phenomenological approach with an ontological approach” (Rodriguez Monegal 1977, pp. 26-27). Monegal made sure to point out that this “meant something completely different from what Roh had meant” (Rodriguez Monegal 1977, p. 27). Monegal’s contribution argued that magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’ were different notions.

In the same year the discussion also turned back towards Roh with the publication of Juan Barroso’s ‘Realismo mágico’ y ‘Lo real maravilloso’ en El reino de este mundo y El siglo de las luces. Barroso also separated magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’ along the phenomenological/ontological line. Furthermore the beginning of his book provided an analysis of Roh’s role in the discussion. He dedicated the first 30 pages to a study of magical realism’s history both in painting and literature. This section discussed Roh and maintained him as a constant, comparing other critics and notions with the German’s ideas. Barroso’s work continued the theme of separating magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’, but more importantly, positioned Roh as an important crux in the discussion.

In 1980 Irelmar Chiampi published a researched study on the subject. Applying notions from Russian Formalism, New Criticism, reception theory and others, Chiampi took a narrative approach to analyzing magical realism and ‘lo real maravilloso’. She pointed out the phenomenological point of view of Roh’s work: “lo que le interesaba postular como mágico era más el acto de percepción que la cualidad esencial del mundo objetivo” and considered it different from Carpentier’s ontological approach (Chiampi 1983, p. 24). At this point it seemed a common theme was developing in separating magical realism from ‘lo real maravilloso’ along the difference in the first representing reality and the second being reality.

Carpentier’s ontological approach can be illustrated by looking at the famous scene in El reino de este mundo where Mackandal is to
be executed by burning. For the characters in the book it ends in one of two ways: the French soldiers see him die while the slaves believe he escaped in a supernatural act. The latter requires faith in the possibility of magical events which, according to Carpentier, the slaves possess. However Zamora noticed an interesting aspect of this double-vision in showing that while the characters "select one or another of the contradictory meanings according to their own cultural positioning... the reader must envision them all at once" (Zamora 2005, p. 28). Carpentier places the reader in the position of deciding whether they have faith in the marvelous nature of Makandal's world or not. In the prologue Carpentier amplified this idea suggesting 'lo real maravilloso' required faith and that while visiting Henri Christophe's lands he "found the marvelous real at every turn," in other words, Carpentier possessed the necessary faith to find 'lo real maravilloso' in the real world (Carpentier 1995, p. 87).

This belief is yet another step away from Roh. In the prologue to Roh's book he wrote, "with the word 'magic' as opposed to 'mystic,' I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it" (Roh 1995, p. 16). The key word in this sentence is "represented"; Roh was writing about how the world is represented by artists, not how it exists in reality. Roh expressed a phenomenological view while Carpentier's vision was ontological.

Earlier in this paper Roh's philosophical vision of magical realism as a middle ground between reality and idealism was discussed. Carpentier fits into the idealist extreme because he believed a marvelous world existed. Roh never discussed his own personal beliefs regarding the existence of magic in the real world, instead he concentrated on artistic representations of the world. He wrote:

"This second objective world thereby rigorously resembles the first, the existing world, but it is a purified world, a referential world... Post-Expressionism [magical realism], in holding to existing exteriority, wants to say clearly that we have to shape the world we find in front of us" (Roh 1995, p. 24).

For Roh, art changes the world in front of us by purifying and shaping it in such a way as to express magic which "palpitates" behind it (Roh 1995, p. 16). This magic can be seen in art, but to find it in the real world would require mystical faith such as described by Carpentier. Roh expressly said he is not talking about mystical faith coming down from above, but a representation of reality which can provoke spectators to find magic within an artistic work and for this reason it is misleading to link him with Carpentier.¹⁵
In 1983 Seymour Menton's book *Magical Realism Rediscovered, 1918–1981* was published. It looked at the pictorial aspect of magical realism's early history, naturally focusing heavily on Roh. Menton intended his book to be the first of a two-part study with the second looking at the literary implications of Roh's ideas. The second half was not published until 1998 which is unfortunate, because it could have, perhaps, served to move Roh to the forefront of the magical-realist debate. This same year saw the publication of Robert Young and Keith Hollaman's *Magical Realism Fiction: An Anthology* which underlined the continued lack of criticism on the subject by including fantastic texts such as Gogol's *The Nose.*

Fantastic literature as a part of magical realism had been refuted by Leal in 1967 yet had always remained a part of the discussion. In 1985 Amaryll Chanady confronted the problem in her book *Magical Realism and The Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy.* For Chanady both the fantastic and magical realism existed on two levels of reality: "the natural and the supernatural" (Chanady 1985, p. 9). In the fantastic "the natural" is "pre-supposed by the text, asserted by the narrator, and accepted by the implied reader" while "the supernatural, is rejected as inconsistent with our normal... structuring of reality" (Chanady 1985, p. 10). As a result of this uncomfortable coexistence both levels are distorted and "By the end of the narrative, each code has been developed to the point where it must be accepted, even though it cannot by itself explain satisfactorily the events occurring in the fictional world." (Chanady 1985, pp. 12–13). Magical realism presented the conflicting views as "autonomously coherent", but divided along cultural lines: "one based on an 'enlightened' and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality" (Chanady 1985, pp. 21–22). For Chanady the role of the implied author and reader were important in the final difference between the fantastic and magical realism: "The irrational but coherent perspective of an individual can be perceived by the Western reader in the same way as the superstitious world view of a culture that is unfamiliar to him." (Chanady 1985, p. 22). Thus for Chanady: "The main difference between the two modes is the manner in which the irrational world view is perceived by the narrator", because "In contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader... The same phenomena that are portrayed as problematical by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist" (Chanady 1985, pp. 23–24).
Chanady based her separation of the fantastic and magical realism on cultural basis. For magical realism to function the reader had to see magical events as supernatural and this presupposed his or her vision coming from Western empiricism. On the other hand the text had to come from a position which was alien to the implied reader, containing characters who accepted magical events as part of life. For Chanady, if these criteria were not met then the magical-realist effect could not be produced. This view presented a bi-cultural dichotomy.

Magical realism's ability to interact with hybrid parts of culture made it a logical choice for places outside Latin America where people were looking to analyze traditional ways of living. Canada was one of the first places to use magical realism for exploring its hybrid society. The book *Magic Realism and Canadian Literature: Essays and Stories* edited by Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski collected a mix of critical essays and fiction presented at a conference at the University of Waterloo in May, 1985. The first of the essays, written by Stanley E. McMullin, created a view of Canada divided along the “heartland/hinterland” dichotomy (McMullin 1986, p. 13). For McMullin “the heartland perpetuates a state of underdevelopment in the hinterland regions” (McMullin 1986, p. 13). In the third essay, Geoff Hancock presented a Canada where “the boundary between reality and illusion was always blurred” and “as a child [he] was always surrounded by fantastic reality” (Hancock 1986: 31). Neither of these texts mentioned Roh and it is perhaps for this reason they seemed to include Carpentier in their notions of magical realism. Nonetheless, Hinchcliffe and Jewinski’s book indicated magical realism was departing from Latin American centered analysis and was headed towards an examination of hybrid cultures.

In 1988 Stephen Siemon continued this theme. He pointed out that while not necessarily needing to come from the third world, magical realism has worn a stigma for some time: “the perception [is] that magical realism, as a socially symbolic contract, carries a residuum of resistance towards the imperial center” (Siemon 1995, p. 408). Siemon saw the critical use of magical realism as taking advantage of the term’s rebellious power to “signify resistance to monumental theories of literary practice” (Siemon 1995, p. 408). He speculated that perhaps this was the reason the term had proved difficult to define. He then used two English Canadian texts to show “the ways in which these texts recapitulate a postcolonial account of the social and historical relations of the culture in which they are set” (Siemon 1995, p. 409). By choosing texts from a first-world
country, Siemon not only continued the Canadian magical-realist debate, but also showed the versatility of the term when wielded within the analysis of Post-Colonialism. Magical realism had become a way to represent the complicated blend being examined by Post-Colonialism.

In 1995, a combination of essays and texts was published by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris under the title *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. It included 23 monographs such as Faris's “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction”, Patricia Merivale’s “Saleem Fathered by Oskar: Midnight’s Children, Magical Realism, and *The Tin Drum*”, and Stephen Siemon’s aforementioned article. These texts reflected how the magical-realist discussion had moved beyond Latin America and now included texts from various parts of the world. However, the most important contribution of Zamora and Faris’s book was its reconsideration of the term’s historical context. Not only did it provide a historian’s article tracing magical realism’s steps between Roh and Latin America, but also published an English translation of much of Roh’s text as well as other key essays by Carpentier, Flores, and Leal. Putting all these texts together, in English, for the first time reflected and further facilitated magical realism’s return to Roh and growing development in literary discussion.

Recently several books have been published concentrating on magical realism’s developing role in Post-Colonialism. The first, Brenda Cooper’s *Magical Realism in West African Fiction Seeing With a Third Eye* included as magical-realists African authors such as Ben Okri, Syl Cheney-Cocker, and B. Kojo Laing. Jean-Pierre Durix’s *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse Deconstructing Magical Realism* followed Homi K. Bhabha’s ideas arguing that the “inter” is the space which carries meanings of culture and those “new literatures” written from cultures with hybrid backgrounds represented a “counter discourse” to the dominant work of the metropolises. In 1999, the collection of essays *Conterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English* also became part of the increasing list of works which have established magical realism as an important element in the Post-Colonial discussion.

Several of these texts maintain Roh at a distance; either only mentioning him as the originator of the term and not including analysis, or in the worst of cases, ignoring completely his contribution. Furthermore, several Post-Colonial texts have included analysis of Carpentier’s work as magical-realist. This is a dangerous path to
follow. It is comprehensible that Carpentier's representation and preoccupation with voices silenced by colonialism is intriguing for Post-Colonial study. However, once again mixing him with magical realism and losing sight of the term's genealogy could easily return to a confusing debate.

Franz Roh could not have foreseen the debate his text would provoke. After all, he was writing about a specific art which had nothing to do with Latin America, and must have seemed a great distance from the study of literature. However, the act of translation brought the term to the Americas at a moment when the continent's waxing narrative needed a name. Other designations were suggested, but magical realism withstood the test of time and critical disagreement. The enthusiasm of the fifties, sixties, and seventies has calmed and a more sober analysis of the term's history has helped develop a clearer profile. However, just as this is happening in Latin America magical realism has again traversed borders and can now be found in Canada, Africa, India, and other parts of the world. While unlikely to disappear, it is important to maintain as a constant the term's history or else risk, once again, entering a dialogue of the deaf.

Notes


2. The exact starting date of magical realist painting is an object of some discussion. Seymour Menton argued it began in 1918 with the end of World War I, while Irene Guenther believed it started in 1920 when several art critics had "perceived Expressionism as having nothing more to say." It is difficult to determine which of these dates is correct; however the close proximity serves to underline that the movement began within the atmosphere permeating Europe in the wake of World War I and diverging from Expressionism. Menton, Seymour. Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981. Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1983. Guenther, Irene. "Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts During the Weimar Republic," in Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community. Eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

3. It is interesting to note 1925 was an important year in German history as it was when Adolf Hitler published his Mein Kampf.

The Big Questions

In order to break down, understand, and organize the vast amount of information gleaned from these articles, I decided to use a color-coded highlighting system to sort out my thoughts. I broke my “big questions” about the term, its characteristics, and its history into five different categories and used different colors to highlight within the articles themselves. These marked up articles are included at the end of this section, and each section’s cover page is labeled by its individual color.
Questions 1

- Definition of term
- Debate over fine details
- Parameters – presence & absence
- Intended audience
- Difference between MR & fantasy
"Magical Realism Revisited" – Michael Bell

"To what extent is magical realism opposed to realism or a form of it" (127).

Magic is part of reality – things happen in our lives that we are unable to explain.

Magical Realism challenges Western rationality (128).

"it subverts or expands the protocols of a more traditional novelistic realism, itself associated in turn with philosophical assumptions underwriting the political possession – and the scientific understanding – of the world" (129).

How do we understand the world? Through politics, science, religion etc. Simply a new way of looking at reality and the characteristics of reality.

"Literature, Eagleton suggests, is merely what a given set of people at a particular time find valuable or judge to be fine writing, and the supposed specialness of literature is a mystification" (130).

We have given value to magical realism. Why? What kind of person would value it above normal fiction? What kind of person will refuse to read it?

"The main difficulty facing national literatures today...is that they must combine mythification with demystification, this primal innocence with a learned craftiness" (135).

Do we let the myth stand as something unexplainable in scientific terms, or do we embrace the mystery? Great wisdom can be found in not understanding.
"Introduction" from Coterminous Worlds by Tommaso Scarano

"In its applications, it is a term that is perhaps not wholly satisfactory" (3).

Is Magical Realism able to be defined? Start with a definition of magic – so many different elements and ideas can be defined as magic, it's no wonder we haven't been able to come up with a textbook definition.

"At times it focuses on magical elements rather than literary aspects, or on explaining connections with local geographical, religious, or anthropological questions..." (3)

Does magical realism rely on magic as a crutch for not so great rhetoric?

"After the crises of the subject and of authority, after the death of God and of the Logos, the birth and management of new cultural typologies entails attacking inherited dichotomies such as:
Man/nature; center/margin; myth/history; real/marvelous or real/imaginary;
true/rhetorical language

These dichotomies aren't always as black and white as they seem. Man is a part of nature. Without margins, there would be no center; myths are a form and an essential part of history. Is it so hard to accept that magical or marvelously unexplainable occurrences are a part of reality?

"[language] is a form of deceit in which the deceiver is dikaioteros – more direct, more honest, more accurate, more in the right – than the non-deceiver, and where the person deceived is sophoteros – more intelligent, more prudent, more astute – than the one who remains undeceived" (7).

Is the undeceived missing the point of the story. Is it indeed relevant if the story is "true" or not? Faith in religious doctrine and stories is a matter of being deceived in a good way. Magical stories in the Bible bring truth and comfort to many people who don't question the value of the lesson for their being magical elements.
"Notes on Spanish-American Magical Realism" by Tommaso Scarano

"the label had turned out to have a paralyzing effect..." (9)

Unable to agree on definition of the genre

"The influence of surrealism has been denied by some and acknowledged by others" (9).

It has been defined as surrealist literature before, but the crucial difference is that surrealism is specifically a depiction of unreality with completely new sets of physical laws, whereas magical realism operates by the laws of this world, manipulating them rather than rejecting them wholeheartedly.

"Carpentier fiercely attacked the conjuring tricks performed by former Surrealist thaumaturges who had now become pure bureaucrats, and whom poverty of imagination had reduced to learning by heart 'codes of the fantastic'" (13).

"It is sufficient to be aware, in using it [the term], that it is no more than a simple formula – that is to say, a model that "in itself is poor in meaning"" (10).

Since we have to call it something, let's call it this.

"A poetic divination or a poetic negation of reality. Something that, for want of a more suitable term, might be called magical realism" (15).

"Clearly, realism mágico is not Surrealism, but it undoubtedly incorporated several of its elements, especially some found in late Surrealism..." (16).

Closely related, often confused, but not the same.

"the amalgamation of realism and fantasy"

Simplest definition, most useful because it doesn't try to go into details or define particulars.

"notion of 'synchronism,' in the sense of the simultaneous presence of different times" (21).

Time is treated differently by all authors, but there is a trend in magical realism to treat time as a manipulable concept.

"This aspect of the non-conflictual coexistence of contrary elements is undoubtedly one of the central traits of realismo mágico, the one that differentiates it most strikingly from classic fantastic narrative" (24).

Being able to hold two contrasting ideas in your head at the same time = ***
“Big Mama in Postmodern Society: Tracing Magical Realism in Popular Culture”
by Gloria Clark

“The term ‘Magical Realism’ can be used to examine the softening of the boundaries between realism and imagination found in selected examples of postmodern artistic production that appear in popular culture, such as film, television programs, photography and the world of computer gaming” (75).

A concept related to art in the blending of colors, themes, and techniques that goes on.

“Magical Realism integrates elements of fantasy, or an imagined world into a life-like, or realistic text. Magical realist authors include magical occurrences in texts that essentially and primarily mirror daily existence, or present recognizable human experience, no matter how seemingly extraordinary” (76).

The basis has to be in reality, the fantastical or magical elements are like extra adornments that fully define and allow us to experience the reality in a new way.

“The term ‘Magical Realism’ is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy....Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the ‘other,’ a situation which creates disjunction, within each of the separate discursive systems, rendering them with gaps, absences, and silences’” (Zamora 409) (79).

Two planes struggling against and with each other, never being able to be fully realized, but at the same time, acknowledging the other in its entirety and giving it legitimacy.

“Another common component of Magical Realism is a highly elastic view of time. The reader finds that time in the text does not proceed as a sequential order of finely measured steps” (82).

I would say that time in real life behaves much as it is described in fantasy, or magical terms. When we are looking forward to something, it slows down; when we dread something, it speeds up. Scientifically, it may be a measurable constant, but in our experience of it, it seems to have its own personality.

“The Magical Realism is found in the magical use of realistic skills” (84).

We are all capable of extraordinary things, but seldom accomplish them. Quantum theory of all possible worlds. Magical Realism simply expounds on what would happen if we let our potential go and believed in the “impossible.”
“Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism” by Scott Simpkins

MR is “a ‘counter-movement’ in art through which ‘the charm of the object was rediscovered.’” (141).

MR is a reaction, then, to a world view that was very scientific and restrictive in regards to what is actually real and what we are “allowed” to believe in. (Post-expressionism).

Realism
History
Mimetic
Familiarization
Empiricism
Logic
Narration
Closure-ridden
Reductive
Naturalism
Rationalization
Cause and Effect

Magic Realism
Myth, Legend
Fantastic
Supplementation
Defamiliarization
Mysticism, Magic
Meta-narration
Open-Ended
Expansive
Romanticism
Imagination
Negative Capability
“The magic realist text ‘does not depend either on natural or physical laws or on the usual conception of the real in Western culture’” (142).

Concerned with things other than what reality is or isn’t. doesn’t bother itself with being scientifically accurate so long as the reader gets the point.

“defamiliarization to radically emphasize common elements of reality, elements that are often present but have become virtually invisible because of their familiarity” (145).

New p-o-v on what we experience every day. Often happens with translation – phrases in another language give you new insight into how you say it in your own.

“Perhaps magic realism’s goal is to return our focus to the backdrop of textual reality, its production and function, by defamiliarizing it” (147).

We take so much about our world for granted, never allowing for the possibility that we don’t understand something as fully as we think we do – especially regarding cultural norms and rules. We grow up with certain assumptions about how the world works, never questioning them until we are forced to. MR forces us to question how our world works.

“Many theorists of the fantastic, in fact, identify the contemporary concern with language’s shortcomings as a symptom of the modern temperament” (146).

We’re still caught in a naturalistic temperament, where we thing everything has to have a definable boundary, and only one.
"Magical Realism: A Problem of Definition" by Kenneth Reeds

"the amalgamation of two key elements: realism (ordinary phenomena) and magic" (177).

Amalgamation: "The mixing or blending of different elements, races, societies, etc.; also, the result of such combination or blending; a homogeneous union."

"magical realism reacted to Expressionism by producing a space where ‘our real world re-emerges before our eyes’ (177).

Once again, forcing us to look at the same reality in a new way.

"In the middle of these two was the magical realism who, while not ‘losing any of his constructivist ideals’, knew how to reconcile them with ‘greater respect for reality’ and a ‘closer knowledge of what exists’” (178) (Roh).

MR seen as middle ground between Strist Realism and Surrealism/Expressionism

"diálogo de sordos" (185)

Referring to the debate over the definition of the term between Leal, Flores, Roh, etc. fighting over semantics when they’re all talking about the same thing.

"The main difference between the two modes [MR and fantasy] is the manner in which the irrational world view is perceived by the narrator’, because ‘in contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader...The same phenomena that are portrayed as problematical by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist’” (189).

For magic to be accepted in fantasy and science fiction, it has to take place in a world apart from this one.
“Realismo Mágico – True Realism with a Pinch of Magic” by Lee Daniel

“It is mainly realism, but with the aid of magic additional planes of reality are possible – but always realistic” (129).

Theory of all possible worlds – they combine, clash, and are integrated into one another.

“la combinación de temas que reflejan la realidad dentro de una exactitud y hondura detallística con técnicas que aunque rompen con las leyes de causalidad, acoplan apropiadamente los temas dentro de la unidad total de la obra” (129).

“the combination of themes that reflect reality within an

Doesn’t matter if reality isn’t duplicated as long as the point is gotten across.

“realismo mágico offers the reader an opportunity to search for a reality more profound than that normally experienced by the average person reading a more traditional and limited approach to reality perception” (130).

New p-o-v
“Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas” by Shannin Schroeder

“Magical Realism, as defined by scholars like Amaryll Chanady, proves to be universal, a code that defies limitations of geography, generation, and language” (1).

Crosses boundaries

“magical realism is a narrative style which consistently blurs the traditional realist distinction between fantasy and reality” (5).

“Magical Realism is a literary technique that introduces unrealistic elements or incredible events, in a matter-of-fact way, into an apparently realistic narrative” (5).

Blurring and blending – there is still clearly visible signs of each, along with the new coloring.

“the magic realist aims at a basis of mimetic illusion while destroying it regularly with a strange treatment of time, space, characters, or what many people (in the Western world, at least) take as the basic rules of the physical world” (5).

Said to be the most restrictive definition of the term. Once again jabs at the naturalistic, extremely scientific views of the Western, industrialized world.

“According to Carpentier’s definition of ‘lo real maravilloso,’ the experience of the marvelous is unexpected and unusual...Nothing could in fact be further from magical realism” (7).

Magic treated as everyday.

“Magic Realism is a distinctly twentieth century genre that developed as a response to cultural diversity, vast immigration, and colonization” (8).

Not only a blurring of fantasy and reality, but a blurring of cultures, languages, traditions, religions, and the struggle that takes place to see who will dominate.

“Sanders argues that magical realism is not synonymous with the postmodern, which ‘focuses on technology, media proliferation, and logos, [since] Magic Realism emphasizes a return to cultural knowledge and authority and values pathos’” (10).

More contrast to the Western world – industrialization takes all the magic out of life, MR attempts to put it back in.

“A few features [of magical realism] can be identified: exaggerated comic effects; hyperbole treated as fact; a labyrinthine awareness of other books; the use of fantasy to cast doubt on the nature of reality; an absurd recreation of ‘history’; a meta-fictional awareness of the process of fiction making; a reminder of the mysteriousness of the literary imagination at work; a collective sense of folkloric past” (12).

Parameters that must be present*
“One of Chanady’s initial tasks is to refute the idea the magical realism is a genre; instead, she claims it is a literary mode that can be found in many types of prose fiction. Were it a genre, she argues, it would be characterized by limitations both historical and geographic” (13).

Globalization – is it too far fetched that we should have a world genre?

“First, it is characterized by ‘two conflicting, but autonomously coherent, perspectives, one based on an ‘enlightened’ and rational view of reality an the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as a part of everyday life. Next is the ‘resolution of logical antinomy in the description of events and situations.’ Finally, that resolution is achieved through the authenticity of the world view expressed in the text...If the narrator stressed the exclusive validity of his rational world view, he would relegate the supernatural to a secondary mode of being...” (14).

Parameters that must be present*
• Can Magical Realism be characterized as a third-world genre?
• Can magical Realism be characterized as a political protest genre?
• How would this serve a political purpose?
• What is the Latin American "boom" and the history of the genre?
“Notes on Spanish American Magical Realism” by Tommaso Scarano

“Each of them had his own dictator to describe...each had his own literary project to accomplish and had discovered a fundamental aspect of American reality which had formerly been ignored, his own hidden face of American culture” (10).

Out of great political strife comes great literature – the majority of S-A countries have had dictators and civil wars.

“Flores used the formula ‘magical realism’ to define a way of story-telling that had developed in the Forties and had rejected the stereotyped models of indigenous, regionalistic, creole realism, preferring a more complex image of reality, based, as Flores said, on “The amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (17).

Conference in 1954 – the term is used to define this literary movement. Doesn’t try to trace other roots and discounts Roh completely.

“works that make the greatest effort to recover and recognize an American identity, which is the keenest problem that ‘discovered’ colonial people have to face” (19).

The indigenous people and literature/oral traditions were all but eliminated when the conquerors came, and these roots are necessary to fully understand the population of any colonized country. MR can be seen as a kind of middle ground between rejecting modernism and trying to understand where we came from to see where we’re going.


“Introduction” from *Coterminous Worlds* by Tommaso Scarano

“They come from countries which have occupied ‘marginal’ position, not only in the geographical sense, but also in the sense of being kept on the periphery of the cultural system by its central forces, though destined nevertheless to converge towards/at the center, as a result of the dynamics at work in every system, or, in the structure of present-day societies, to become part of the polysystem” (2).

MR is a kind of grass roots movement in literature which indeed tells reality more as it is for a significant population: the third world. Their experience is often more “real” or in touch with nature and their own culture than our world of commerce and industry.

“From the periphery, seen for a long time as the place of the Other, these texts often embody their very own encounter with otherness; where the Other is everything that is not at ease within monolithic structures, everything outside the order, rules and logic of the West and therefore regarded not infrequently as lower on the scale of Eurocentric values” (3).

If this is true, why is MR such a popular genre in the U.S. and the industrialized world? The whole social system seems turned on its head. This is indeed an opportunity for people to see through a different lens and understand someone else’s point of view.
“Magical Realism Revisited” by Michael Bell

“Magical realism’ draws on pre-scientific folk belief to subvert the ‘Western’ commitment to scientific reason, itself associated with both imperialism and a history of realist representation” (126).

If this is true, and it is such a popular genre in Western society, could that indicate that we as Westerners/Americans are dissatisfied with our own world view. Is science not enough to explain our world? Is it easier to believe/enjoy folk beliefs and native traditions because we know they are pure ‘fiction’?

“To take the sub-genre in this way is to deflect its meaning from pre-modern ethnographic exceptionalism and to see it rather as the expression of a highly sophisticated universality. That also explains why ‘magical realism’ has characterized widely different writers around the world, irrespective of influence from a single regional center” (130).

Being of a lower/suppressed class cuts across boundaries like country, race, and religion. This allows us to have unlimited cultural perspectives. It begins the unification of the world.

“Fiction may be a deviation from history, or a concentration of it as meaning” (132).

The version in the history books is rarely even 10% of what actually happened, and from only one person’s perspective: the conqueror. MR can be seen as a supplement to the history of any particular region/country/people.

“But to a later generation around the world the universalistic claims of these writers seemed Eurocentric, and it became more urgent – while recognizing the mythic nature of every worldview, both individual and cultural – to question the hegemonic power of myth” (135).

Myths are the first history of any people/culture, why should we discount them now? This kind of scientific attitude seems more Eurocentric/Westernized than I think these authors intended.
“Why are Europeans and North Americans so Obsessed with Magical Realism?”
by Gustavo Pellón

“The situation of contemporary Latin American literature, what it is like, and who writes it, reminds me of the story of the blind men and the elephant...” (263).

Literature is always a different experience for each individual who brings his/her own prejudices, experiences, assumptions etc. to a book. Can this be applied to an entire genre?

“a glance at two virtual bookstores which sell giga-quantities of books in the United States, at least gives an impression of what passes for Latin American literature in this country beyond academia” (264).

MR is more popular in north America than it is in the countries where it originated. Why would these native countries not be as interested in their own authors and what they have to say?

“...and devote myself to the ‘real’ Latin American literature, that of the Native Americans. Magical Realism is a new avatar of that view which permits the readers in the United States to see the Latin American as other” (265).

The concept of focusing so narrowly on one genre or author from a country or tradition as completely representational is always unfair. Simply because every writer from a particular place is not an oppressed other doesn’t mean his/her literature counts for nothing.

“This atmosphere of what we call ‘political correctness’ has hurt the dissemination of works by Latin American authors” (267).

Writers are caught up in the dilemma of not being “the flavor of the month” to the world consumers. Often only ‘academics’ are political activists are well versed in all the literature of a particular place/time because they recognize the need for seeing the big picture.

“Add some folklore and a dash of tropical heat and come back later. That was the message I heard”...“but quite removed from my middle-class, metropolitan Chilean existence. All of a sudden, it hit me: I was Latin American, all right – I just wasn’t Latino enough” (271).

Rather cynical, one would hope that if his writing was indeed quality that he would find some kind of forum or outlet to publish him. I wonder if he’s not just bitter about being rejected, but this does raise a real concern. Have we pigeon-holed Latin American authors into this one genre?
“Magical Realism: A Problem of Definition” by Kenneth Reeds

“The magical realist was neither the practical ‘Machiavellian politician nor the apolitical man who listens only to the voice of an ethical ideal, but a man at once political and ethical’” (178).

MR is the great middle ground. Between fantasy and reality, politics and ethics, myth and science. Buddha.

“it shows how far Ortega’s translation had already brought magical realism away from Roh: geographically it had left Europe and crossed the Atlantic and artistically it had been transferred from painting to literature” (180).

History of the journey of the term. But isn’t literature a type of painting with words?

“However, the intellectual separation of the Latin American countries did not last and the period when Uslar Pietri recovered magical realism from what he called his ‘subconsciente’ was marked by the increasing interest in a new kind of writing unifying the continent. Elzbieta Sklodowska described the time up until 1950 as an era when ‘el intent por redefinir la realidad latinoamericana en terminos propios del continente es el denominador comun’” (181). The intention to redefine the Latin American reality in its own terms for the whole continent was the common denominator.

Another instance of MR being the unifying force, the great middle ground where countries whose borders were closed to each other were able to come together.

“He pointed out that while not necessarily needing to come from the third world, magical realism has worn a stigma for some time: ‘the perception [is] that magical realism, as a socially symbolic contract, carries a residuum of resistance towards the imperial center’” (190).

It is much more common for the Other to write MR, the oppressed, marginalized and poor, but is it not the call of MR to bring all people together in mutual understanding? The more elite and privileged North Americans should be encouraged to enter to genre.
“Big Mama in Postmodern Society: Tracing Magical Realism in Popular Culture”
by Gloria Clark

“In this case, the text presents itself as an amalgamation of Latin American history and experience, the result of five hundred years of progress through conquest and colonialism, through independence and the vicissitudes of governmental processes” (75).

MR starts from the very beginning, taking all history into account because real life takes all history into account in differences between peoples.

“García Márquez also reflected on the influence of the physical ambiance of Latin America on his writings during his Nobel acceptance lecture on December 8, 1982. In this speech, entitled ‘The Solitude of Latin America,’ he notes that nature alone in Latin America is so fantastic that it influences descriptions of day to day reality. It is a natural world full of exuberance and exaggeration, with exotic plants, for instance, which practically defy description” (78).

This would make it distinctly difficult for someone from the Midwest to write about fantastic landscapes, but I kinda wanna try. It takes someone either so steeped in his/her own country landscape to draw out its magical elements, or someone from completely outside who will be struck by the most mundane things.

“the conquering power moved in swiftly to subsume the existing culture and replace all of the key elements such as language, educational institutions, religion, and government with European experience and design” (79).

If they’ve been lost, however, can they really be reinstitute through literature? Does it matter if they’re different or not?

“Indigenous groups in Latin America have historically relied on oral tradition to preserve their cultural outlook and shared experiences” (80).

Oral histories are harder to pass on in a complete, unchanging form than written histories. If parents weren’t allowed to speak in their native language to tell their history to their children, it will have been lost in as few as a couple generations.

“For example, there are many situations and events that are not viewed as totally right or wrong, black or white, male or female, as they were in the past. Societal opinions have changed in regard to such topics as divorce, marriage, pregnancy, and child care, to name a few” ...“People have found themselves rushed into an age where definition by differences is not so dependable and the truth is not so rigid” (83).

MR exists in the middle, the gray area of life where dichotomal extremes don’t exist.
"Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas" by Shannin Schroeder

"Luis Leal, in 1967, would refute Flores’s claims in another attempt to petition for magical realism as a solely Latin American event" (2).

The great debate over the term and where the genre started. There’s never an exact date and place where a movement starts.

"to demonstrate to the European that there is no excuse not to know other cultures’...’Latin American writers are affirming a plurality of cultures within a larger sense of being ‘Latin American’” (3).

Politically and socially, I believe Latin America will come into even greater prominence in the near future. Europe has always been studied and understood, especially by those conquered by European countries. However, the conquered peoples are beginning to take back their own countries. Also Africa will be the continent that will next produce the most important literature for our generation.

"‘an important presence in contemporary world literature’. It is ‘an international literature that oversteps national boundaries and languages, with roots deep in many literary traditions” (4).

Did not start only in L-A. The universal genre.

"His geographic association denied European artists access to lo realismo maravilloso, though in fact his own arguments rested heavily upon European sources and ignored his own partially European heritage” (6).

It cannot be denied to anyone, even the Europeans; and cannot be exclusive to anyone, including the Latin Americans."
Questions:

- Gender issues: how are women portrayed?
- Identity issues: race, social class
- Identity issues: importance of name
“Phenomenal Women: The Shape-Shifter Archetype in Postcolonial Magical Realist Fiction”
by Megan Musgrave

“women novelists have been excluded from the operative discourses of magical realism. While numerous critics discuss the work of García Márquez, Carpentier, Rushdie, Wilson Harris and other male writers when attempting to define the genre, few women are ever mentioned as contributing to our understanding of magical realism despite significant works by women across a variety of cultures” (66).

Three years later, is this still true? Or is it perhaps that certain works by women that are famous are not classified as MR for one reason or another? – Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Silko fall into the “immigrant women’s category.”

“With such dismissive turns of phrase, women’s writing has been relegated to the realm of the local, the ‘intimate,’ and the personal, all of which are presumed ‘less strident’ (67).

Are personal topics any less “spectacular” than the politics men often write about? I wonder if the names were taken off of the works, would people still be able to identify the gender simply based on material and style? How important is gender if the work itself can stand alone?

“Shape-shifters are shamanic figures who, in this context, symbolically reveal the arbitrary nature of the boundaries created by the colonial system by transforming their shape at will” (68).

Examples: Beloved**, Kahu taking on not only her tribe’s sexism, but bringing back the tradition left out by the colonizers.

“[the female body] considered to be an object of repulsion and intense attraction simultaneously...Her powers of transformation are based on a compete mastery of her body, displaying a sense of inner authority and creative energy” (68).

When the oppressed find no other alternative for escape, they go inside themselves and find power no one knew existed. – Beloved and Kahu, Tita

“she cultivates a role as ‘preserver of the cohesiveness and structure of communities that have been faced with several historical and socioeconomic crises that have threatened the well being of the group’, namely, colonialism, capitalism, racism, and sexism” (68).

Kahu brings back the old traditions and leads her people when no one else is able. Fa Mu Lan becomes a warrior and fights back and invading force to save her village and China.

“The tension Douglas establishes between outsider and insider perceptions of Jamaica is a microcosm of the metatextual relationship of symbiotic resistance between the novel and its reader” (77).

Even though we are reading about these outsider groups, that doesn’t make us an insider. We gain a better, clearer understanding of their struggle, but we will never be able to truly understand it because we have not lived it.
“Bella’s story of the slave girl reiterates the power of women’s laughter; remembering the secrets of creation, the slave girl laughs at the auctioneer’s presumption that her body is something to be bought and sold” (79).

Women are usually portrayed as weeping or gossiping. Find examples of laughter.

“Bella’s overt re-writing of Genesis, the penultimate patriarchal narrative of creation, with the verse ‘in the beginning there was laughter’ suggest that in order to overcome the sorrow that defines her existence, the shaman must introduce her myth of women’s empowerment in a way that allows it to be heard without disturbing the precarious balance that individual women have struck in their lives” (80).

Still walking on eggshells. Women should feel able to turn the system on its head if they want.
"Unsavory Representations in Laura Esquivel’s Like Water for Chocolate" by Helene Price

"the works of Laura Esquivel...reinforce the ‘traditional’ boundaries of gender, race, and class” (182).

Women in the kitchen, mixed race people as servants, and poor people as unsophisticated and wild. Does this really reinforce the boundaries? Or does it simply point them out as a fact of life, shoving them in people’s face for them to decide?

"Mamá Elena is a strong and dominant woman, she cannot be considered a positive role model for women, for her cruelty and despotism imply that for a woman to be strong, she must be a ruthless, masculine and authoritarian woman who rules with an iron fist” (184).

Give an example of a good female role model. Do they exist in literature? Or are we still deconstructing what a woman shouldn’t be, we still don’t know what or how she should be?

"it is ultimately Pedro who controls their irrational behavior and interactions” (185).

Is it Pedro, the individual, or the machisto systems put in place by centuries of tradition? These women give him the power because they know no other system, but they still each exercise their own power in her own way. If you know how to play the system, you can get a lot farther than trying to reform the system all by yourself.

"This common motif advocates female passivity, fidelity and dependence on the male subject...acting from the heart and not from the head” (186).

Really? Women = heart; Men = head – is one really better than the other? Since when did acting on an intuition become foolish? This could be another reaction to Westernized society – science deals with the head, and feelings and emotions have been demonized as irrational and not useful to making decisions.
"Suspended Between the Nastiness of Life and the Meanness of the Dead": Beloved as the Physical Embodiment of Magical Realism” – from *Rediscovering MR in the Americas* by Shannin Schroeder

"Beloved is ‘the embodiment of the past that must be remembered in order to be forgotten’” (97).

What is Beloved? 1) the ghost of the murdered baby; 2) Sethe’s past; 3) the escaped girl kept locked up in a shed; 4) Baby Suggs come back to life; 5) a demon; 6) an angel.

“For African Americans, at least until the recent past, the experience of spirits communicating with the living was a natural one rather than a weird, unnatural act” (99).

Even during slavery and for a time after, the supernatural was natural. What happened to make it change? The forced assimilation into white society no doubt had an impact.

"Beloved returns the father figure to the text in the end, providing Sethe with a man who is strong enough to put Sethe back together” (101).

Really? Does Sethe need a man to put her back together? Is she incapable of doing it herself? After all her negative experiences with men, I would expect her to put herself back together.

"The loss of name, Spillers argues, is a ‘metaphor of displacement’ for the cultural and social practices lost in the Middle Passage. The naming by Morrison sums up this profound absence in the historical record’ (Comfort 123). In a sense, though, Beloved invents herself through self-naming” (102).

A person’s name is so important – Beloved takes the word off the gravestone to tie herself to the baby and all of Sethe’s past. Also in *Whale Rider* – Kahu takes on the name of the ancestor, becoming the ancestor come back again, even though it’s a boy’s name. Santiago in *The Alchemist*, references the pilgrimage to Santiago cathedral.

"Thus, the ‘dangerous power of [the myths of slavery] to rigidify meanings and fix identities’ (75) and the linear progression of history must both be exploded in order to reorder the community” (106).

Escaped and freed slaves have to recreate their identities to really be free of slavery. Some took on new names to be “born again” in the North. The linear progression of history being exploded is parallel to the non-linear progression of the novel.

"This ritualistic suicide illustrates Sethe’s own self-loathing. ‘For Sethe, the price of inscription is sexual degradation, and her sex is worth only the seven letters comprising the word ‘beloved’” (108).

Circle of life – Sethe has killed her child, and now has the potential to create new life by offering up herself in order to commemorate her firstborn girl.
"For Sethe, in particular – whose name echoes Lethe, the mythical river of forgetfulness – *rememory* provides the key to unlocking, and ultimately transforming, a past her rational memory has repressed" (110).

Importance of names again – I don’t doubt that Morrison chose these names on purpose. Also, the forced remembering of a past in order to live through it, in essence, go through hell to get back out again and be forgiven.

"The naming by Morrison, like the naming by the Mothers of the Disappeared [in Latin America ...] enables her to ‘harness the magical power of unquiet souls’ in order to imagine and affirm a living community of resistance. Thus, the name ‘Beloved’ evokes not only the dead child, not only those who have died in the Middle Passage, but also the living African American community. (Comfort 122)” (114).

The Mothers of the Disappeared cling to their children’s names and photos because they have no way of finding out what really happened to them. Without a name, they will be forgotten.
• Who are the big names?
• What role does translation and language play?
“Spanish-American Magical Realism” by Tommaso Scarano

“The second difficulty is to find a language that succeeds in saying what cannot be said. García Márquez writes: ‘It is necessary to create a whole system of new words constructed for our reality’ (20).

Language is arbitrary, therefore insufficient for describing our world and our experiences of it. Can a writer ever truly convey what they have in their head? Or is it more like a dream? – you can tell someone what happened and what you saw and felt, but they will never be able to get inside your head.

“Introduction” from Coterminous Worlds by Tommaso Scarano

“Lastly, the language is both lexically and syntactically inventive and frequently has recourse to the multiplication of signifiers (lists), plays on words, polysemy, paradoxes, and a constant literalization of ‘figures’ – metaphor, oxymoron, hyperbole, and antonomasia – which seems to confirm the overturning of the dichotomy realistic language = true/rhetorical language = false” (6).

The language is played with as well as the laws of reality. Paradox is central. Polysemy = diversity of meanings – furthering the idea that language is arbitrary. Antonomasia = identifying someone by a title instead of their name. In other words, the most elusive literary devices are employed in order to overturn the idea of language being misleading. If it is obviously misleading and is out in the open with its devices, a reader can begin to look past the tricks and see through to the meaning.

“Magical Realism Revisited” by Michael Bell

“It may be, in other words, that García Márquez is less a cause than a harbinger of change (126).

García Márquez has been elevated to an extremely popular status, and is thought of sometimes as the father of MR, but I don’t think he either earned or deserves this title. That’s like saying Rock ‘n’ Roll is Pink Floyd, end of story. Only a fool looks at a finger that points to the sky. GM is such a finger.
“Why are Europeans and North Americans Obsessed with Magical Realism?”
by Gustavo Pellón

“The top three bestsellers in both lists are Isabel Allende, Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez, the authors most associated in the United States with magical realism” (264).

He goes on to say that at a literary conference in Latin-America, these authors were barely even mentioned, Allende not at all. Could it be that L-A has moved on to bigger and better things within their own countries while we are stuck on one phase of their writing history?

“Magical Realism: A Problem of Definition” by Kenneth Reeds

“However, the act of translation brought the term to the Americas at a moment when the continent’s waxing narrative needed a name” (192).

The term was taken out of its original context and used to describe a new genre in a different part of the world.

“Big Mama in Post-Modern Society: Tracing Magical Realism in Popular Culture”
by Gloria Clark

“García Márquez outlines the origin of the magical in his works. He first traces the magical influences in his childhood, as he grew up in the home of his paternal grandparents surrounded by the beliefs and stories of his grandmother and aunts” (78).

Who can remember a story they heard as a child that they thought was real, later found out wasn’t exactly the way they had first thought of it, but still wants to believe it? I remember stories my Grandpa used to tell me. Also, I believed in Santa Clause until I was about 11 years old.
“Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas” Introduction by Shannin Schroeder

“Writers do not as a rule think of themselves as magical realists or write exclusively magic realist works; if the label fits some of their novels or stories it is usually because what they had to say in them required that particular form of expression” (12).

The inadequacy of language forces us sometimes to use new and sometimes controversial forms of expression.
- How does mythology, religion, and traditional folklore fit into MR?
"Spanish-American Magical Realism" by Tommaso Scarano

"Mythology and folklore continually have come into, and passed out of, the discussion" (10).

Why would it have passed back out?

"translation of the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Quichua Indians, based on the French version of Georges Raynaud" (11).

Is there a common thread throughout all religions/mythologies that provides a basis for religion in MR? Several of our books have to do with religions and spirituality.

"Paul Valéry, who read the translation by Francis de Miomandre, was enthusiastic about these 'story-dream-poems,' with their 'bizarre mixture of beliefs, tales and customs, representing all the stages of development of all the ages of a composite people,' from 'a land where nature, botany, indigenous magic and theology combine to compose the most delirious of dreams'" (12).

The development of a people or just one person is highly influenced by the beliefs, customs, and theology of their community. Do indigenous people have a magical slant to their upbringing simply because their beliefs and religious system are different from mainstream Christianity etc.?

"a revaluation and use of myths and popular legends in the conviction that it is in the conscience of the people that 'a broad channel of communication between the mythical and the real' is created" (15).

The collective conscience or unconsciousness of an entire people will color the way they physically see the world, the way they interact with other peoples and among themselves. If magic is accepted as a fact of life by a people, then by their perception it is a real part of life.

"These ideas included those of the origins of the marvelous from a range of different cultures. These ideas included those of the origins of the marvelous in folklore, in popular mythology, and in religious syncretism, as well as the hypothesis according to which fringe cultures are the privileged site of the marvelous" (16).

What about isolation? Physical isolation of a culture lets them hold onto their own traditions and mythologies, while those who are integrated at one point or another into a more global society have to deal with the pluralism of religion and culture. Are they privileged because they are isolated and pure, or at a disadvantage because they cannot appreciate any culture but their own?
“Introduction” from *Coterminous Worlds* by Tommaso Scarano

“Cultural typologies are renewed by memory and by an awareness of new against old cosmologies, thus entailing acknowledgment of the persistence of myth” (6).

Collective memory – traditions are passed down, but some must be lost along the way. Also, religion cannot be put into context without another religion or lack of religious practices and stories to compare it to. To the isolated indigenous, his ‘religion’ is simply a way of life, not anything that can be changed or debated.

“At times it focuses on magical elements rather than literary aspects, or on explaining connections with local geographical, religious or anthropological questions (the ‘geographical fallacy’), or on the emergence of a general need for the supernatural and the religious as a popular phenomenon, such as in current ‘new age’ thinking” (3).

Religion as a popular phenomenon, but a universal one, shows that there is something beyond just religion itself that people want. Could the magical connections be some way of filling a void? The current paradigm is unsatisfactory, hence the ‘new age’ thinking and a search for something with a bit more substance (or a bit less substance).

“Magical Realism Revisited” by Michael Bell

“‘Magical realism’ draws on pre-scientific folk belief to subvert the ‘Western’ commitment to scientific reason, itself associated with the imperialism and a history of realist representation, so that the new genre is intrinsically oppositional and progressive” (126).

Science can only go so far in explaining our world and ourselves. The 18th-21st centuries have been, in the Western world, an attempt to deconstruct our environment and ourselves to find out just how everything works. But religion and MR argue that there are some aspects of the world and especially of the construction and functioning of a person that cannot be explained through science.

“Indeed, on a world-historical scale, the Bible is the most influential work of ‘magical realism’ in a colonial context, although this fact is commonly overlooked for the very feature that makes it so interesting a case: its peculiar status of having survived into modernity with a large readership for whom the magical elements are a matter of literal faith” (130).

Examples of MR in the Bible? How do these instances compare to some of the magical events we’ve read? The debate of reading the Bible as holy, infallible text, or as a piece of (fictional) literature. Why has the Bible survived so long if the stories cannot be treated as reliable histories?
“Big Mama in Postmodern Society: Tracing Magical Realism in Popular Culture”
by Gloria Clark

“The magical strain of narrative in magical realism often follows the ingrained myth, legend, and religion that is so alive in Latin American culture. Over time, there has been an amalgamation of traditions, those extant at the time of the conquest and those brought in as a result of the conquest” (81).

More amalgamations – taking perhaps the best or most used elements of each tradition and combining it to make a new tradition. In L-A it’s a type of Catholicism.

“This viewpoint or spiritual stance is interwoven into the fabric of the daily lives of Latin Americans, a strand is so integral that it cannot be separated without unraveling the whole” (81).

Also the Chinese American tradition has this kind of total immersion in the myth or religion in everyday life, to the point of superstition taking over. The older generation seems to carry on more of the traditions and force them on resistant children.

“Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas” Introduction by Shannin Schroeder

“emphasizes on ‘superstition and primitive faith,’ ‘popular myths, legends and folklore’ privilege Old World myths as ‘reality’ and indigenous ones as ‘supernatural’ ...” (8).

Another rebellion against Western society, who have said for centuries that their religion is the best, more right one. Many people are finding their way back to cultural origins, not only with religion, but with meditation, alternative medicine, etc. As we become a more globalized society we are more open to other cultures and ways of thinking.

“Phenomenal Women: The Shape-shifter Archetype in Postcolonial Magical Realist Fiction”
by Megan Musgrave

“Language tends to ‘die’ in the sense that word and sentences cease to have any definite meaning clearly identifiable by purely rational methods” (76).

Language is inadequate for the writer as well as the reader. Why do we as humans continue to struggle with it as a tool?

“‘Sentences cease to have any definite meaning’; thus even the smallest unit of the narrative, the sentence, is condemned as emblematic of Western hegemony” (77).

Here lies the difference between oral and written traditions. Eastern or indigenous vs. Western industrialized methods of transmitting cultural information. Tone of voice, vocabulary choices, and non-verbal gestures can give a sentence meaning when words typed on a page cannot. **
"The relationship between storyteller and listener, the primary relationship in West African storytelling tradition, is privileged over the satisfactory sense of closure Western readers often expect as a reward at the end of every story" (77-8).

If a real person is telling you this story, they must have heard it before themselves and experienced the “moral” or lesson of it already, giving the listener comfort that even if there is a sad/tragic ending, the storyteller is still able to tell the story, therefore it must have value. Western readers are left with either a happy ending on the page to go away feeling like the universe is still in order, or is deeply disconcerted because s/he has no one there to deconstruct his/her emotions towards the story. Listener and storyteller must have a two-way communication going.
Novel and Short Story Synopses
One Hundred Years of Solitude
By Gabriel García Márquez

A novel that chronicles the family history of the Buendías, set in a mythical Caribbean town called Macondo, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is considered the best modern example of Magical Realism. While García Márquez himself does not claim to be a Magical Realist writer, all of the basic elements of the genre are present and perfected here. Centered around the life stories of the Buendías, all of the characters are consumed by solitude, unable to reach out to those around them from the deepest parts of their selves. Also seen as a political novel, García Márquez writes about various wars and political disturbances in his native Colombia such as the civil war and the Banana Massacre. He was influenced by the oral story telling techniques of his maternal grandmother, with whom he lived for the majority of his childhood. His matter of fact way of presenting the magical and wondrous make this truly, if not the singular, one of the capstones of this genre.

Like Water for Chocolate
By Laura Esquivel

Esquivel takes another family tradition and mystifies it in her unique novel. Chapters are broken up into the twelve months of the year with an accompanying family recipe. The life of the main character, Tita, is centered in the kitchen. From there she is able to influence the other members of her household, particularly her tyrannical mother, Mama Elena. Condemned to taking care of her mother until she dies, Tita is not allowed to marry, even though she is deeply in love with Pedro. Pedro marries her sister, Rosaura in order to be close to Tita, but through circumstances beyond their control, they are still separated. Tita's supernatural abilities in preparing food and caring for those around her evoke a kind of mystical feminine, as well as addressing the problem of female impotency to control her own destiny in Mexican society.
“White Tigers” (chapter from Woman Warrior)
By Maxine Hong Kingston

Within a novel exploring her own Chinese-American identity and her relationship with her mother, Hong Kinston retells the traditional story of Fa Mu Lan in this chapter. In this version, the woman warrior wanders away from her village and disappears into the clouds of the mountain. She lives with and is trained by an old couple in the ancient martial arts so that she will be able to avenge her village. She learns an supernatural control over her own body as well as how to communicate with animals and the earth. When she returns to her village she is greeted as a hero. Her parents carve their revenge into her back so that she will bring honor back to her family. Disguised as a man, she leads an army to the imperial seat to overthrow the emperor who has allowed their village to be ransacked and destroyed. Hong Kingston transitions into this story so smoothly that the jolt out of it is very jarring as we are brought back to modern America where the battles to be fought are racism and prejudice.

“At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers”
By Salman Rushdie

This story comes from the West section of Rushdie’s collection titled East, West. The majority of the action takes place at an auction where people are preparing to bid on Dorothy’s ruby slippers from The Wizard of Oz. Set in the future, it provides a glimpse into one of Rushdie’s versions of our future by commenting on our present. Longing for home is one of the central themes, and it is up to the reader to define whom, what, or where home is.

“The Prophet’s Hair”
By Salman Rushdie

This story comes from the East section of the same collection by Rushdie. Huma, daughter of a wealthy moneylender in Shrinagar, seeks out the services of a thief to steal a treasure from her own house. One day her father found a silver vial containing a hair of the Prophet Mohammed that had been stolen from the local mosque. As soon as the hair enters the household changes occur in the moneylender that cause devastation to his family. The importance and power of relics is an overarching theme in both of the Rushdie stories, especially this one.
“A Drug Called Tradition”  
By Sherman Alexie

Three Spokane men leave a large party to try out a new drug down by the lake. Each has a hallucination of one of the other two in the car with images of him as a powerful Native American. One steals a horse, one dances to resurrect his dead ancestors, and one sings about the triumph of the Indians over the white man. The story culminates in a collective vision told by Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the local story teller. He tells of a better version of their own past where alcohol does not destroy them and they are able to rejuvenate their tribe and bring hope to their people. This story addresses the fine line between magic, drugs, alcohol, and the poor living conditions on Indian reservations.

“The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore”  
By Sherman Alexie

Two friends reminisce about the local basketball legends that have risen and fallen on the reservation. The story begins with praise of a high school boy who is the star of the team, but as he quickly falls into alcoholism, the townspeople simply move on to a younger girl who has skills on the court. The narrator himself used to be a basketball star, but once he had his first drink it all went downhill. This story is a sad portrayal of the way legends are born and forgotten on Indian reservations.

“Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation”  
By Sherman Alexie

When a woman dies in a house fire, the narrator takes in her infant son and raises him. The child is given an unpronounceable name in Spokane, but everyone calls him James. The child grows normally but never speaks until he is several years old. When he does talk the power of his words carry the weight of the whole history of the Native Americans. The experience of raising him brings about a change in the lifestyle of the narrator and it becomes a spiritual experience for him to be responsible for the life of another.
**Beloved**  
By Toni Morrison

Set in both pre and post-Civil War Cincinnati and Kentucky, this is mainly the story of Sethe. She is an ex-slave who experienced emotional and physical trauma on the plantation Sweet Home and ran away while she was six months pregnant. She made it to freedom across the Ohio River, but after only a month living with her mother-in-law, her previous owner found her. Based on the true story of Margaret Garner, the action of the story centers around Sethe murdering her oldest daughter and trying to kill her three other children to prevent them from being returned to slavery. Eighteen years later, the spirit or ghost of the murdered girl return in physical form to claim all the love that was denied to her. Sethe is completely consumed by the girl, who terrorizes her sister and drives out the man with whom Sethe had been living. Only once the black community came together to support Sethe after ostracizing and ignoring her since the incident was the spirit of Beloved driven away and Sethe allowed to rest.

**Whale Rider**  
By Witi Ihimaera

Born female into a strictly patriarchal society, Kahu survives her twin brother and has to struggle to earn even the acknowledgment of her grandfather. Descendent from a long line of Maori royalty, Kahu has to draw on an inner confidence that is magical in order to save the whales that beach themselves near her home in New Zealand. Ultimately she earns the respect of her grandfather and all of her tribe as she breaks gender stereotypes and leads her people into the future. This novel wrestles with the issues of gender, post colonization, and brings to life the oral traditions of the Maori people.

**The Alchemist**  
By Paolo Coelho

A young shepherd is intrigued by a recurring dream about treasure. After seeing a fortune teller and meeting a king who gives him divining stones, Santiago decides to sell his flock and pursue his dream. Along his journey he meets many different people, is robbed, beaten, befriended, falls in love, and becomes apprentice to an alchemist. He joins a caravan to cross the Sahara, hoping to reach the pyramids, where he believes his treasure will be found. This is mainly a story of one man’s journey to find out what his true treasure is and where it can be found. Ultimately he returns to his homeland, becomes very wealthy, and returns to the oasis in the desert where he marries the woman he fell in love with on his journey. It’s an inspirational story that ponders the questions of prophecy, predestination, and the belief in one’s dreams.
Author Biographies & Discussion Questions for Lesson Planning
One Hundred Years of Solitude

Gabriel García Márquez biography:

- Born 6 March 1928 in Aracataca, Colombia
- Raised by maternal grandparents
- Aracataca was a banana town which his grandfather helped found.
- Costeños vs. cachacos – coasters and highlanders. His family was costeña.
- Grandfather very much like Colonel Aureliano Buendía
- Grandmother full of superstitions and ghost stories. Told as matter-of-fact
- Left to be raised by his grandparents because his mother had married a conservative man her parents didn’t approve of.
- Went to school in Bogotá, didn’t like the city
- Started his degree in law, per his parents’ wishes, but really wanted to study journalism
- Met future wife, had 14 year engagement
- “The Metamorphosis” by Kafka influenced him a great deal – reminded him of his grandmother’s storytelling style.
- Faulker influenced the idea of a place as a character – returned to his grandparent’s house and began to form Macondo
- Travelled through Europe, settled in Paris for a while to write in a less hostile environment
- Finally returned to Venezuela and married Mercedes Bacha
- = Communist
- January 1965 had his epiphany that would lead to 100 Years
- Lived in poverty, pawning furniture to feed his family, he locked himself up and chain smoked to write 100 Years
- 1982 – won Nobel Prize for Literature
- Lymphatic cancer
- Lives in Mexico City & Los Angeles
- Currently writing his memoirs
Colombia: political notes

- Independence in 1810 from Spain – democracy
- Simón Bolívar reliberated the country – 1820, first president
- Two political parties: Liberals and Conservatives
- Today the parties are more like warring factions, both oppressive, corrupt, and abuse power. Very family oriented, moblike
- Costeños (coastal) racially mixed, outgoing vs. cachacos (central highland) aristocratic and formal, racially pure
- García Márquez refers to himself as a costeño and mestizo
- 19th century saw lots of rebellions, civil wars, and coups d’etat
- 1899 – War of a Thousand Days, defeated Liberals, over 100,000 dead, mostly peasants
- GM’s grandfather fought in that war
- 1928 = Banana Strike Massacre. United Fruit Company = American company had monopoly on banana industry. Only source of income for many costeños. = Western Imperialism, exploited workers.
- October 1928, over 32,000 workers went on strike, demanding hygienic conditions, medical treatment, functioning toilets, and payment in cash. Worked 7 days a week. Defined as subcontractors, not really employees – exempt from labor laws.
- U.S. ignored demands. Colombian military used. December saw a demonstration in Ciénaga. Conservative gov’t sent in military, hundreds gunned down. Over the next months, hundreds more vanished.
- Incident officially denied and ignored
- La Violencia – roots in banana massacre. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán tried to investigate the incident. 1946 Gaitán caused split in the Liberal party, Conservatives returned to power. Started terrorizing Liberal voters, killing thousands. Gaitán was assassinated April 9, 1948 after becoming party leader in Congress.
- Caused 3 days of riots = El Bogotazo = 2500 dead. Both parties organized guerilla armies. Lots of people emigrated to Venzuela. Ultimately La Violencia killed 150,000 by 1953.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. <strong>Author</strong>: Gabriel García Márquez</th>
<th>2. <strong>Social/Political</strong>: Colombia won, independence in 1810, 1st president in 1822, constant war, union, workers, liberals, banana workers vs. cuchillos, United Fruit Co.</th>
<th>3. <strong>Why MR vs. other style</strong>: De-politicize, “La Violencia” in the style of his grandmother</th>
<th>4. <strong>Gender?</strong>: Noriega Ursula, women in control, their family is only channel of voice, women’s rights, professional society accepted as normal</th>
<th>5. <strong>Race/Ethnic?</strong> : U.S. had monopoly on fruit market, banana massacre</th>
<th>6. <strong>De-centered, “other” Anti-W?</strong> : All is L.A. is at some point anti-U.S.</th>
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<td>7. <strong>Religion/Folklore?</strong>: Grandmothers’ beliefs, alchemy</td>
<td>8. <strong>Author’s Intention</strong>: Make political statements in a different way</td>
<td>9. <strong>Memory/Reality</strong>: Lemonia plaque, Chiribaya exist, wealth, violence, things happened, “deadpan style:” banana massacre can’t be understood to believe</td>
<td>10. <strong>Perceptions of Reality</strong>: Amerindian last of the stories, imaginative, fantastic elements in order to write about Latin right</td>
<td>11. <strong>Passages</strong>:</td>
<td>12. <strong>Misc.</strong>:</td>
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Discussion Questions:

Study and refer back to the family tree throughout

Day 1:

Pg. 2 – alchemy brought by Melquiades (keep in mind for "The Alchemist"). How is it that magical elements are treated as every-day, but something like a magnet is a magical invention?

Pg. 5 – earth is round – can Macondo be seen as a microcosm of the world and its progression? Basic discoveries made are magnificent at first, and then the world plunges into war

Pg. 9, 11 – Macondo is like an Eden. New town with egalitarian water rights and no death yet. If you had the opportunity to start over in a town like Macondo, how would you live your life? Isn't this what all utopian societies have tried to do? Essentially start over at the beginning?

Pg. 15 – naming: son has characteristics of the father if they share the same name

Pg. 37 – Úrsula found the rout her husband couldn't. How do you think gender is going to play itself out in this book?
Day 2:

Pg. 43 – Rebeca eating earth & paint – why do you think she does this?

Pg. 45 – 50 – “insomnia plague” – do you think American society has an insomnia plague of sorts? We are working around the clock. Are we eventually going to forget the names of things?

Pg. 54, 63 – trying to capture a daguerreotype of God – religious attitude – seeing is believing

Pg. 58 – “the fall” – authority battle over painting the houses blue

Pg. 69 – Pilar Ternera coals in her heart gone out – “Choc.” – the fire inside each one of us

Pg. 81 – José Arcadio Buendía tied to chestnut tree

Pg. 84, 85 – need for religion?, “levitation by means of chocolate” – they don’t really take father Nicanor seriously until he does something magical

Pg. 89 – wishing evil on someone, can it cause evil in general to manifest? – the power of intention – did Amaranta really cause the death of Remedios? Or is it only guilt feeling? Is it possible to affect someone else with your thoughts?

Pg. 99 – AV “waging war over things that could not be touched with the hand.” – Here begins the political voice of GM – so many wars in Colombia and South America, they forget what they’re fighting for/about.

Pg. 101 – AV farce of voting

Pg. 102 - AV
Day 3:

Pg. 150 – AV opinion about military

Pg. 159 – fighting because you want to – having a cause you actually believe in instead of doing as your told

Pg. 166 – AV fight religion and give prayerbooks as gifts – the hypocrisy of man

Pg. 186 – names: “While the Aurelianos were withdrawn, but with lucid minds, the José Arcadios were impulsive and enterprising, but they were marked with a tragic sign.”

Pg. 187 – twins Aureliano and José Arcadio Segundo – lemonade incident. Do twins really have that kind of connection?

Pg. 189 – hereditary memory? Recognizing a friend of your father’s

Pg. 191 – confusion over God and the devil and who “won” coming from the priest.

Pg. 199 – time has turned around and we’re back at the beginning. Time as a circular phenomenon, and having a personality.
Day 4:

Pg. 216 – Fernanda making food, a comforting thing, uncomfortable with her ceremony – AV, part of his association as a costeño – the woman from the highlands is the one who disrupts the casual comfort of the home and is hated by all. Even her husband leaves her.

Pg. 222 – 17 Aurelianos are marked with the ashes from church

Pg. 233 – enter the Banana company and the railroad tracks, creating a segregation line through the town. – now it’s possible to live “on the wrong side of the tracks” – the people that do are the ones who were there since the beginning.

Pg. 243 – Remedios’ ascension with the sheets

Pg. 246 – AV – blind rage and feelings of impotence

Pg. 261 – eating contest Aureliano Segundo vs. the elephant – how does gluttony fit into the picture of the sins of war? Someone consuming so much more than his fair share, and all for pride
Day 5:

Pg. 280 – Meme crossing over the fence to play with white children. Saturday dances only non-segregated times. – it’s usually the younger generations that cross the boundary lines drawn by their parents.

Pg. 282 – Fernanda only associates Catholicism’s relationship with death, not with life.

Pg. 305 – Moses – worked in the Bible, why not now? – The Bible as MR – why do people accept those stories as fact, or at least, not as myth or legend, but not more modern versions?

Pg. 307 – court decided the workers didn’t exist. How can you decide that?

Pg. 311-312 – Banana massacre, AV

Pg. 345 – shared solitude. No sex, just a silent understanding – suggests there’s something about solitude and a person’s need for attachment that runs deeper than the physical (sex, food, battle) – we want to reach out and touch another person’s soul/essence/spirit/intellect to know that they’re real.

Pg. 355 – time stumbles
Day 6:

Pg. 379 – discovering that you understand a language, “Everything is known.” Does this suggest that everything we need in our world is right in front of us? Is there a “doomsday” when the world will come to an end?

Pg. 422 – hurricane arrives as Aureliano Babilonia reads the last lines of his family history. What a waste – if the world were to start over, the new ones couldn’t even learn from the experiences of the first timers.

Transition to “Like Water for Chocolate”

- Mexican revolution = another time of political turmoil
- Esquivel may be responding to GM’s style of using fantastic events in a matter of fact tone
- Both are books about relationships between people and a society
- Both books are a response to a society and a culture. Different parts of the culture – gender, but as we’ve seen through Úrsula’s character, women are strong throughout Latin America