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APPREHENDING BUTTERFLIES
AND FLYING BEAUTIES:
BRINGING MAGICAL REALISM TO GROUND

by
Maria Takolander, B.A. Hons

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University, July 2003
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INTRODUCTION

From the Strangely Seductive to the Seductively Strange:
The Mesmerizing and Mystifying Case of Magical Realism

Magical realism. As Fredric Jameson notes, in ‘On magic realism in film’, even the term itself has a ‘strange seductiveness’ (1986, p. 302). Alluringly lyrical and an enigmatic oxymoron, the label tantalizes with its air of an exotic artifact and promise of authentic fantasy. The literature thus named, at least for less academically and more literally inclined readers, does not disappoint. The Colombian butterfly plagues, big-nosed Indian telepathists, Nigerian spirit children and voracious African-American ghosts that appear in these enticingly classified narratives, as their considerable popularity suggests, ostensibly fulfill the anticipations of Western reading audiences bored by flies of the garden variety and the strictures of scientific rationalism. What is more, the authors of magical realist texts often attest to the legitimacy of their marvelous visions when they materialize for book promotions.

However, while magical realism is a “seductive” and eminently marketable literary genre, it is also a “strangely”, even conspicuously, misconstrued one. Magical realist fiction may be famous for its alluring fantastical characteristics, but it is not some form of whimsical exotic fantasy. Magical realist literature may be popularly (and paradoxically) understood as a realistic representation of a genuinely magical marginal reality, but neither is it some kind of eccentric foreign realism. Just as magical realist texts emerge primarily from marginal places, magical realist narrative itself inhabits a peripheral space at the border that separates the two genres of fantasy and realism. With its base camp set up in the realist domain, it slips, skips or charges into fantastic territory, sometimes without recognition of its trespasses, sometimes with mischievous glee and abandon and sometimes with a confrontational and sadomasochistic attitude. While magical realism may appear to be geared for the entertainment of Western mainstream readers, its fundamental agenda, as its marginal location and transgressive action ultimately suggest, is the elucidation of a marginalist and transgressive politics. Magical realist texts confuse the genres of realism and fantasy in order to make subversive marginalist political statements that revolve around the ideas that the centrist discourse of realism is not an objective representation but a partisan
fabrication and that the centrist reality it defends, likewise, is not a self-evident entity but an ideological construct. Magical realist fiction thus not only obeys a political imperative but also raises radical poststructuralist literary and ontological questions. In consideration of the sabotage of orthodox versions of realism and reality that magical realist literature enacts, the transformation of that slippery genre into exotic curio in part by Western marketplace machinations seems neither innocent nor surprising. As the common message of magical realism is that politics always play a part in realist representations or, rather, fabrications of that hallucinatory phenomenon called reality, the reactionary falsification of that narrative category is also somehow ironically appropriate. To play a little more with Jameson’s phrase, popular images of magical realism are “seductive” and sedative illusions, while the true nature of the literary genre has remained elusive or “strange”.

As the confession of Jameson indicates, consumers of popular culture, whose desires encourage and are encouraged by the specious ideological contrivances that escort and distort the magical realist product, have not been the only reading audience to be bewitched by this fantastical literary tour de force. Magical realism, with its appeal to a First World fetish for exotically inclined distraction, has been responsible for fiction export booms in Third World countries, but it has also, unlike many other popular cultural commodities, attracted the attention of literary critics worldwide. Gabriel García Márquez’ magical realist prototype One Hundred Years of Solitude (Cien años de soledad 1967), for example, which has become a perennial best seller, has also inspired well nigh its own critical industry. In addition, the authors of magical realist fictions have been the recipients of major literary prizes. García Márquez and Toni Morrison, author of the magical realist paragon Beloved (1987), both have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981) and Ben Okri’s The Famished Road (1991), two other canonical magical realist texts, each have been awarded the prestigious Booker Prize. However, despite the illustrious accolades and the extensive commentary, critics often merely have demonstrated the “seductiveness” of the magical realist narrative category and intensified its “strangeness”. Indeed, magical realism has become, at least in the world of literary criticism, a term that is notorious for its theoretical indeterminacy.

Critics have confused magical realist fiction with a host of “strange” art forms, such as the identically named European painting style of magical realism, the
literary category of fantasy, the European avant-garde movement of Surrealism and the Western cultural phenomenon of postmodernism. They have also employed the magical realist classification to denote an impossibly diverse range of fiction. In fact, magical realism, similarly to Surrealism, fantasy and postmodernism, has become a literary division that often seems to function as a dumping ground for the convenient disposal of any fiction that deviates from or experiments with the rules of realism. In addition, while magical realism has “seduced” some literary commentators, inspiring them to speculate about the existence of Blytonesque magical faraway lands, it has “estranged” others. A number of critics, in response to the questionable contention that magical realism embodies a “marginal realism”, have denounced the entire genre as a market driven racist fraud. Fellow detractors have rejected the literary denomination on the ironic grounds of its apparent meaningless, while other equally dissatisfied but more persevering commentators have tinkered with the famous cognomen or divided the narrative genre into subcategories. However, magical realism has survived all attempts at comparison, dissemination, nationalization, criticism and sabotage and, as Jameson recognizes, remains a (perhaps too) resiliently enigmatic literary phenomenon.

In my thesis on magical realism, I attempt to strip the narrative genre of a little of its “seductive strangeness”. I examine the labyrinthine tangles of the critical discourse that magical realism has generated over the years and attempt to loosen the strangling grip of popular misconceptions. Through a process of negation or invalidation, an identification of what magical realism is not, I attempt to reveal what the literary category is and to offer a definition that is comprehensive and yet concise.

This thesis is divided into two parts, which are each divided into three chapters. In part one, I address the misguided tendency to define the magical realist literary genre in terms of the identically named magical realist pictorial movement, from which the narrative category derived its alluring name. This constitutes a primary source of academic confusion about magical realist fiction. In chapter one, I examine the roots of the magical realist label in European painting, and I trace the migration of the term across both geographical and generic borders to the Latin American literary arena. In chapter two, I investigate the confusion that resulted from this translocation and, invoking García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude as the universally certified exemplar of magical realist narrative, scrutinize the link between magical realist literature and magical realist art that
critics often take for granted. Indeed, the innovative narrative strategy that I identify as the definitive characteristic of magical realist fiction, which entails the realistic representation of the patently fantastical, decisively separates it from magical realist painting, which involves, by contrast, the irregular representation of the perfectly realistic. The nonchalant depiction of the ostentatiously magical within a realist framework also distinguishes the literary category of magical realism from the narrative genres of realism and fantasy, between which, as its binominal label accurately suggests, it dexterously hovers. Finally, in chapter three, I focus on the inaugural and discordant conceptualizations of magical realist fiction by the Latin American literary critics Angel Flores, who identifies Borges as the forefather of magical realist literature, and Luis Leal, who specifies Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Ángel Asturias as among the narrative genre's progenitors. Flores and Leal instituted not only the tendency to define magical realist writing in terms of magical realist painting but also the inclination to partition magical realism into a poststructuralist form and a political version. However, the magical realist literature of Borges, Carpentier and Asturias can be uniformly distinguished from magical realist art as well as unanimously encompassed by the magical realist rubric on the basis of their representation of the extraordinary as ordinary. My discussion of their pioneering magical realist texts within the Latin American postcolonial context in which they emerged allows me to further distance magical realist fiction from its nominal pictorial counterpart. It also allows me to expand upon my structural definition of the magical realist narrative genre to recognize its subversive nature. I examine the ways in which Borges, Carpentier and Asturias engage in a realistic representation of the evidently unreal in order to question the nature of realism and of reality. In magical realist fiction, as the latter day archetype of García Márquez demonstrates, the poststructuralist and the political share, albeit often decidedly uncomfortably, common ground.

Tracing the development of the magical realist literary genre in Latin America certainly contributes to foster a better understanding of this narrative form. However, many critics and writers of magical realism, including García Márquez, who is widely hallowed as the global authority on the subject, have suggested that magical realist fiction is so relevant to its cultural origins as to be inherently specific and mimetically faithful to them. This is a second prominent misconception about magical realist writing, which I address in the second part of my thesis.
Over the last half a century, magical realism has come to be affiliated with not only the literary output but also the entire region of Latin America, and this alliance has remained stable if controversial. Magical realism and Latin America appear to be joined for better or for worse, with the union witnessed and well nigh unanimously sanctioned by the publishing industry, literary critics and reading public of the Western world. Other authors from other usually marginal locales have also written magical realist texts, which the West has similarly enthusiastically received less as examples of a narrative genre than as pieces of anthropological exotica. In part two, I vigorously argue against the idea that magical realism constitutes some kind of a Latin American realism or, more generally speaking, "marginal realism". In chapter four, I examine the text that originally inspired the idea, Alejo Carpentier’s polemical foreword to his seminal magical realist novel The Kingdom of This World (El reino de este mundo 1949). In this renowned preface, Carpentier argues that Latin American reality is home to what he calls the marvelous real and thus suggests that the magical realism of his novel is a Latin American realism. Carpentier, through the medium of these two appended texts, was largely responsible for not only the conception of the magical realist literary genre but also its conceptual evolution. Numerous writers and critics of magical realism from within Latin America and around the world since have offered Carpentierian “magical margins” explanations for the narrative category. However, the Carpentierian “magical margins” premise is extremely dubious. In chapter five, I trace the roots of Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real to the exoticist philosophies of the European Modern Primitivist and Surrealist avant-garde movements in order to expose its cultural inauthenticity and questionable politics. Despite its purported autochthony and apparent nationalism, Carpentier’s “magical margins” hypothesis is actually little more than a suspect European imperialistic fantasy that confirms Western hegemony. The same can be said of the analogous “magical margins” theses that other authors and theorists of magical realist literature propagate in apology for the genre. Finally, in chapter six, referring to various magical realist novels from around the world, I argue that the conceptualization of magical realism as a “marginal realism” is generically misrepresentative. Magical realist fiction itself does not sustain the spurious Carpentierian notion that it constitutes a mimetic reflection of a magical periphery. Magical realism, which represents the unreal as real, is an inherently ironic and subversive genre, which exposes the delusory
capacities of realism and deceptive constructions of reality. While magical realist literature undoubtedly evidences an intimate connection with global margins, this is not because subaltern communities homogeneously experience genuine enchantment but because they are acutely skeptical, having been historical victims of the hegemonic center’s partisan manipulations of realism and biased malformations of reality. Magical realism is often equated with Surrealism, which similarly depicts the fabulous as factual, and postmodernism, which is comparably informed by poststructuralist linguistic and ontological skepticism. However, the political grounding of magical realist fiction distinguishes it from those past and present movements. My interpretation of magical realism in this final chapter makes further space for the inclusion of writers such as Borges, who have been traditionally excluded from parochially inclined characterizations of the narrative category. Moreover, it rescues magical realism from its decidedly dubious erstwhile status as a “marginal realism” and a marketing concept and allows it to be considered, instead, as a subversively marginalist and entirely valid literary genre.

Magical realist fiction, which is often affiliated with a vaguely metaphysical form of painting but which has also become conceptually inseparable from the tropical butterfly plagues and ascending virginal beauties of García Márquez’ novel, has itself well nigh drifted off into an ethereal region of tantalizing and tranquilizing mystification. The aim of this thesis is to draw magical realist literature from the realm of myth, in which it has become obscured, and to draw attention to the myths of realism and reality with which this transgressive genre is ultimately concerned.
PART I
From Magical Realist Painting to Magical Realist Literature:
Straying Outside of the Lines

Magical realist fiction has engendered a mass of contradictory interpretations since it emerged onto the global literary stage. The beguiling magical realist label is primarily (that is, in the first place and principally) accountable for the confusion because it constitutes a palimpsest. That is, the magical realist appellation was originally applied in a different context and ascribed a disparate significance. A German art critic coined the term to denote an unusual style of painting, which evolved in Europe in the 1920s and which involved the estranged depiction of familiar scenes. Literary critics on the other side of the globe then confiscated the attractive classification to identify an innovative style of writing, which appeared in Latin America in the 1930s and which entailed the realistic representation of the manifestly fantastical. The motive for the theft may not have been particularly transparent, but the appropriation nevertheless proved to be a famous success. The enchanting magical realist rubric has since become well nigh synonymous with the enchanted narratives of such renowned authors as the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez. However, traces of the label’s past meaning in the world of art continue to mar and, indeed, have always colored assessments of its contemporary relevance in the arena of literature.

The task of defining the magical realist narrative genre, because of the tainted nature of its name, necessitates a pseudo-archaeological exercise. An excavation of the origins of the magical realist denomination in the European art world and of the emergence of magical realist fiction in postcolonial Latin America reveals that magical realist writing cannot be equated with its nominal pictorial predecessor. A clarification of this fundamental error of association allows the fundamental nature of magical realist literature to be revealed.
CHAPTER ONE
A Portrait of a Label:
The Shadowy (and Shadowing) Origins of Magical Realism

The magical realist binomial was officially introduced into the cultural lexicon with the publication of a study entitled *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* ("Post-Expressionism, Magical Realism: Problems of the Newest European Painting") in 1925. A German art critic named Franz Roh was the author of the work, and he devised the term *magischer realismus* or magical realism to describe a peculiar style of painting that emerged in Germany at the end of the First World War. According to Seymour Menton, the author of one of the few subsequent analyses of the pictorial phenomenon, *Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981*, magical realism was the dominant style in German painting when Roh formulated the label and published his exposé of the new art form (1983, p. 27). Menton, who writes almost 70 years after the movement was inaugurated and with the benefit of hindsight, argues that magical realist painting also became popular throughout Europe and in the U.S.A. and continued to be practiced throughout the twentieth century.

However, the magical realist painting style, which Menton portrays as an internationally recognized art form, is a much more tenuous phenomenon than he suggests in his somewhat misleadingly enthusiastic study. The definition, the practitioners and even the name of the pictorial mode constitute sites of academic contest. Indeed, the fragility of the magical realist classification and the confusion over the definition of the magical realist category in the art world undoubtedly contributed to the successful appropriation and (perhaps somewhat less successful) semantic renovation of the seductive rubric by literary commentators.

*Towards a Definition of Magical Realist Painting:*
*Identifying the Ethereal (or the Barely Real?)*

Magical realist paintings typically depict industrial and metropolitan cityscapes (although human portraits and rural landscapes are also rendered) in a style that is distinguished by its intensely sharp and uniform focus, unusual angle of rendition, defined shadows, geometric precision, miniaturization of the subject, thin paint
surface, effaced brushstrokes and (resultant) photographic smoothness. This method of illustration evokes, as Jeffrey Wechsler argues, in 'Magic realism: Defining the indefinite', an atmosphere 'of stillness' and 'of unnatural emptiness and quietness' (1985, p. 294), and the intensified realism paradoxically imbues the scene with a sense of unreality.

As Menton suggests, magical realist paintings often resemble illustrations of the fourteenth and fifteenth century International Gothic period (1983, p. 20). The linear manner of depiction, microscopic detail, mannequin-like figures, static atmosphere and enamel-like surface that are among the hallmarks of the work of the great Flemish Gothicist Jan van Eyck are characteristics that are also common to many magical realist paintings. The Dutch artist Carol Willink's *Wilma* (1932)¹ and the U.S. artist Grant Wood's *Parson Weems's Fable* (1939), which Menton reproduces in his publication as examples of magical realist art, each exhibit stylistic similarities to van Eyck's renowned portrait *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434). The human figures in these magical realist portraits, like those in van Eyck's International Gothic classic, are conveyed with an unnatural exactitude. They appear, as Irene Guenther writes, in 'Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the arts during the Weimar Republic', 'overwhelmed by the almost unbearable stillness and isolation of their silent sphere' (1995, p. 46).

However, Menton, like Roh before him, identifies the Frenchman Henri Rousseau and the Italian Giorgio de Chirico as the 'two principal forerunners' (1983, p. 19). The magical realist painters may have rejected the exotic subject matter of Rousseau's so-called Naïve art in favor of a more civilized range of topics, but they retained the innocence of depiction, attention to detail and smooth presentation that are among Rousseau's stylistic trademarks. These characteristics can be found in several of the magical realist illustrations that Menton displays in his book. The Swiss painter Niklaus Stöcklin's precise but toy-like portrayal of building facades on a cobblestone street in *Rhine Lane* (1917),² for instance, and the German artist Franz Radziwill's polished but peculiarly childlike *Fatal Crash of Karl Buchstätter* (1929)³ are stylistically reminiscent of the work of Rousseau. In comparison, Edward Hopper and Charles Sheeler of the U.S.A, whose work is also featured by Menton, paint in a manner that recalls the Metaphysical mode of de Chirico. Hopper reproduces the strong geometric lines, striking shadows,
miniature appearance and vacant feel that distinguish de Chirico's *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (1914) in his depiction of a deserted commercial boulevard in *Early Sunday Morning* (1930). Sheeler exaggerates these same qualities in his portrayal of a lifeless, antiseptic and geometrically exact industrial scene in *Classic Landscape* (1931).4

According to Menton (1983, p. 15), the magical realist painters began to compose their portraits of urban realities partly in response to and in reaction against the prevailing artistic modes of Expressionism (1885-) and Cubism (1907-14). The magical realists, whom Roh also called Post-Expressionists, returned to a more representational, orderly and tranquil style in opposition to the distortion of the subject, anarchy of form and emotional intensity that typified those dominant genres. However, Menton claims that the serene and lucid nature of magical realist painting also involved a rejection of the violence and chaos of the First World War (p.10) and that the focus on modern metropolitan vistas reflected the rapid industrialization and urbanization of society that occurred in the period subsequent to the war (p. 86).

Early twentieth century reality was transformed as a result of the unprecedented social changes brought about by the First World War and the advance of modern capitalism. In addition, the early twentieth century perception of reality was radically transfigured as a consequence of new psychological theories that illuminated and investigated the realm of the unconscious. As a result of the revolutionary ideas of the fathers of modern psychology, Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung, the palpable world became little more than a façade and the concept of reality became much more encompassing and strange. Freud envisioned the unconscious as an internal realm of primitive urges, forbidden desires and subversive forces that each individual struggles against continually, if unwittingly, in order to live a civilized existence. Jung, in comparison, portrayed the unconscious as the collective source of a raw, timeless and authentic form of wisdom that informed and validated the dreams, myths and religions of the whole of humankind and affirmed human fraternity. Many artists in the early part of the twentieth century were motivated to create art forms that reflected these alternative visions of reality and captured the mystery. The Surrealist school of artists of the 1920s and 30s may have been the most famous explorers of the unconscious, but

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3 See appendix A, illustration 3.
4 See appendix A, illustration 4.
Menton claims that the magical realist painters were also inspired to convey the new perspectives on human existence that the psychological theories of Freud and Jung afforded (p. 13).

Magical realist landscapes may not be as conspicuously mysterious as the dreamscape conjured by the entranced shamans of Surrealism, but they do evoke a comparably dream-like or eerie atmosphere. Magical realist paintings, rather than present bizarre dream-logic juxtapositions and exotically metamorphosed subjects, offer an intimation of the mystery or strangeness that exists within the ordinary. These pictures of readily recognizable but disquietingly distanced realities allude to the unseen and unknown, to the secrets that retreat with the horizon, to the visions that disintegrate upon waking, to the unbreakable equilibrium of desire and denial that is the human blessing and affliction. In his seminal study of magical realist art, Roh describes Post-Expressionism as being about ‘the constant appearance and disappearance of the real’ (qu. González Echevarría 1977, p. 114). Similarly, Wechsler contends: ‘[t]he very qualities that produce our pleasure in viewing magic realism hinder our full intellectual grasp of it.’ (1985, p. 298) Jorge Luis Borges, a Latin American pioneer of magical realist literature, in ‘The Wall and the Books’ (La muralla y los libros 1952), provides one of his many brilliant insights into the aesthetic experience when he writes:

[m]usic, states of happiness, mythology, faces worked upon by time, certain twilights and certain places want to tell us something, or said something we should not have missed, or are about to say something; this imminence of a revelation that does not take place is, perhaps, the aesthetic phenomenon.  

Jameson, in his discussion of the aesthetic effect of the modern fantastic, in ‘Magical narratives: Romance as genre’, similarly reflects on ‘an object world forever suspended on the point of meaning, forever disposed to receive a revelation, whether of evil or of grace, that never takes place’ (1975, p. 146). The cold, quiet, still and yet somehow glimmering façades of magical realist paintings induce such a restless anticipation or dread of an epiphany, of a shattering of the mystery, of a moment that has always already been lost.

While Roh identified magical realist painting as a Post-Expressionist art form, he also perceived it, as the paradoxical title he was inspired to create attests, as

5 'La música, los estados de felicidad, la mitología, las caras trabajadas por el tiempo, ciertos crepúsculos y ciertos lugares, quieren decírnos algo, o algo dijeron que no hubiéramos debido perder, o están por decir algo; esta iminencia de una revelación, que no se produce, es, quizás, el hecho estético.' (J.L. Borges 1989, vol. 2, p. 13) The translation is mine. I deal with original Spanish language texts wherever possible in my thesis. When I quote from these texts, my practice
something of a synthesis of the two poles of Expressionism and Impressionism or, generally speaking, of subjectivism and objectivism (González Echevarría 1977, p. 113). The style of magical realist painting could be described, if I may be permitted to assemble yet another oxymoron, as a subtly subjectivized objectivity. However, while Roh obviously perceived something magical in the immaculate Lilliputian vistas of magical realist pictures, that quality appears to be both very subtle and extremely subjective. Menton, in accordance with Roh, claims that magical realist art ‘injects a touch of magic in reality’ (1983, p. 23), but magical realist illustrations, with their strange mixture of childlike naivete and intellectual frigidity, are somehow rather frightening. Menton characterizes magical realist painting as an optimistic art form (p. 52), which ‘provided one alternative to the existential anguish’ (p. 10) that many artists expressed in the war torn early decades of the twentieth century. However, the sense of total stillness and silence and the typical absence of human life are eerily suggestive of death. Indeed, even Menton contradictorily suggests that magical realist painting reflects the dehumanized environment of modern capitalism and contains a Jungian critique of ‘the limitations of an overly rational and technological society’. Is the goal of the magical realist artists to celebrate the magic that endures within mundane and mercantile suburbia or to allude to the sterility of a world dictated by reason and to hint at the madness that lurks beneath the rational façade? Do magical realist paintings resemble scenes from a dream, as Menton claims (p. 13), or scenes from a nightmare? Guenther, unlike Menton, acknowledges the ambivalence. She argues that magical realist art evokes an atmosphere of ‘unheimlichkeit’ or uncanniness that is both ‘monstrous and marvelous’ and that elicits both ‘fear and wonder’ (1995, p. 36).

However, the enchanted properties that Roh originally detected in this style of painting appear to have escaped the attention of the majority of art critics. Indeed, Roh’s magical characterization of the pictorial mode was contested from the time of its first enunciation. In the same year that Roh published his seminal critical study of the magical realist phenomenon, Gustav Hartlaub, the director of the Mannheim Art Museum in Germany, organized an exhibition of “magical realist” paintings under the more ascetic and arguably more appropriate title of Die Neue Sachlichkeit or The New Objectivity. Significantly, The Oxford Dictionary of Art
defines The New Objectivity, which seems to be well nigh equivalent to magical realist painting, as ‘the use of meticulous detail to portray the face of evil’ (1997, p. 396). While Menton retains Roh’s more seductive label and remains faithful to his more optimistic definition, he nevertheless concedes that Hartlaub’s rubric defeated magical realism as the more popularly recognized name for the art form (1983, p. 17). Indeed, even Roh himself abandoned his preliminary appellation and adopted Hartlaub’s more austere exhibition classification in his 1958 publication, German Art in the Twentieth Century (Menton 1983, p. 18).

However, “magical realist” illustrations, such as those that Menton reproduces in his “rediscovery” of this purportedly sixty three year long movement, have also more commonly been categorized under other alternative labels, which include Photorealism (also known as Superrealism or Hyperrealism), Precisionism and Metaphysical painting. In fact, the painting that Menton identifies as ‘the single best-known example of magic realism’ (1983, p. 86), Christina’s World (1948) by Andrew Wyeth of the U.S.A., is not recognized as such by other art publications. The Oxford Dictionary of Art, for example, fails to make any reference to magical realism in its section on Wyeth and states only that this particular painting is well known (1997, p. 611). Since Roh’s identification of the magical realist pictorial style, its existence has often appeared to be as tenuous as the element of magic that inspired his original label.

From the European Art World to the Latin American Literary Arena: Stealing a Label (and a Legacy?)

Roh’s study of magical realist art was translated into Spanish and published in Spain in José Ortega y Gasset’s Revista del Occidente (“Review of the West”) in 1927. This journal was also circulated in Spanish America, where it was of profound influence among the cultural elite, who eagerly consumed the cultural news from Europe that it provided (González Echevarría 1977, p. 52). The

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6 Magical realism, however, as Menton also acknowledges, is not always understood as a subordinate synonym for The New Objectivity and is alternatively understood as a right wing version of the left wing movement of The New Objectivity (1983, p. 23). According to this interpretation, as Guenther explains, painters such as Georg Schrimpf, Carl Grossberg and Franz Radziwill, whom the Nazis received favorably because their styles closely resembled the Neo-Classicism that Hitler endorsed, are categorized as magical realists, while artists such as Max Beckmann, Otto Dix and George Grosz, whom the Nazis rejected because their work retained Expressionist elements and criticized bourgeois society, are classified under the rubric of The New Objectivity (1995, p. 56).
seductive magical realist appellation, which was disseminated among cultural circles in Latin America just two years after Roh invented it in Germany, immediately captured the attention of literary commentators and was swiftly stolen across geographical borders and linguistic barriers as well as the great generic divide. Indeed, according to the Argentine writer and essayist Enrique Anderson Imbert, in ‘El “realismo mágico” en la ficción hispanoamericana’ (“Magical realism’ in Hispano-American fiction”), literary critics in Buenos Aires appropriated the appealing label within a year of its introduction to the Argentine capital (1976, p. 12). The issue of when the magical realist title was first officially used in reference to literature in Latin America is rather contentious. However, what is certain is that the term began to be employed in Latin American literary discourse with increasing frequency and growing distinction from 1955 when Angel Flores wrote his influential essay on the subject, ‘Magical realism in Spanish American fiction’. What is also certain is that the transportation of magical realism to the region of Latin America and to the arena of literature resulted in an enduring and highly successful migration. Roh may have formulated the oxymoron in an attempt to describe a fragile image of unfamiliarity that haunted the otherwise realistic metropolitan paintings of a small group of European artists. However, after 1967, following the multilingual translation and global circulation of García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude, the magical realist rubric came to be universally recognized and predominantly identified with a hybrid form of fiction that combined fantasy and realism, which Latin American writers had produced and were producing.

The magical realist label has been and continues to be employed in an extremely haphazard manner in relation to Latin American literature. In fact, it has been used to denote almost any novel written in Latin America, about Latin America or by a Latin American. It has also been used to describe a large variety of fiction written by authors of other marginal domains. However, if García Márquez’ One

7 Anderson Imbert writes only that the Buenos Aires literati used the label in verbal discussions as early as 1928. According to Menton, Massimo Bontempelli, who promoted magical realism in the context of both painting and literature in his Italian-French journal 900 Novecento from 1926 to 1929, published contributions from Latin American writers and critics, such as the Uruguayan Alberto Zum Felde, during this period (1983, p. 9). Roberto González Echevarría (1977, p. 109) and María-Elena Angulo, in *Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse* (1995, p. 4), contend that Arturo Uslar-Pietri was the first Latin American literary commentator to officially employ the term in his 1948 *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (1958 (1948); “Letters and Men of Venezuela”), in which he used the tag to describe certain Venezuelan short stories.

8 I examine this dubious association of magical realism with Latin America and, in general, the world’s margins in the second part of this thesis.
*Hundred Years of Solitude* is understood as the archetypal magical realist text, which appears to be the sole consensus within the entire contested literary genre, magical realist fiction would appear to be very different from the pictorial mode from which it derived its name. A work of literature in which a girl ascends into the skies while she folds bed sheets and a child is born with a pig's tail in a frontier Colombian town cannot be easily identified with or likened to a work of art that presents an unusually pristine and geometrically aligned European cityscape. However, a number of critics nevertheless define the magical realist narrative genre in terms of the identically named but strikingly different painting style. The manifestly inappropriate and contradictory definitions that have been advanced for the magical realist literary category as a result are perhaps the inevitable legacy of the literati's appropriation of the predefined label.
CHAPTER TWO
(No) Thanks for the Memories:
Separating Magical Realist Fiction from Magical Realist Art

Magical realist painting, despite its somewhat tenuous existence, rather feeble claim to the magical realist label and relative eclipse by magical realist writing, has nevertheless managed to exert a surprisingly powerful influence over the contemporary significance of the magical realist classification in the literary arena. Indeed, although the fantastical magical realist fiction of García Márquez seems to exist at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum from the realistic magical realist cityscapes of Western artists, some literary critics resolutely equate magical realist writing with magical realist painting and expressly base their characterizations of the literary genre upon prior formulations of the art movement. In fact, the urge to unite the pictorial and literary styles that share the magical realist label appears to be so strong that some critics of magical realist fiction are prepared to defy both logic and their professed objective in order to define magical realism as an homogeneous across-the-arts phenomenon. That is, they disregard the incongruities that exist between magical realist writing and magical realist painting and neglect to identify the essential characteristic of the narrative genre that constitutes their purported object of study, which decisively separates it from its alleged pictorial counterpart.

Towards a Definition of Magical Realist Literature
(and Away From a Definition of Magical Realist Painting):
Removing the Stubborn Stain of the Past

Scott Simpkins, in ‘Magical strategies: The supplement of realism’ (1988), is one such literary critic who defines magical realist narrative in terms of magical realist art. He begins his discussion of magical realist writing with a reference to Roh’s publication on magical realist painting, reconstructs Roh’s table of oppositions between Expressionism and Post-Expressionism into a chart that contrasts realism and magical realism and actually asserts that any further consideration of the historical development of magical realism would be ‘superfluous’ (p. 141). For Simpkins, the existence of a link between the two forms of magical realism is all
too apparent. However, the definition that he proposes for magical realist fiction reveals that his assumption regarding the existence of a connection with magical realist painting in fact required a little more scrutiny. Indeed, the strategy by which Simpkins defines magical realist literature, which is identical to the method of magical realist art, is the opposite of the actual defining procedure of magical realist narrative.

Simpkins argues that magical realist texts ‘present familiar things in unusual ways’ in a strategy of ‘defamiliarization’ in order ‘to stress their innately magical properties’ (p. 145). His definition is not entirely invalid as magical realist novels, like magical realist paintings, occasionally do operate by estranging the commonplace. In addition, they commonly achieve this effect by adopting a naïve viewpoint. This is typically provided by a character or, indeed, an entire community that has somehow remained isolated from the modern world (which is the ‘familiar’ territory of the assumed reader).9 In García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude, for example, ice is transformed into diamonds (2002 (1967), p. 102) and a train into ‘a kitchen dragging a village’10 in the astonished eyes of the Buendía family and their fellow residents of the remote village of Macondo, who experience these ‘marvelous inventions’11 for the first time. Wendy Faris, in ‘Icy solitude: Magic and violence in Macondo and San Lorenzo’, describes this narrative device in which a “‘real life’ situation is seen as if with fresh eyes” as ‘the “man-from-Mars” technique’ (1985, p. 49). However, the strategy of ‘defamiliarization’ that magical realist writers sporadically employ differs from the comparable practice of estrangement that magical realist artists utilize in a crucial way. The authors of magical realist texts may not be from Mars, but they are, unlike the European and U.S. magical realist painters, typically from the margins or from cultures outside the Western mainstream for which modern reality can appear genuinely strange. The alternative perspectives of modern existence that their magical realist novels provide represent not the ‘innately magical properties’ of Western civilization but an authentic heterogeneity in human experiences of reality. In other words, the ‘defamiliarization’ procedure of magical realist fiction reveals not the enchantment of the Western world but the hegemony of privileged perspectives. In addition, although magical realist texts may portray the everyday as exotic, this maneuver is certainly not, as Faris points out, new or exclusive to

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9 I examine the nature of the assumed reader of magical realist texts later in the thesis.
10 ‘una cocina arrastrando un pueblo’ (p. 331).
magical realist literature (1985, p. 49). Cervantes, for example, used a comparable technique in *Don Quixote* (1605). Neither is this literary device representative of magical realist fiction. Magical realist novels may depict the ordinary as extraordinary, but they more commonly, often solely and certainly more conspicuously operate in a reverse direction.12

Magical realist literature is renowned for and more appropriately defined by its representation of the extraordinary as ordinary. Magical realist texts may on occasion portray the "man-from-Mars" or, perhaps, the "man-from-the-margins", that is, the tourist from an isolated and underdeveloped region who experiences surprise in his encounter with what to the typical reader of the text appears to be the ordinary minutaie of modern life. However, magical realist literature is famous for and more accurately characterized by its utilization of a strategy that can be comparatively described, if only for the sake of the present argument, as the "man-in-Mars" or the "man-in-the-margins" technique.13 Magical realist novels more frequently depict the resident of a strange frontier who appears to be perfectly at case in a territory of oddities and marvels. In García Márquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for example, José Arcadio Buendía, driven by his passion for science, dismisses the distraction of a flying carpet outside his laboratory window in Macondo as he leads his two young sons, Aureliano and José Arcadio, in search of the elusive philosopher’s stone. The narrator informs us:

> [o]ne afternoon the boys became enthusiastic about the flying carpet that swiftly passed by at the level of the laboratory window carrying its gypsy conductor and several children from the village who cheerfully waved, but José Arcadio Buendía would not even look at it. ‘Forget those who dream,’ he said. ‘We will fly better than them with more scientific means than that mischievous bedspread.’

According to Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, in *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy*, such ‘authorial reticence’ in the representation of the logically extravagant is the characteristic that distinguishes magical realist literature from fantastic literature (1985, p. 123). Fantastic fiction,

11 ‘*maravillosas invenciones*’ (p. 333).
12 However, while the defamiliarization of the real may not constitute the definitive characteristic of magical realism, it nevertheless complements the definitive maneuver, the familiarization of the unreal, in carrying out the *raison d’être* of the literary genre. This is, as I suggested here and as I more explicitly argue later, to undermine hegemonic unilateral representations of reality.
13 I must qualify my analogy here, because I later vehemently argue against the idea that magical realism does provide an insider view into some kind of a genuinely magical marginal domain.
14 ‘*Una tarde se enentusiasmaron los muchachos con la estera voladora que pasó veloz al nivel de la ventana del laboratorio llevando al gizano conductor y a varios niños de la aldea que hacían alegres saludos con la mano, y José Arcadio Buendía ni siquiera la miró. “Déjenos que sueñen,” dijo. “Nosotros volaremos mejor que ellos con recursos más científicos que este miserable sobrecamas.”*’ (2002 (1967), p. 118)
at least as writers such as Edgar Allen Poe, Henry James and Stephen King practice it, depicts the non-rational event as a far more striking and problematical occurrence. However, not all fantastic narratives portray the supernatural in this way. Works of fantasy by the Brothers Grimm, C. S. Lewis and Isaac Asimov, for example, treat the marvelous as a logical matter and in a direct manner similarly to works of magical realism. In addition, contemporary magical realist texts are not always reserved in their descriptions of the fantastical and can often contain highly ironic self-reflexive commentary on the farfetched events that they relate. In fact, magical realist literature, which involves the representation of the unreal as real, manifests an inherently ironic strategy, which undermines or perhaps overrides the ostensible narrative restraint that Chanady describes.\(^{15}\) To be a little pedantic, then, ironic nonchalance rather than ‘authorial reticence’ is a better characterization of the idiosyncratic tone that distinguishes the magical realist representation of the magical as natural. Another more successful criterion to distinguish magical realist novels from fantastic texts also exists. Magical realism, as Faris succinctly puts it, in ‘The question of the other: Cultural critiques of magical realism’, ‘is a combination of realism and the fantastic in which the former predominates.’ (2002, p. 102) That is, magical realist texts, like realist texts, as Nancy Gray Diaz elaborates, in The Radical Self: Metamorphosis to Animal Form in Modern Latin American Narrative, ‘assume a vital political and historical relationship between the configuration of the narrative world and that of the external world’ (1988, pp. 4-5). Fairytales, children’s fantasy and science fiction, the sub-genres of fantasy within which the Grimms, Lewis and Asimov write, are not nearly as predominant or rigorous in their realism. In fact, while magical realist texts can be said to portray the “man-in-the-margins”, fantastic texts, such as Grimm’s Fairytales (1812-22), Lewis’ Chronicles of Narnia (1950-6) and Asimov’s Foundation trilogy (1951-3), tend to depict the “man-in-Mars”. That is, they are set in extra-terrestrial and solely textual realms in which paranormal occurrences are completely accepted and entirely expected as a result of their candidly imaginary contexts. The marginal realm of the magical realist novel, as a consequence of the apparent absence of or disregard for rational notions of the possible, may often appear to be similarly disengaged from reality or at least from the understanding of reality that the typical modern reader of the text maintains. However, magical realist fiction sustains a connection with a terrestrial and extra-

\(^{15}\) I examine the ironic nature of magical realism in chapter six.
textual referent. As Suzanne Baker contends, in ‘Binarisms and duality: Magic realism and postcolonialism’, ‘[d]espite the presence of fantastic events,’ the magical realist text ‘is always linked with the “real” world, grounded in recognisable reality through social, historical and political references’ (1993, p. 83). Magical realist literature may portray the “man-in-the-margins”, but the protagonist, however eccentric, is always human, the peripheral location, despite its distance and magical difference, is geographically identifiable, and the narrative, aside from the instances of the unreal, is often even historically verifiable.

One Hundred years of Solitude, for example, despite the intangible events that it portrays, is solidly anchored to our tangible world. Macondo, the remote village that provides the setting for the novel, may be a fictional place, but it is certainly not, despite the many patently fantastic occurrences that take place within its confines, a fanciful one. García Márquez modeled Macondo on his hometown of Aracataca (Apuleyo Mendoza & García Márquez 2000, pp. 10-17), which is located on the Peninsula de Guajira, a promontory on the Caribbean coastline of northern Colombia, and even derived the name of Macondo from that of a banana plantation that existed nearby (Bell-Villada 1990, p. 44). The novel’s reincarnation of the exact geography, commerce, population and history of that Colombian region firmly situates his imaginary village in that specific reality. The fictional town of Macondo, as we learn from the novel, like the actual town of Aracataca, lies to the south of the real town of Riohacha on the Peninsula de Guajira. Macondo, similarly to Aracataca, grows and prospers as the so-called banana company, the novel’s pseudonym for the infamous U.S. firm The United Fruit Company, develops banana plantations in the region and establishes the form of agriculture that continues to be the economic mainstay of the area today. The population of the town swells from the initial group of Spanish founders and the local Guajiro to include Africans from the Caribbean, Europeans and North Americans and comes to reflect the racial diversity that characterizes the region. As with many economics that are dependent on a single agricultural export, a bust inevitably follows the boom, and Macondo, like Aracataca, eventually experiences a decline and finally deteriorates into a ghost town. However, the downfall of Macondo occurs not when the value of the banana decreases but when the Colombian army intercedes to end a strike that the Colombian laborers on the banana plantations had instigated in order to protest against their exploitation by
the U.F.C. The strike and the ensuing massacre of an untold number of Colombians by their own military in the defense of U.S. interests is a real event that took place in 1928 in Ciénaga, a town that is located to the north of Aracataca and to the south of Ríohacha on the Peninsula de Guajira. Although García Márquez presents Ciénaga as Macondo, he identifies the particular conditions that inspired the protest (2002 (1967), pp. 413-5) and the individual, General Carlos Cortés Vargas, who authorized the troops to shoot to kill (p. 419).

Magical realist texts, such as One Hundred Years of Solitude, portray the fabulous as factual within the framework of a narrative that is, aside from the instances of the patently unreal, perfectly compatible with the literary genre of realism. This would-be naturalization of the supernatural through its incorporation into a customary realist narrative is the maneuver that has come to be the trademark of magical realist fiction. Magical realist novels, such as One Hundred Years of Solitude, may sporadically engage in the strategy of ‘defamiliarization’ that Simpkins describes, but a reverse procedure that involves the familiarization of the fantastically strange is much more characteristic of this writing style. In addition, although magical realist texts may occasionally alienate the commonplace in a way that vaguely recalls the altered magical realist portraits of modern metropolises, the commonplace representation of the alien that defines this form of fiction decisively separates it from its pictorial namesake.

However, while magical realist literature may not completely abandon the narrative techniques of the realist genre, the magical realist label is typically understood in its application to fiction, as Lois Parkinson Zamora and Faris contend, in Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community, ‘to signal ... a text’s departure from realism’ (eds 1995, p. 15). This ‘departure’, as I have suggested, takes the obvious form of a thematic deviation. While reality may appear to be the exclusive domain of realist novels, fantastic phenomena, such as the flying carpet in the above extract from García Márquez’ novel, form a distinct and fundamental ingredient of magical realist texts. According to David Young and Keith Hollaman, in Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology, “[i]n a magical realist story there must be an irreducible element, something that cannot be explained by logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief.” (eds 1984, p. 4) The magical realist text presents this illogical, unfamiliar and unbelievable component, in the words of
Parkinson Zamora and Faris, as 'an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence' that is 'admitted, accepted and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism' (eds 1995, p. 3). However, despite the attempted amalgamation of the two opposing genres of realism and fantasy, the hybrid product of the magical realist text is certainly not seamless. In fact, the supernatural is arguably even more conspicuous because of its incongruously composcd representation within the course of an otherwise realistic narrative. Faris, in 'Scheherazade's children: Magical realism and postmodern fiction', describes the inexorably discrepant magical element as 'a grain of sand in the oyster of that realism' (1995, p. 168).

In contrast, as Parkinson Zamora and Faris suggest, Roh originally formulated the magical realist label to denote a style of 'realistic, figural representation' that involved a 'reengagement' of the realist tradition (eds 1995, p. 15). Magical realist painting involves, as I suggested earlier, a conscientious return to a mimetic style of depiction. Magical realist painters portray their cosmopolitan subjects with an almost photographic clarity. Although their realism may not be completely pure, fantasy is certainly not the substance that corrupts their otherwise pristine portraits of modern metropolitan scenes. The magical realist artists infuse their realistic cityscapes with a glimmer of magic or a sense of unfamiliarity by virtue of certain identifiable peculiarities of composition. Menton, in his study of magical realist art, insists that the painting style does not involve the portrayal of the fantastic (1983, p. 13). In fact, he distinguishes magical realist painting from Surrealist art on these grounds. He argues that, although Surrealist and magical realist illustrations share a 'similar precise-line, sharp-focus technique', magical realist art works can be identified by the realistic nature of their subject matter (p. 66). He contends: '[w]hereas magic realism injects a touch of magic in reality, it should not be confused with fantastic realism, which portrays the magic, the imaginary, the fantastic in a somewhat realistic manner.' (p. 23) Menton may have had Surrealism in mind when he devised this alternative category of 'fantastic realism', but he inadvertently almost perfectly characterizes magical realist literature.17 Magical realist art may involve the enchanted representation of the real that Menton describes, but magical realist writing is famous for its 'somewhat realistic' representation of the enchanted. Julio Rodriguez-Luis, in The Contemporary

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16 This does not mean that the fantastic cannot be accounted for at all. As I argue in the final chapter, the supernatural phenomena that magical realist narratives portray variously encourage psychological, allegorical, political and poststructuralist interpretation.
Praxis of the Fantastic: Borges and Cortázar, discusses this crucial difference between magical realist painting and fiction:

[The goal of the Spanish American writers that are usually called magic-realists (...) was not really to depict the magic lying underneath everyday reality, and even less, to portray that reality objectively. These were the goals of the magic-realistic painters, who tried to accomplish them by stressing the mimetic character of painting with regard to landscapes and the human figure, while at the same time giving their paintings a subjective mood (...) or distorting their subject from the viewer by underlining certain of its features or removing from it elements that we would normally expect .... Instead, the Spanish American writers associated with magical realism reproduce reality in schematic, lyrical, exaggerated, caricatured ways which facilitate the momentary but frequent suspension of the tenets of realistic representation so as to allow for the introduction of supernatural events (1991, p. 107).

From Misrepresentation to Misrepresentation:

More Clearing Up

Simpkins' failure to recognize the marvelous as a distinctive and definitive feature of magical realist fiction seems rather incredible, particularly considering that he acknowledges García Márquez' marvel filled One Hundred Years of Solitude as a standard.18 However, Simpkins is certainly not alone in this oversight. A number of other literary critics have also been unable or unwilling to identify the peculiar commingling of fantasy and realism as the fundamental characteristic of magical realist narrative. In fact, although the supernatural dimension of magical realist literature arguably constitutes the primary basis for its popularity among mainstream reading audiences (who are, significantly, generally unaware of the previous pictorial assignation of the magical realist label), disregard of the fabulous features of magical realist fiction is one of the most common errors in academic interpretations of the narrative genre. As in the case of Simpkins, this appears to be largely a consequence of a misguided attempt to align magical realist literature with magical realist art.

Menton, for example, like Simpkins, explicitly insists on a correspondence between the two forms of magical realism. In his study of magical realist painting, he argues that magical realism 'is a valid term to describe a tendency found not only in recent Latin American fiction but in the art and literature of Germany, Italy, France, and the U.S. from the end of World War I to the present.' (1983, p.

17 I explore the historical links as well as the generic similarities and, ultimately, differences between magical realist literature and Surrealism in part two.
18 In fact, while Simpkins does recognize 'flying carpets, Nabokovian butterflies, mass amnesia, and so on' as features of One Hundred Years of Solitude, he nevertheless unaccountably describes these obviously paranormal phenomena as 'common elements of reality', which García Márquez defamiliarizes (1988, p. 145).
9) In a later essay, 'The Last of the Just: Between Borges and García Márquez' (1985), in which he ostensibly turns his attention to magical realist literature, Menton attempts to demonstrate the magical realist nature of André Schwarz-Bart's 'The Last of the Just' (1959) through a comparison with the magical realist work of Borges and García Márquez. However, Menton's focus remains manifestly distracted by magical realist art, and his interpretation of magical realist fiction is clearly founded upon Roh's account of magical realist painting rather than on these latter examples of magical realist writing. Menton defines magical realist narrative by its utilization of several techniques, which include an 'ultrasharp, static ... vision' (1985, p. 519), the depiction of an 'airless, vacuumlike setting' (p. 523) and the use of a 'sharp contrast between light and shadow ... reminiscent of De Chirico's paintings'. He completely fails to identify the fantastic as an integral feature of magical realist fiction, as his attempt to include Schwarz-Bart's Jewish holocaust novel into that category demonstrates. In fact, like Simpkins, Menton claims that 'reality is made to appear like a dream' (p. 523) in the magical realist text. The Jewish protagonists of 'The Last of the Just may occasionally experience reality as a dream or, perhaps more accurately, a nightmare, as Benjamin Levy does when he sees his mother kill one of their Cossack persecutors during a Jewish pogrom (Schwarz-Bart 1984 (1959), p. 80). However, magical realist fiction, as typified by García Márquez' 'One Hundred Years of Solitude, which Menton himself endorses as a paradigm, more commonly and more characteristically operates in a reverse direction and presents the dreamlike as real. In a later publication, Latin America's New Historical Novel (1993), Menton appears to concede the irreconcilability of magical realist fiction and magical realist art. He formulates a new literary category, the New Historical Novel, into which he relocates magical realist texts, including García Márquez' classic.

Theo D’haen, in 'Timothy Findley: Magical Realism and the Canadian Postmodern' (1990), like Simpkins and Menton, also characterizes magical realist literature in terms of magical realist painting and, as a consequence, fails to acknowledge the realistic representation of the fantastic as the distinguishing feature of magical realist fiction. D’haen quotes the definition that The Oxford Dictionary of Art provides for magical realist painting in order to describe magical realist writing, which he identifies as fiction "in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism but which because of paradoxical elements or strange
juxtapositions convey a feeling of unreality, infusing the ordinary with a sense of mystery” (p. 217). D’haen’s complacent acceptance of this pictorial definition as an accurate representation of the magical realist narrative genre is itself rather mysterious. One Hundred Years of Solitude, which D’haen recognizes as a magical realist literary paragon, is distinguished by its ‘infusing’ of the marvelous with a sense of the ordinary rather ‘the ordinary with a sense of mystery’. Indeed, even Findley’s novel, The Telling of Lies (1988), which forms the focus of D’haen’s essay, fails to fulfil D’haen’s criteria. Findley’s text certainly evokes a ‘sense of mystery’ with its enigmatic plot and anomalous depiction of a stray iceberg off the coast of the U.S. state of Maine. However, the C.I.A. conspiracy that the heroine Vanessa Van Home uncovers, which involves past pharmaceutical experiments on unwitting Canadian citizens, and the aberrant iceberg hardly constitute ‘ordinary’ phenomena. The iceberg, in particular, is an evidently extraordinary meteorological event on the Maine shoreline. Findley’s novel may qualify as an example of magical realist literature, but not for the reasons that D’haen cites.19

Harley Oberhelman, in ‘The absurd in three representative Spanish American novelists’ (1970), offers a definition of the magical realist literary genre that closely resembles Simpkins’, Menton’s and D’haen’s pictorially based characterizations. He writes that in magical realist fiction ‘[t]he vague unreality of words, metaphors, and symbols used creates a feeling of mystery and of reverie which makes everyday objects and situations appear shrouded in an unreal atmosphere.’ (p. 98) According to Oberhelman, magical realist fiction forms part of the wider literary category of the absurd, but his characterization of magical realist literature itself does not make sense. Two of the three texts that he studies as representative of magical realist writing, García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude and Juan Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo (1993 (1955)), create ‘a feeling of mystery’ not by the utilization of any vaguely real ‘words, metaphors and symbols’ but by the nonchalant portrayal of flagrantly extraordinary ‘objects and situations’. Oberhelman actually does acknowledge ‘the path of fantasy’ (1970, p. 102) that García Márquez follows in his famous magical realist novel. He also recognizes Rulfo’s early magical realist text, which relates the story of a Mexican outpost named Comala that is haunted by the dead victims of the despotic Páramo

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19 Findley’s text, as the subtitle of A Mystery suggests and as D’haen himself recognizes (1990, p. 225), can also be categorized as a detective story.
of the novel’s title, as the story of ‘a ghost town in the true sense of the word’ (p. 99). However, as both his definition of magical realist fiction and his consideration of Julio Cortázar’s experimental but non-fantastical novel *Hopscotch* (Rayeula 1963) as a third representative magical realist text reveal, he fails to duly recognize the supernatural as an essential aspect of magical realist narrative.

Young and Hollaman, unlike Simpkins, Menton, D’haen and Oberhelman, profess to distinguish the magical realist literary genre by the presence of an ‘irreducible’ fantastic element, as I suggested earlier. However, they feature several non-fantastical stories in their magical realist fiction anthology, and their justifications for doing so indicate that they remain significantly influenced, like their fellow misguided commentators of magical realist fiction, by Roh’s seminal conceptualization of magical realist art. For example, the excerpt from Rainer Maria Rilke’s 1910 novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (eds Young & Hollaman 1984, pp. 89-95), which consists of a lyrical and metaphorical description of the decay and eventual death of the young narrator’s grandfather, is devoid of fantasy and quite compatible with the genre of realism. Young and Hollaman justify its incorporation into the anthology with a vague reference to the ‘poet’s way of seeing the world’ that Rilke manifests in his writing, which they contend is ‘a “magical realist” trademark’ (p. 87). Young and Hollaman also include Yuri Olesha’s 1929 short story ‘Lyompa’ (pp. 153-6) and Elizabeth Bishop’s 1953 ‘In the Village’ (pp. 421-36) in their book based on comparable and similarly inappropriate criteria. Young and Hollaman write of ‘In the Village’ that ‘the whole texture of the story shines with magic’ (p. 419) and comment on the ‘extraordinary blend of realism and wonder’ (p. 151) that they find in ‘Lyompa’. Both stories, like the extract from Rilke’s novel, portray the death or suffering of an adult from the viewpoint of a child and use a lyrical and metaphorical style of narration. However, both tales, again, like the excerpt from Rilke’s work, do not portray the fantastic and, thus, according to the definition of magical realist literature that Young and Hollaman themselves offer in their introduction, cannot be considered as works of magical realist fiction.

Parkinson Zamora, in ‘The visualizing capacity of magical realism: Objects and expression in the work of Jorge Luis Borges’ (2002), similarly to Young and Hollaman, contradicts her earlier fantasy based distinction of magical realist

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20 In fact, while these narratives may evoke a magical atmosphere, they cannot even be likened to magical realist art, because they engender this effect through figurativeness rather than realism.
narrative from magical realist art. Indeed, she makes the unsupported claim that
'litery critics ... have largely preferred to ignore the origins of magical realism in
the visual arts' and suggests that 'we would do well ... to review the itinerary of
the term and reconsider its visual lineage.' (p. 22) Parkinson Zamora goes on to
define magical realist writing in exact accordance with Roh's definition of
magical realist painting as being 'characterized by its ... capacity to create
(magical) meaning by seeing ordinary things in extraordinary ways.' However,
she nevertheless paradoxically discusses the magical realist literature of Borges,
which is, as I argue shortly, like the magical realist fiction of García Márquez,
distinguished by its representation of the 'extraordinary' as 'ordinary'.

Examples of critics who perpetrate the misconception that magical realist fiction
is synonymous with magical realist art abound. Anderson Imbert is another critic
who adheres to Roh's definition of magical realist painting in his characterization
of magical realist narrative. He writes that magical realism 'represents reality as if
it was magical.' This is despite the fact that he also asserts that 'when a term
conceived in respect to the plastic arts emigrates to the literary arts, it must be
readjusted to its new conditions.' Unfortunately, such an adjustment does not
appear to have been carried out by Anderson Imbert nor a great number of other
commentators.

Whether these critics argue that magical realist literature and magical realist
painting constitute analogous cultural phenomena or merely acknowledge the
origins of the label in the art world, their interpretations of magical realist fiction
are certainly reminiscent of Roh's characterization of magical realist painting.
According to Roh, in 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', in magical realist art,
'the mystery ... hides and palpitates behind' the 'represented world' (1995 (1925,
p. 16). By contrast, in magical realist fiction, the fantastic is ostentatiously
apparent in the 'represented world'. However, the misrepresentations of magical
realist literature that these contemporary critics perpetrate and perpetuate can be
blamed not only on prior characterizations of magical realist art but also and
perhaps even more so on the initial conceptualizations of the emergent magical
realist narrative genre in Latin America.

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21 'presenta la realidad como si fuera mágica' (1976, p. 19).
22 'cuando un término concebido con respecto a las artes plásticas emigra a las artes literarias
debe reajustarse a nuevas condiciones' (p. 8).
CHAPTER THREE

Three Men (Borges, Carpentier and Asturias) and a Paternity Contest: The Birth of Magical Realist Narrative in Postcolonial Latin America

The inclination to characterize magical realist writing in terms of magical realist painting, despite the obvious disparities that exist between them, is not completely incomprehensible. Magical realism, after all, was a meaningful term when it was first employed in reference to literature, and so one could quite reasonably assume and argue that some resemblance must have existed in order for the utilization of the label to be extended from its pictorial context to its narrative one. However, while the first Latin American critics to apply the magical realist tag to Latin American fiction maintain an allegiance to Roh’s original definition, the basis for their loyalty and, indeed, the foundation for their appropriation of that predetermined rubric are not always obvious. Angel Flores, for example, one of the most significant pioneer theorists of the magical realist literary category, may identify prototypes of magical realist fiction that are vaguely reminiscent of magical realist painting, but Luis Leal, another influential early commentator, specifies other seminal instances of magical realist writing that are notably dissimilar to their purported pictorial counterparts. In addition, the texts that Flores and Leal nominate as exemplary of the emerging narrative genre, despite their differences, are consistently distinguished by the innovative realistic treatment of the fantastic that continues today to characterize magical realist literature and to divide it from magical realist art. The magical realist cognomen may have originated in the European art world, but magical realist fiction emerged from postcolonial Latin America, perhaps subsequently to but nevertheless, contrary to the suggestions of both these early commentators and latter day critics, quite independently of magical realist painting. An examination of magical realist literature on its own terms and in its appropriate context promotes an appreciation not only of its true narrative strategy but also of its inherently subversive nature. This in turn provides the basis for the belated reconciliation of the magical realist literary genre, which has remained divided into two camps since Flores and Leal offered their adverse inventories of early Latin American magical realist writers.
Flores was one of the first Latin America literary commentators to identify and define the narrative form of magical realism, and he is unmistakably influenced by Roh's original rendition of the concept.\textsuperscript{23} In his 1955 essay, 'Magical realism in Spanish American fiction', Flores refers repeatedly to de Chirico (whom Roh names as a precursor of magical realist painting) and describes magical realist literature, in accordance with Roh's construal of the pictorial style, as 'cold and cerebral and erudite' (1995 (1955), p. 113), 'uniquely civilized' (p. 116), 'sophisticated', 'dehumanized' and as exhibiting a 'mathematical precision and perspicacity'. Flores writes that, in addition to this 'preoccupation with style', magical realist fiction can be distinguished by its evocation of 'an infinite, timeless perspective' (p. 115) and by its 'transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal' (p. 114).

Flores' description of magical realism certainly fails to encapsulate or even approximate the García Márquezian magical realist narrative style that the critical establishment has upheld as archetypal of the literary category since the publication and dissemination of One Hundred Years of Solitude from 1967. García Márquez' novel, in contrast to Flores' characterization of magical realist literature, focuses on a frontier town rather than on the 'uniquely civilized', exhibits an interest in the material as well as in the 'cerebral', evinces strong humanitarian concerns and is set in a quite specific time and place.\textsuperscript{24} In addition, García Márquez' exemplary magical realist text more conspicuously and more characteristically transforms the 'awesome and the unreal' into 'the common and

\textsuperscript{23} Uslar-Pietri employed the magical realist title in reference to fiction some seven years earlier. However, he refers to magical realism only in passing. His description of magical realist literature as 'the consideration of man as mystery in the midst of the facts of reality' ('la consideración del hombre como misterio en medio de los datos realistas' 1958 (1948), p. 287) and as 'a poetic divination or a poetic negation of reality' ('una adivinación poética o una negación poética de la realidad') is, incidentally, also reminiscent of characterizations of magical realist painting. Antonio Portuondo also alluded to the magical realist phenomenon in Latin American literature earlier than Flores. His reference to magical realist fiction, like Uslar-Pietri's, is extremely brief but also recalls Roh's description of magical realist art. Portuondo writes that the magical realist text evokes a 'magical reality in which everyday things, illuminated by a halo of hallucination and anguish, futilely struggle to surpass their pure materiality' ('mágica realidad en el que las cosas cotidianas, iluminadas por un halo de alucinación y de angustia, se debeat en una lucha estéril por superar su pura materialidad' 1955 (1952), p. 136).

\textsuperscript{24} However, his novel also proposes a cyclical vision of time and is peculiarly vague regarding issues of temporality. The novel begins, for example: '[m]any years later...' ('Muchos años después...') 2002 (1967), p. 81.)
the everyday’ rather than the reverse. However, the magical realist appellation has
not always been employed in its literary context to denote the fiction of García
Márquez. In fact, if the term was first used in reference to literature in 1928, as
Anderson Imbert claims, the Colombian writer had only just been born. Flores,
who writes over ten years before One Hundred Years of Solitude made its
definitive impact on the narrative category, identifies Jorge Luis Borges as the
pioneer of the magical realist literary genre in Latin America and his 1935
publication A Universal History of Infamy (Historia universal de la infamia) as the
paradigmatic Latin American magical realist text.

Flores’ interpretation of magical realist literature, if it is understood as a
description of the magical realist fiction of Borges, is quite appropriate in several
respects. In fact, it is an apt characterization of well nigh his entire diverse literary
opus, in which Borges flirts with miscellaneous genres. A Universal History of
Infamy, which features a number of historical portraits of notorious personages
from around the globe as well as a handful of magical realist and fantastic tales
derived from international legends, certainly manifests an ‘erudite’ perspective.
The stories in this collection also exhibit a narrative style that is, as Flores
suggests, ‘cold’ and ‘mathematical’ in its ‘precision and perspicacity’. Borges’
later fiction, regardless of its genre, also consistently demonstrates this
combination of eclectic erudition and narrative civility, which has become a
Borgesian trademark. His later stories also often display a disinterest in human
characters and a preference for intellectual or oblique concepts, which render them
even more ‘dehumanized’. ‘The Library of Babel’ (La biblioteca de Babel 1941),
for example, is a fantastical parable that depicts the universe as an infinite library,
while ‘The Lottery in Babylon’ (La lotería en Babilonia 1941) is a politically
allegorical fable about an occult penalty-oriented state lottery (which evokes the
mystical, violent and arbitrary nature of the Perón regime in Argentina, under
which Borges and his family were unjustly persecuted.) In fact, even when Borges
ostensibly focuses on individual human beings, as in the magical realist story
‘Funes, the Memorious’ (Funes, el memorioso 1944), which portrays a character
who possesses an infinite memory, or in the crime story ‘Emma Zunz’ (1949), his
characters often serve as mere vehicles for his investigation of speculative “what
if” situations or for his elucidation of clever plot lines. In addition, Borges creates
what could be characterized as ‘an infinite, timeless perspective’ due to both his
invocation of the infinite as a theme in his work and his evocation of people and
places from all over the globe and from the entire spectrum of human history. However, contrary to Flores’ characterization, Borges’ literature is also commonly characterized by its transformation of the ‘awesome’ into the ‘common’ rather than the ‘everyday’ into the ‘unreal’. This peculiar matter-of-fact and, indeed, almost scientific representation of the fantastic, which Flores misdiagnoses, arguably constitutes the most distinctive feature of Borges’ innovative literature. It certainly forms the definitive characteristic of the magical realist revolution in Latin American fiction, which Borges led and which Flores, despite his ultimate misdiagnosis, perspicaciously announces in this essay.  

The “Infamously Universal” Magical Realism of Borges: An Imperialist Deconstructive Literature?

Flores’ failure to recognize the representation of the fantastical as real as the salient characteristic of Borges’ magical realism can be ultimately ascribed to his inability to embrace this innovative literary genre on its own terms as a home grown phenomenon. Flores, distracted by magical realist art and perhaps a lingering colonial subservience to European cultural paradigms, is unable or unwilling to recognize that Borges’ inaugural magical realism was not an extension of European magical realist painting but, in many ways, a response to the Latin American postcolonial environment in which it emerged. Indeed, Borges’ magical realist writing engendered a great deal of controversy and earned a significant

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25 The innovative realistic depiction of the unrealistic is the characteristic that unites the otherwise diverse fiction of many of the Latin American writers that Flores includes under the magical realist rubric, such as Adolfo Bioy Casares, Rulfo, Mario Luisa Bombal and Cortazar. (It also distinguishes the literature of many of the European authors whom Flores names, such as Franz Kafka.) Their representation of the fantastic is certainly a better basis for their homogeneous classification than the qualities Flores cites. The stories of Bioy Casares and Cortazar, similarly to those of Borges (with whom Bioy Casares often collaborated), utilize an intellectual and dehumanized manner of narration and often deal with sophisticated and inhuman subjects. However, like those of Borges, they are more conspicuous for their naturalistic representation of the supernatural. Bioy Casares’ *The Invention of Morel* (La invención de Morel 1972 (1940)), for instance, is a scientifically presented account, complete with footnotes, of an island that is inhabited by the human projections of a technologically advanced image recorder. Cortazar’s *Bestiary* (Bestiario 1994 (1951)) includes the stories of a man who regurgitates rabbits while minding his friend’s flat in Paris and of a girl who is sent away for the summer to a house disturbed by a resident tiger. The literature of Rulfo, unlike that of Borges, is provincial and philanthropic, rather than cosmopolitan and depersonalized, while the stories of Bombal are lyrical and romantic. The attribute that links their fiction with that of Borges is the representation of the magical as real. Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*, for instance, as we have seen, features ghosts, while Bombal’s *The House of Mist* (La última niebla 1984 (1935)) relates the story of a lonely woman’s romantic encounter with a “dream man”, who is presented (perhaps not surprisingly) as a genuine apparition. Indeed, the literature of Borges, Bioy Casares, Cortazar and Bombal (as well as Kafka) is often more akin
measure of notoriety within Latin America because most critics there received it precisely as a response, albeit a reactionary one, to the postcolonial nationalist political climate of the time. Flores, who fails to view Borges’ seminal magical realism in its appropriate context, is unable to identify not only the innovative narrative procedure of his magical realist fiction but also its controversial transgressive nature.

The intellectual, aloof and terse style that Flores praises certainly formed an important aspect of the new form of fiction that Borges pioneered. However, it entailed not an imitation of the techniques of European magical realist painting, as Flores suggests, but a repudiation of what Flores himself comparatively and contemptuously describes as the ‘mawkish sentimentalism’ (1995 (1955), p. 116), ‘flatulence’ and ‘elephantine and sprawling’ plots that characterized such ‘classics’ of the Latin American literary tradition as José Eustacio Rivera’s The Vortex (La vorágine 1967 (1924)) and Rómulo Gallegos’ Doña Bárbara (1977 (1929)). Flores’ evaluation of these prototypes of the Latin American novela de la tierra (or regionalist novel) is certainly unflattering, but it is not entirely unjust. Rivera’s The Vortex, an adventure story set in the pampas (or plains) and jungles of Colombia, and Gallegos’ Doña Bárbara, a tale of life on the cattle ranches of the Venezuelan llanos (or prairies), certainly tend towards the melodramatic, pompous and verbose. In The Vortex, a rubber trafficker abducts the young bride of the novel’s hero, Arturo Cova, who subsequently travels from the perilous pampas to the jeopardous jungles of the Amazon in her rescue. Along the way, he experiences a number of histrionically related adventures and articulates his feelings for his stolen bride in incongruously sappy asides. Gallegos’ novel similarly contains a romantic plot in which Santos Luzardo, the hero of the story, and Marisela, the daughter of the preternaturally degenerate Doña Bárbara of the book’s title, overcome all obstacles to form the predicted sentimental union and to afford the expected happy ending. The intellectuality and exactness of Borges’ prose undoubtedly provided a refreshing change from the bombast and prolixness of the regionalist novel for many critics in Latin America, as Flores attests. However, Borges’ innovative writing, as I suggested, was certainly not received with unanimous enthusiasm at the time of its evolution. This was due not to the economical style that Borges espoused but to what he chose to write about or,
rather, what he chose not to write about. While Borges may have rejected the ‘mawkish sentimentalism’ and ‘flatulence’ of the canonical Latin American texts, these were not his only or his most remarkable departures. Borges became notorious for his repudiation and subversion of their parochial realist aspirations.

Realist novels that involved the depiction of a local socio-geographical, socio-historical or indigenous cultural reality constituted the dominant and sanctioned form of literature in Latin America when Borges began to produce his peculiar style of short fiction in the early 1930s. Works in the regionalist genre, such as Rivera’s The Vortex and Gallegos’ Doña Bárbara, as well as Ricardo Güiraldes’ Don Segundo Sombra (1926), a tale of gaucho (or cowboy) life on the Argentine pampas, were perhaps the most widely published and celebrated. However, novels of the social realist genre, such as Mariano Azuela’s The Underdogs (Los de abajo 1916) and Martín Luis Guzmán’s The Eagle and the Serpent (El águila y la serpiente 1928), both accounts of the Mexican Revolution, were also prevalent and highly praised. The indigenist genre had also grown in popularity after the publication of Alcides Arguedas’ Race of Bronze (Raza de bronce) in 1919.

These novels marked a period of intensely nationalistic cultural production within many Latin American republics, which postcolonial theorists tend to view as a customary and necessary stage in the evolution of postcolonial nations. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures, for example, describe the creation of a parochial culture as a strategy of cultural decolonization (1989, p. 30) and contend that it serves a dual purpose: it both permits ‘a distancing from the centre’ and provides ‘a means of self-assertion’ (p. 167). They argue that the construction of a self-referential culture allows the postcolonial nation to renounce the consequence of the imperial world and the pertinence of imperial culture and, at the same time, to affirm the significance of the postcolonial nation and its right to self-determination.26

The culmination of cultural parochialism in Latin America during the 1920s, the decade in which the classics of the regionalist genre and a number of significant

26 Other postcolonial critics, however, have questioned whether the construction of a nationalist culture involves either a ‘self-assertion’ or a ‘distancing from the centre’. According to critics such as Carlos J. Alonso (1990) and António Cândido (1980), for example, the constructions of difference that parochial fiction offer conform to Western perceptions of the colonized as ‘other’ and cater to Western predilections for the exotic. Significantly, the regionalist texts Doña Bárbara, Don Segundo Sombra and The Vortex ‘were amongst the first Latin-American novels to be translated into the European languages’ (Franco 1971, p. 193). I discuss this issue as it pertains to magical realist literature in the second part of this thesis.
social realist and indigenist novels were published, undoubtedly involved such a
twofold anti-imperialist impulse and was certainly not an arbitrary development. It
coincided with the celebration of centenaries of independence throughout the
region. The First World War (1914-18) and socialist revolutions in Mexico (1910-
17) and Russia (1917), as Jean Franco writes, in An Introduction to Spanish-
American Literature, further ‘marked the end of a European hegemony’ (1971, p.
193) and inspired a new faith among Latin Americans in Latin America. However,
as the old empires of Europe diminished, the U.S.A., which began to emerge as the
pre-eminent global power after the First World War, initiated a new age of
imperialism and again subjugated and, indeed, threatened to subsume Latin
America, starting with Central America and the Greater Antilles. The U.S.A. took
command of Puerto Rico and Cuba after it defeated Spain in the war of 1898. The
U.S.A. also invaded and occupied Panama (on 17 separate occasions between 1850
and 1925), claiming a considerable portion of that nation's land for the
construction of the Panama Canal (1904-14), Nicaragua (in 1912), Honduras (in
1911 and 1912) and The Dominican Republic (from 1916 to 1924). It had begun
what was to become a prolonged and ignominious history of self-serving and
ruthless interference in Latin America. By the end of the First World War, the
U.S.A., whether through military aggression or economic infiltration, already
possessed effective control of a number of Latin American countries and had
successfully sabotaged their soon to be celebrated independence. Indeed, the
U.S.A had even managed to inscribe its supervisory role into the constitutions of
some Latin American countries, such as Cuba and Panama. The U.S.A. had also,
through an intensified campaign of capitalist modernization, a project that it had
initiated in the 1880s together with European imperial nations, effected radical
changes in the social structures and cultural practices of these republics and had
begun to seriously undermine their sense of cultural individuality. In fact, the neo-
imperialist political and economic practices and geographical and cultural
incursions of Latin America's proximate and powerful northern neighbor
constituted arguably one of the most significant stimuli for the preoccupation with
the assertion of a unique identity that Latin American culture reveals during this
period (and also beyond.)

At the turn of the twentieth century, cultural leaders in Latin America,
particularly conscious of the new imperial threat of the U.S.A., exhorted their peers
to contribute to the construction of a unique Latin American identity. The
Mexican poet Octavio Paz, in his highly influential essay 'Nuestra América' (1891; “Our America”), and the Uruguayan critic José Enrique Rodó, in his equally significant article ‘Ariel’ (1900), called for the cultural definition of a unique Latin American identity that distinguished Latin America from its neo-imperialist northern neighbor. Latin American writers responded. The authors of the regionalist, social realist and indigenist novels that dominated Latin American cultural production during the 1920s disregard the modern metropolises of commerce that foreign (and predominantly U.S.) capital had created and, instead, portray native landscapes, original communities and traditional lifestyles, ostensibly providing proof of cultural individuality and thereby theoretically bolstering the besieged image of Latin America's postcolonial independence. Even the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, whose Latin American modernist classic Azul (1888; “Blue”) notoriously championed a European aestheticism, published a volume of nationalistic poems, Cantos de vida y esperanza (1905; “Songs of Life and Hope”), in which he, according to Gabriel Coulthard, in Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature, ‘abandoned his ivory tower to write in virile and aggressive tones in favour of the spiritual and political independence of Latin America, in the face of North American political and cultural incursions.’ (1962, p. 2) Indeed, such was the intensity of the neo-imperialist threat and the vigor of postcolonial sentiment (and, perhaps, the effectiveness of the parochial lobbying) that the quest for expressions of cultural individuality, as Roberto González Echevarría and Carlos J. Alonso suggest, came to constitute nothing less than the catalyst for cultural production in Latin America. In Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative, González Echevarría argues that “[t]he evolving nucleus of the Latin American narrative tradition’ came to be ‘concerned with … uniqueness, difference, and autonomy’ (1990, p. 172). In The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony, Alonso similarly contends that “[t]he discourse of cultural autochthony’ became ‘virtually synonymous with cultural production in Latin America.’ (1990, p. 163)27

In addition, as the Chilean author José Donoso points out, in The Boom in Spanish American Literature: A Personal History (Historia personal del “boom” 1998), such was the intensity of the Latin American identity crisis in the twentieth

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27 An obsessive concern with cultural identity often characterizes postcolonial cultures. Andrew Lattas, for example, in ‘Aborigines and contemporary Australian nationalism: Primordiality and the cultural politics of otherness’, detects a similar preoccupation in Australian culture, which is, he argues ‘mediated through the production of an identity crisis’ (1997, p. 231).
century that ‘mimesis of what was verifiably “ours” – social problems, peoples, landscapes, etcetera – was transformed into a measuring stick of literary quality.’\textsuperscript{28} The classic status to which such seriously flawed novels as \textit{Doña Barbara} and \textit{The Vortex} were elevated is indicative of the importance that was assigned to the construction of a nationalist literature at the time.

However, Borges, contrary to the dominant and sanctioned literary trend of the era, refused to limit himself to mimetic portrayals of Latin America. To begin with, as Flores seems to recognize in his reference to an ‘infinite … perspective’, Borges elected to write tales that were brazenly unbounded in their geographical scope. In his fiction, Borges assembles a cast of characters from various localities around the world. However, his characters are, despite their heterogeneous cultural backgrounds, peculiarly homogeneous. In fact, their distinct and distinctive names typically constitute the only indicators of personal and cultural individuality. Borges seems to present cultural identity as a matter of negligible importance. While Flores may have connected Borges’ idiosyncratic ‘infinite’ vision to European magical realist painting, most Latin American critics interpreted it as a reactionary response to the postcolonial nationalist cultural imperative. As early as 1924, the editor of the Argentine literary magazine \textit{Martin Fierro}, who invented the so-called Bocco-Florida polemic, unfavorably compared what he deemed to be the European literature of Borges and other writers from the aristocratic Buenos Aires suburb of Florida to the parochial fiction of authors from the proletarian Bocco district (Dorfman 1991, p. 233). Since then, literary critics, motivated partly by the internationalist inclination of Borges’ fiction, have often presented Borges as little more than an ‘imperialist’ traitor, as Gerald Martin does, in \textit{Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century} (1989, p. 156).

Such accusations are certainly understandable on the extra-literary basis of the political opinions that Borges expressed throughout his life. In interviews, Borges notoriously proclaimed himself to be a ‘European in exile’ (qu. Graham-Yooll 1991, p. 10) and inflammatorily praised the U.S.A. as ‘the friendliest, most forgiving and most generous nation’ he had ever visited and as a nation in which ‘people … approach things ethically’ (qu. Ruch 2003). Borges also demonstrated an apparent sympathy for the imperial politics of Europe and the U.S.A. He

\textsuperscript{28} ‘mimético de lo comprobablemente “nuestro” – problemas sociales, razas, paisajes, etc. – se transformó en la vara para medir la calidad literaria’ (p. 28).
dismissed the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands War between Argentina and Great Britain, a battle in which hundreds of Argentines lost their lives and a subject which continues to inspire passionate anti-imperialist and nationalist sentiments, as 'absurd' (qu. Alifano 1984, p. 12) and, in his inimitable style, as 'a fight between two bald men over a comb' (qu. Ruch 2003). Borges also opposed the 1959 Cuban revolution that toppled the corrupt and terrorist dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and signed a manifesto in support of the bungled 1961 U.S. Bay of Pigs invasion. As John King suggests, in Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey, Borges was undoubtedly affected by his unfortunate experience of the national socialist Perón government rather than by 'any real understanding of the issues involved' (ed. 1987, p. 113). Nevertheless, the widespread condemnation of Borges as an imperialist recreant by anti-imperialist Latin American critics is hardly surprising. However, Borges does not really warrant such condemnations within the context of his cosmopolitan literature.

To begin with, Borges, contrary to the rhetoric of the contrived Boedo-Florida conflict, was never immune to the nationalistic spirit. His early publications of poetry, such as Fervor de Buenos Aires, Poemas (1923; "Fervor of Buenos Aires, Poems"), manifest a sentimental interest in Argentine history, culture, people and places. His first publication of fiction, A Universal History of Infamy, despite its stated focus on the universally infamous, nevertheless also continually refers to Latin America. 'The Cruel Redeemer Lazarus Morell' (El espantoso redentor Lazarus Morell 1935), for example, which is primarily the tale of a U.S. slave trafficker, begins with a reference to the Spanish American "philanthropist" Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who recommended in 1517 that Africans rather than indigenes be employed as indentured laborers in the Americas and who was thus responsible (at least to some degree) for the ensuing three hundred odd years of African slavery in the region. Borges then catalogues and celebrates the ways in which the African presence has shaped the culture, society and history of the Americas. While Borges reportedly bought and burned copies of his earlier work, which he derided as so artfully drenched in local color that 'the locals could hardly understand it' (qu. Ruch 2002), his mature work nevertheless continues to reveal a patriotic spirit. The majority of the tales in Brodie's Report (El informe de Brodie 1970), for example, are concerned with the military history of Argentina, the Argentine figure of the gaucho or the Argentine tradition of the duel. In fact, as Borges himself concedes in a story entitled 'The Congress' (El congreso 1975), he
engaged in a 'demagogical exaltation of an imaginary Buenos Aires of knife fighters'\textsuperscript{29} throughout his literary career.

In addition, while the majority of his fiction is culturally pluralistic, this is attributable not to any antipathy towards Latin America but to two main ideological factors. One of these is his philosophy of liberal humanism. Borges’ fiction is not only commonly universal in its subject matter; it is also typically universalist in its theoretical implications. This globalist vision by no means implies a renunciation of his nation, but it does involve a repudiation of nationalism. Borges denounced nationalism, with its insularity, exaltation of cultural purity and inherent propensity for intolerance, as ‘the main affliction of our times’ and encouraged people to ‘be citizens of the world’ (qu. Alifano 1984, p. 12). He urged: ‘[i]f humanity is to be saved, we must focus on our affinities, the points of contact with all other human beings; by all means we must avoid accentuating our differences’. For Borges, parochial literature perpetrates a dangerously antagonistic emphasis on cultural difference. In fact, in his fiction, Borges characteristically undermines not only the significance of cultural differences but of all distinctions that provide bases for the differentiation of self and ‘other’. The hero and the traitor, the victor and the vanquished, the dreamer and the dreamed, the divine and the human, and the mortal and the immortal are all one and the same. In his consistent subversion of any traditional basis for a distinction between self and ‘other’, Borges makes what can be perceived as a profound philanthropic declaration.\textsuperscript{30}

The second ideological factor that underlies the unique cultural indeterminacy that distinguishes much of Borges’ writing is his skepticism regarding the purported authenticity of parochial literature. Indeed, although Borges himself was not completely averse to representations of his nation’s culture in his fiction, he was often inclined to acerbic criticisms of the proclaimed authenticity of patriotic constructions of cultural identity. In ‘The Uncivil Master of Etiquette, Kôtšuké no Suké’ (El incivil Maestro de Ceremonias Kotsuké no Suké 1935), for example, Borges introduces his tale with the preamble:

\textsuperscript{29} ‘la exaltación demagógico de un imaginario Buenos Aires de cuchilleros’ (1989, vol. 3, p. 20).

\textsuperscript{30} However, his peculiar disinterest in human characters can also seem to imply a benign apathy towards humankind. In the fiction of Borges, human beings are all equally lost in the labyrinths of existence and can appear to be lost as equals in his monomaniacal contemplation of those mysteries.
I follow the relation of A.B. Mitford, which omits the continuous distractions that build local color and prefers to attend to the movement of the glorious episode. This commendable lack of orientalism leads you to suspect that you are dealing with a direct translation of the Japanese.  

In an essay entitled ‘The Argentine writer and tradition’ (El escritor argentino y la tradición 1932), Borges directly addresses the subject of nationalist literature. With typical deadpan wit, he writes:

in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe that if there was any doubt about the authenticity of the Koran, this absence of camels would be enough to prove it is Arabic. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabic; they were for him a part of reality, he had no reason to distinguish them; by contrast, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would have done is to lavish camels, caravans of camels on each page; but Mohammed, as an Arab, was relaxed: he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I believe that we Argentines can be like Mohammed, we can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local colour.

He concludes:

we must think that our patrimony is the universe; to assay all themes, and not limit ourselves to Argentine subjects in order to be Argentine; for either to be Argentine is fate, and in that case we are so no matter what, or to be Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask.

Borges, in this essay, defends himself against those critics who would have him confine his literary subject material to parochial representations in order to portray his nation and prove his nationalism. To begin with, Borges argues that costumbrista (or local color) texts, with their artful focus on national characteristics, depict not the nation but an ‘affectation’ or ‘mask’. In addition, he suggests that his culturally unselconscious literature is far more loyal to the nation than the deliberately patiotic texts of the costumbrista writers, whom he describes as ‘falsifier[s]’ and ‘tourist[s]’ and, indeed, the true scribes of foreign fiction.

However, while Borges was not unpatriotic, his representation of the essential oneness of humanity and his subversion of the authenticity of patriotic representations ultimately render false the postcolonial nationalist project of cultural identity construction, and this maneuver undoubtedly leaves his work vulnerable to accusations of treacherous sabotage. At the same time, while

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31 ‘Sigo la relación de A.B. Mitford, que omite las continuas distracciones que obra el color local y prefiere atender al movimiento del glorioso episodio. Esa buena falta de “orientalismo” deja sospechar que se trata de una versión directa del japonés.’ (1989, vol. 1, p. 320).

32 ‘en el Alcorán, no hay camellos; yo creo que si hubiera alguna duda sobre la autenticidad del Alcorán, bastaría estar ausencia de camellos para probar que es árabe. Fue escrito por Mahoma, y Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes; eran para él parte de la realidad. no tenía por qué distinguirlos; en cambio, un falsario, un turista, un nacionalista árabe, lo primero que hubiera hecho es prodigar camellos, caravanas de camellos en cada página; pero Mahoma, como árabe, estaba tranquilo: sabía que podía ser árabe sin camellos. Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local.’ (1989, vol. 1, p. 270)

33 ‘debemos pensar que nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque ser argentino es una fatalidad, y en ese
Borges’ cultural indifference can be feasibly perceived as an imperialist strategy that undermines the postcolonial project of cultural re-centering, it also can be interpreted as an anti-imperialist tactic that instigates a postcolonial system of cultural de-centering. Borges’ gesture of globalization is a gesture of relativization, which undermines the hegemonies of colonialism arguably even more radically and effectively than the counter-hegemonies of postcolonial nationalism.34

Borges also broke with the literary tradition in Latin America in yet another equally controversial and, for the purposes of this thesis, more significant way. Borges not only refused to write solely about the reality of his country; he also declined to write exclusively about reality at all. In complete contrast to magical realist art and in a maneuver that defines magical realist literature, Borges often elected to focus on the unreal, which he presented as something of equal significance and substance to the real.

Borges begins A Universal History of Infamy with factually verifiable accounts of criminal identities from around the world, but he soon strays across the fine line that separates the universe of history from the universe of mythology. However, Borges appears to be blissfully unaware of his trespass and continues to narrate his stories of the ostentatiously mythical with the same sobriety and economy that characterize his earlier narratives of the ostensibly historical. In the fantastic story ‘A Double for Mohamed’ (Un doble de Mahoma 1935), for example, the narrator calmly begins, with budding magical realist narrative panache: ‘[s]ince the ideas of Mohammed and religion are indissolubly joined in the minds of Muslims, the Lord has ordained that in heaven a spirit that plays the part of Mohammed shall always preside over them.’35 In his later fiction, Borges continues to concentrate on supernatural themes and to present the unreal as something that is as consequential and concrete as the real. In the allegorically fantastical ‘The Lottery of Babylon’ and ‘The Library of Babel’, Borges depicts conceptual worlds as if they are material. In the more definitively magical realist ‘The Zahir’ (El zahir 1949), in which Borges recounts his possession of and by a coin, and ‘The Aleph’ (El aleph

34 I interrogate the political effectiveness of postcolonial nationalist cultural constructions in part two.

35 ‘Ya que en la mente de los musulmanes las ideas de Mahoma y de religion están indisolublemente ligadas, el Señor ha ordenado que en el Cielo siempre los presida un espíritu que hace el papel de Mahoma’ (1989, vol. 1, p. 343).
1949), in which he describes his discovery in a friend’s basement of a spherical object that impossibly encapsulates human existence, Borges relates untenable personal experiences as if they really occurred. Indeed, even in tales that are not, strictly speaking, fantastic or magical realist, Borges plays a similar game. For example, in ‘Three Versions of Judas’ (Tres versiones de Judas 1944), Borges offers idiosyncratic interpretations of the historical figure of Judas, which he ingeniously corroborates and ingenuously submits as more legitimate than traditional characterizations. Similarly, in ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote’ (Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote 1941) and ‘A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain’ (Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain 1941), Borges examines non-existent texts as if they actually do exist. Borges is often so convincing in his presentation of these fictional worlds, experiences, personages and texts that the reader may on occasion begin to wonder if his narratives are indeed factual. In the magical realist story ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ (1941), for example, in which Borges relates his discovery of an imaginary world called Tlön, which is described in an imaginary book that is the work of an imaginary sect, Borges himself features as the narrator of the tale, several of his literary colleagues appear in cameo roles and the streets and suburbs of Buenos Aires provide additional material reference points. Borges refers to real texts (encyclopedias no less), conjures academic arguments about his imaginary books (conducted by his living peers in Buenos Aires) and utilizes many of the conventions of serious academic writing (including footnotes.) However, the reader loses any faith in the credibility of the narrative when Borges claims in all seriousness in a postscript to the story that the fanciful world of Tlön has infiltrated and begun to usurp the physical world that Borges inhabits.

Borges’ representation of the supernatural as actual, contrary to Flores’ suggestion, constituted a radically different strategy to that of magical realist painting and, like Borges’ predilection for universal themes, was more commonly viewed and, indeed, criticized by Latin American commentators in the context of the contemporary political situation. This prevalent censorious interpretation was certainly more understandable than Flores’ comparative one. To begin with, Borges’ depiction of the fantastical in the face of the very real situation of neo-imperialist intimidation and socio-political turmoil could easily be construed as ‘escapist’, as Antonio Portuondo avers, in (the politically revealingly titled) El heroísmo intelectual (1955, p. 136; “Intellectual Heroism”). In addition, his representation of the unreal as real constituted a radically subversive narrative
strategy that undermined the traditional mimetic literary philosophy that was crucial to the postcolonial nationalist project of cultural identity construction.

The representation of the fabulous as factual exposes the realist discourse as a fraud. It shows that realism is, as Frank Lentricchia argues, in After the New Criticism, ‘a problematic textual manoeuvre (rather than a textual translation) which creates the illusion of a non-linguistic object that is being mirrored’ (1980, p. 171), even when, I might stress, that non-linguistic object does not exist. Realism, as the magical realist texts of Borges demonstrate and as the very label of magical realism implies, is a bewitching strategy that can beguile the reader into a state of credence even when the reality it purports to portray is pure fantasy. Indeed, Borges’ literature, in its consistent representation of the immaterial as material, repeatedly shows that narrative and language, in general, do not copy any actual world but create their own chimerical reality. Thus, narrative, with its hallucinogenic world building powers, as Borges avers, in the renowned essay ‘Narrative art and magic’ (El arte narrativo y la magia 1932), is fundamentally magical rather than realistic.

Borges, as I have suggested, was deeply cynical of the contrived parochial narratives that were celebrated as genuine lexical reflections of Latin American reality. His respectful representation of the marvellous undermines their mimeticism and mocks their authenticity. However, this is hardly an imperialist plot, as some critics might argue, but merely a kind of aside. If Borges refused to be limited to depictions of his nation, he also refused to be confined to criticisms of nationalism. While Borges illuminates the artificial character of parochial portraits of Latin America, his focus is the artificial nature of what passes for world reality, which the construction of nations through narrations just happens to foreground so clearly. Borges, in his consistent confusion of the fictional and the factual, continually suggests that reality is so thoroughly infested by our linguistic representations of it that we cannot discern the world beyond words from the myriad worlds of words that we have superimposed upon it. Reality, as we experience it, is a labyrinth of simulacra. Reality, per se, is an infinite and infinitely receding mystery, which we experience only as a disturbing intimation of irredeemable loss and for which this multifarious façade is intended to compensate.

In ‘Avatars of the Tortoise’ (Avatares de la tortuga 1932), Borges writes:

‘[T]he greatest wizard (Novalis memorably wrote) would be he who would cast a spell over himself to the point of taking his own phantasmagorias as autonomous appearances. Would not this be our case?’ I conjecture that it is. We (the undivided divinity that operates within
us) have dreamt the world. We have dreamt it as solid, mysterious, visible, ubiquitous in space and stable in time; but in its architecture we have allowed tenuous and eternal interstices of unreason in order to know that it is false. 36

Like the supreme magician that Novalis imagines or the madman Quijote whom Cervantes contrives (and who appears time and again in the work of Borges), 37 we are unable to distinguish reality as it is from reality as we have conceived it to be. Reality, according to Borges, is little more than our own fantasy. Reality, rather than fantasy, is the domain of the escapist and the reactionary.

Borges’ magical realism, with its representation of the unreal as real and the inherent subversion of realism and of reality that this narrative strategy implies, in additional to its cultural pluralism, was itself more commonly the target of such accusations. However, just as his cultural relativism can be interpreted as an anti-imperialist strategy, his interrogation of realism and of reality also has application within a postcolonial framework. Like the universal nature of his fiction, the fantastical component of his literature, with its radical implications, has the political characteristic of a double edged sword. For while his subversion of realism and of the real appears to undermine postcolonial constructions of cultural identity, it also subverts colonialist representations of the world.

Leal Objects:
The Case for Carpentier and Asturias

Luis Leal is perhaps, after Flores, the second most significant early theorist of the magical realist literary category in Latin America, and he is also clearly influenced by Roh’s original definition of magical realist art. In his 1967 essay, ‘Magical realism in Spanish American literature’, Leal argues:

Magical realism is not magic literature ... Magical realism is, more than anything else, an attitude toward reality. In magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. (1995 (1967), p. 121)

36 “El mayor hechicero (escribe memorablemente Novalis) sería el que se hechizara hasta el punto de tomar sus propias fantasmas por apariciones autónomas. ¿No sería ese nuestro caso?”. Yo conjecturo que así es. Nosotros (la indivisa divinidad que operan en nosotros) hemos soñado el mundo. Lo hemos soñado resistente, misterioso, visible, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenues y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso.’ (1989, vol.1, p. 258)

37 Intertextuality, which ‘celebrates the solidity of invention and takes us beyond representation conceived primarily as mimosis to re-presentation’ (Faris 1995, p. 176-7), is a procedure that clearly complements the strategy of Borges and is a consistent feature of his work.
Leal even twice quotes Roh’s characterization of magical realist painting: "the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it." (pp. 120 & 123)

While Leal echoes Roh’s pictorial interpretation of magical realism in an ostensibly similar manner to his predecessor Flores, he nevertheless opposes Flores’ seminal literary rendition of the category. Leal objects primarily to Flores’ identification of Borges as the Latin American pioneer of magical realist fiction. Leal contends that the stories of Borges constitute ‘fantastic literature’ rather than magical realist literature (p. 122). Indeed, some of Borges’ supernaturally permeated tales, due to a deficit of realism, are more compatible with the genre of fantasy than magical realism. However, the motive for Leal’s eviction of Borges from the magical realist narrative division is not the absence of realism in his fiction but the presence of the marvelous. Leal, who stresses throughout his essay that the fantastic is incompatible with magical realism, essentially argues for a definition of magical realist literature that adheres even more stringently to Roh’s inaugural formulation of magical realist art.

However, in what constitutes a conspicuously self-contradictory maneuver, Leal includes the names of Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Ángel Asturias in his revised inventory of Latin American writers of magical realist literature. Carpentier and Asturias are the two authors who are, along with Borges, perhaps most frequently recognized as the Latin American pioneers of magical realist writing. Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* (El reino de este mundo) and Asturias’ *Men of Maize* (Hombres de maíz), which were both published in 1949, are the two novels that are arguably most often identified as the first Latin American magical realist texts. Leal’s reluctance to consider the literature of Carpentier and Asturias alongside that of Borges is understandable. While these authors alternately occupy identical roles as innovators of the magical realist narrative genre, their magical realist fiction differs quite significantly. However, the ways in which the magical realist texts of Carpentier and Asturias differ from those of Borges, contrary to Leal’s suggestion, make them far less compatible with magical realist painting.

To begin with, Carpentier challenges the reader with the dense convolutions of a baroque style, while Asturias writes an intensely lyrical and richly metaphorical form of prose. These narrative characteristics separate their magical realist work from the clinical and concise fiction of Borges, but they also distance their magical realist literature from magical realist art, with its simplified lines and naive
lucidity. Carpentier and Asturias also evidence an interest in human beings and their material concerns, which render their magical realist narratives more humanized than either the magical realist fiction of Borges or magical realist art. While Borges, as Ariel Dorfman puts it, in *Some Write to the Future: Essays on Contemporary Latin American Fiction*, is ultimately concerned with the exploration of ‘essence’ rather than ‘existence’ (1991, p. 227), Carpentier and Asturias, by contrast, are primarily concerned with matters of ‘existence’. In fact, the magical realist texts of Carpentier and Asturias, unlike those of Borges and certainly unlike magical realist art, reveal an especial interest in the particulars of Latin American ‘existencia’. Indeed, while Borges rejected the self-consciously parochial forms of fiction that dominated Latin American literary production during the early decades of the twentieth century, Carpentier and Asturias in some ways extend upon the sanctioned traditions of regionalism, social realism and indigenism. *The Kingdom of This World* and *Men of Maize* portray Latin American landscapes, document Latin American historical events and social realities and defend non-European Latin American communities. Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* narrates the tumultuous nascent postcolonial period in the history of Haiti that began at the turn of the nineteenth century when African slaves fought against the French for independence and then against each other for the power to rule the new republic. Asturias’ *Men of Maize* depicts the struggle of the Maya-Quiché of Guatemala to resist the expropriation of their lands by mercenary imperialist governments as well as the tragedy of their decline following their historical defeat. Unlike the magical realist literature of Borges, if not completely unlike magical realist painting, Carpentier and Asturias also aim to achieve a credible illusion of mimesis. While Borges often goes to great lengths to foster the impression of realism in his short stories, his invocations of actual personages, events and locations are little more than decoys in a fictional game in which he entices the reader to surrender to faith only to utterly destroy it. The Borgesian mimetic hoax culminates in a Borgesian deconstructionist apocalypse, and the reader is left to ponder not only the artifice of the word but also the artifice of the world. Carpentier and Asturias, in contrast, respond rather than merely refer to personal, historical and geographical realities, and they do so with apparent faith in the word and in the world they represent. For Carpentier and Asturias, the text is in many ways an uncomplicated mirror with which they attempt to reflect a certain truth or reality. For Borges, in comparison, the text is a mirror only insofar
as it suggests what he refers to, in ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, as an ‘atrocious or banal truth’\textsuperscript{38} about the illusory nature of reality. However, while Carpentier’s \textit{The Kingdom of This World} and Asturias’ \textit{Men of Maize} may be thematically similar to earlier regionalist, social realist and indigenist works and may manifest a comparable mimetic agenda, they also differ quite significantly from those traditional patriotic and realist narratives. The nature of this conspicuous variation aligns the magical realist literature of Carpentier and Asturias with that of Borges and provides the rationale for their equivalent consideration under the magical realist banner. It also definitely divides the magical realist fiction of Carpentier and Asturias, as it does that of Borges, from magical realist art. The magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias, contrary to Leal’s characterization, like the magical realist stories of Borges, innovatively incorporate the fantastic into the narrative framework of realism.

\textit{The Cultural “Kingdom” Magical Realism of Carpentier and Asturias: A Postcolonial Reconstructive Literature?}

The magical realist fiction of Carpentier and Asturias, far from being an extension of the European magical realist pictorial movement, constituted a response, which was, indeed, even more direct than the magical realist literature of Borges, to the Latin American postcolonial nationalist political environment of the twentieth century. In fact, the magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias entailed a challenge, which was, again, even more specific than that issued by the magical realism of Borges, to the realism of the parochial genres of the time. However, Carpentier’s and Asturias’ magical realist fiction, unlike Borges’, questioned these postcolonial nationalist narratives from an ostensibly partisan perspective. Indeed, it offered itself and was interpreted as something of a corrective, rather than a subversive, gesture. Partly because of this, the magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias engendered far less controversy and were received far more favorably than the magical realist texts of Borges.

The parochial narratives that dominated Latin American literary production in the first half of the twentieth century, despite their nationalist agenda, were decidedly ambiguous in their representations of Latin America. As Franco argues, although these novels focus on the rural cultural scene as the source of Latin American

\textsuperscript{38} ‘\textit{una realidad aterradora o banal}’ (1989, vol. 1, p. 431).
identity in a gesture reminiscent of European romanticism, they very rarely achieve
the status of a pastoral idyll (1971, p. 49). According to Franco, this is a
consequence of the inhospitable nature of the Latin American landscape and the
barbaric character of the Latin American people, which ‘came into conflict’ with
the literary conventions of the romantic genre when these were ‘transplanted’ from
their original European context into the alien Latin American domain. She argues
that while the European romantic writer could idealize ‘the countryside and the
integrated, meaningful life of the peasant’, the Latin American writer was unable
to glorify his or her ‘vast, threatening’ landscape and its ‘tribes of savage Indians
and half-wild gauchos’. Indeed, in early regionalist, social realist and indigenist
novels, the untamed landscape and its native or even mestizo (or mixed race)
inhabitants consistently inspire apprehension or reprehension rather than
enthusiasm or pride and are typically portrayed as elements that need to be
changed or eradicated rather than embraced or eulogized. However, while Franco
explains these equivocally patriotic works in terms of a failed attempt to transplant
European romanticism to Latin American letters, they appear to have been more
influenced by the form and, significantly, the ideology of European realism. To
begin with, the writers of regionalist, social realist and indigenist texts often
engage in an insistent, meticulous and distinctly unromantic documentation of
Latin American frontier landscapes and their indigenous and other inhabitants in
what is a patent attempt to emulate Western realist discourse. In addition, the
critical attitude that they often manifest towards Latin America is the result not, as
Franco implies, of its ‘wild’ and ‘savage’ nature but of a positivist worldview that
privileges the “rational civilization” of the Western world and that is fundamental
to canonical European realist literature.

The positivist system, like the realist genre that constitutes its cultural
embodiment, is also essential to colonialism. As postcolonial theorists have
demonstrated, colonialism is not solely an act of territorial expropriation but first
and foremost an ideology, which inspires, drives and justifies the reality of the
subsequent invasion. According to the postcolonial critic Abdul R. JanMohamed,
the ideological basis of colonialism takes the form of a manichean system of
oppositions. In ‘The economy of manichean allegory: The function of racial
difference in colonialist literature’, JanMohamed argues:

[the dominant model of power - and interest - relations in all colonial societies is the
manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed
inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive
framework and colonialist literary representation: the manichean allegory – a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object. (1985, p. 82)

The manichean opposition between the ‘rationality’ and ‘civilization’ of the colonizer, which are offered as evidence of an inherent intellectual and moral superiority, and the ‘sensuality’ and ‘savagery’ of the colonized, which are represented as objective and innate characteristics (rather than prejudiced and imaginary projections) and as synonyms for ignorance and depravity, is pivotal. In fact, this particular dichotomy provides the ideological foundation or justification for the entire colonial project. It generates a dialectic that suggests, as Edward Said argues, in Culture and Imperialism, ‘that certain territories and people require and beseech domination’ (1993, p. 8) and that ultimately effects an ideological transformation of colonialism from an inhumane exercise in exploitation to a humanitarian mission of enlightenment.

The realist novel, which emerged from Europe as the most popular cultural artifact in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as that continent engaged in a phase of unprecedented colonialism, attested to the “rationality” and “civility” of the European by its seemingly “rational” and “civilized” nature. In addition, during that period, the realist novel, for which the colonies provided a convenient ‘structure of attitude and reference’ (Said 1993, p. xxvi), often activated the manichean antithesis between the “rationality” and “civility” of the European and the “irrationality” and “savagery” of the non-European in its content. In Jane Eyre (1847), for instance, Charlotte Brontë constructs a subtextual contrast between the composed and sensible English governess Jane, who aspires to become the wife of her employer Rochester, and the violent and deranged West Indian creole Bertha, who already occupies the role of his legal spouse. While Bertha appears as Jane’s opposite, she simultaneously represents, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend, in The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, ‘Jane’s truest and darkest double ... the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress’ (1979, p. 361). Bronte’s novel, like many other eighteenth and nineteenth century classic English realist narratives, such as Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Charles Dickens’ Great Expectations (1861), provided an effective tool in the fortification of imperial ideology and contributed to a project that Suvendrini Perera, in Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens, describes as
‘the cultural consolidation of Empire’ (1991, p. 53). Bronte doubtlessly did not intend to produce any sort of crude advertisement for colonialism and quite possibly did not consider the reality of colonialism at all when she created the figure of Bertha to play Jane’s “Mr. Hyde”. Indeed, she appears to have employed the manichean opposition to make a complex and even contradictory statement about feminine behavior and feminist empowerment. Her utilization of the colonial dichotomy provides, rather than any kind of demonstration of Bronte’s support for the colonial project, an impressive illustration of the insidious, seductive and pervasive nature of the manichean ideology, which managed to infiltrate not only the mind and the literature of the colonizer but also the mind and the literature of the colonized. JanMohamed writes:

> [t]he power relations underlying this model set in motion such strong currents that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex. ... a “native” writer ... can also be inducted, under the right circumstances, to fulfill the author-function of the colonialis... writer. (1988, p. 82)

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the former colonies of Latin America, “native” writers certainly appear to have been, as JanMohamed suggests, ‘drawn into’ the ‘strong currents’ of manichean thought that their former European masters set into motion and that their would-be U.S. masters continued to agitate. In 1845, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the Argentine writer who later became president of that nation, published an infamous treatise entitled *Civilización y barbarie* (“Civilization and Barbarism”), in which he argued for the eradication of Latin American gaucho “barbarity” and the cultivation of imported European urban “civility”. More than a century later, the critic Franco, who regularly remonstrates against the pitfalls of imperialism, nevertheless remains similarly trapped within the ‘vortex’ of manichean thought when she characterizes European existence as ‘integrated’ and ‘meaningful’ and denounces Latin American reality as ‘savage’ and ‘wild’. The “native” writers of the early regionalist, social realist and indigenist texts in Latin America, whose ambiguous representations of Latin American reality inspired the critical assessments that Franco makes of it, also appear to have been caught in the maelstrom of manicheanism to which JanMohamed refers. These writers ostensibly attempt to represent a patriotic vision of a unique and independent Latin America. However, indoctrinated by imperial ideology, they ultimately perceive their non-Westernized reality as an unacceptably “irrational” and “primitive” world. In fact, much like Sarmiento, they effectively argue for the local establishment of a Western style
"rational civilization". In other words, they support the replacement of the "inferior" culture of Latin America with the "superior" society of the imperial antagonist. This dubious argument is carried out implicitly and perhaps unconsciously through their earnest and often decidedly overzealous emulation of the realist form, which is the cultural epitome of the self-proclaimed supremely "rational" and "civilized" Western world. However, it is also carried out much more explicitly and consciously through their narratives, which are essentially didactic and attempt to indoctrinate a respect for "reason" and "civility" as the foundation for the achievement of a successful Western style society.

In his regionalist classic Doña Bárbara, for example, Gallegos describes the landscapes of the llanos and the lifestyles on the cattle ranches of the Venezuelan prairies in faithful and meticulous detail in what is less an enthusiastic portrayal of his nation than a self-conscious exercise in ratiocination. In addition, the entire plot line of his novel is little more than an instruction in the importance of "rational" thought and "civilized" behavior (as well as patriarchal authority.) Santos Luzardo, the novel's educated urban hero, returns to the farm of his forefathers and purposefully begins to tame the land, domesticate the women, challenge corruption and eliminate "superstition". Clorinda Matto de Turner, in her indigenist prototype Birds Without a Nest (Aves sin nido 1968 (1889)) documents the appearances, costumes, customs, lodgings and even furniture of the indigenes that appear in her novel and details the commercial exploitation that the indigenous alpaca farmers endure. However, her story is ultimately not a depiction of indigenous life, but like Gallegos', a lesson, albeit a distinctly more feminine one, on the merits of "rationality" and "civility". The romantic heroes of her story, Don Fernando and Doña Lucia Marín, move from the sophisticated city of Lima to the backwoods town of Killac and politely proceed to domesticate the indigenes, tame the men, right corruption and dispel "superstition". Euclides da Cunha's archetype of social realism, Rebellion in the Backlands (1957 (1902)), almost resembles a work of science in its laborious explication of the geology, geography, climate, flora, fauna and human inhabitants of the sertãos (or backlands) of Brazil. The novel also describes, with equal attention to detail, a siege that occurred in the provincial town of Canudos in 1896, when a small group of sertanejos (or backlanders), led by the self-proclaimed prophet, Antonio Counselheiro, resisted a federal government army force for the length of a year. However, while da Cunha focuses on a decidedly "uncivilized" group of people and a particularly
“uncivilized” war, his novel, which counterbalances this “crude” subject material with an excessively scholarly style, is a conscientious exercise in and ostentatious endorsement of “civilized” thought. In addition, while he concedes a respect for the tenacity and bravery of the men of Canudos, he evokes the racial and racist philosophies of Joseph Gobineau and stresses the retrogressive nature of Counselheiro, the sertanejos and their style of warfare. He writes: ‘[w]e must insist upon this point: the war of Canudos marked an ebb, a backward flow, in our history.’ (p. 161)

Latin American writing matured considerably in the 1930s and 40s. However, while later novels in the regionalist, social realist and indigenist genres no longer engaged in such an insistent documentation of reality, they nevertheless continued to champion, albeit with a little more subtlety, the values of “rationality” and “civility”. Ciro Alegria’s Broad and Alien is the World (El mundo es ancho y ajeno 1982 (1941)), for example, evidences the vast improvement that took place within the indigenist genre. In Alegria’s novel, the indigenes are no longer objects to be described or the passive victims of injustices but subjects who tell their own story and actively defend their own rights. In fact, Alegria idealizes his indigenous protagonists and presents their Andean village of Rumi as something of a rural paradise. However, the indigenous citizens of this utopian village are idealistically “civilized”. They are well organized, hard working, peace loving, law abiding and capable of reason, if not entirely “rational”. In addition, while Alegria represents their mythological beliefs without any obvious intolerance, he nevertheless carefully undermines their validity. For example, the curse that the village witch, Nasha Suro, places on the avaricious landowner, Don Alvaro Amenabar y Roldan, when he sues the community of Rumi for its land, is shown to be futile. The community of Rumi loses its defense and is forced to ascend to the inhospitable terrain of Yanañahui. Nasha Suro loses all credibility and goes into exile. The wise and respected village mayor, Rosendo Maqui, consults the sacred mountain peak above Yanañahui for an augury of their fate and believes he hears that all will be well. However, the people of Rumi subsequently experience great hardship in their new mountainous environment, they lose their appeal to regain their former land, and Maqui himself is jailed and beaten to death. The mestizo Benito Castro, who returns to the community after a period in the army, is appointed the new leader in place of Maqui. Castro, who regards the mythological beliefs of his mother’s people as little more than impediments to progress, disregards the
"superstitions" that had previously prevented them from irrigating the lake or from erecting houses in the most practicable places on the new terrain and, as a consequence, builds a flourishing community at Yanañahui. Like the majority of early regionalist, social realist and indigenist texts, Alegria's novel, which is ostensibly an attempt to illustrate a cultural reality that is unique to Latin America, is seriously compromised by its regard for a cultural model that is upheld by Europe and the U.S.A.

The magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias also represent Latin American reality and, like indigenist literature in particular, focus on the non-European community as a symbol of cultural individuality and national independence. However, the magical realist texts of Carpentier and Asturias offer themselves as far less ambiguous examples of parochial literature than the would-be patriotic fiction of their predecessors. Carpentier's and Asturias' magical realist novels repudiate the glorification of "rationality" and "civility" that constitutes the ideological legacy of colonial rule and that distorts so many prior representations of Latin America. Instead, in defiance of the imposed values (if not of the proscribed terms) of colonial ideology, they embrace the "irrational" and the "primitive" as valid and vital characteristics of Latin America. Their innovative magical realist texts neither participate in a slavish imitation of the Western form of realism nor engage in a subtextual petition for the establishment of a Western ideal of society. Indeed, their novels, which respectfully represent the derided mythological beliefs of non-Western cultures, expose realism as a biased and hegemonic discourse and the Western worldview it defends as partisan and oppressive. Whereas previous nationalist literature in Latin America, with its promotion of the "rational" and the "civilized", commonly reveals an underlying desire for cultural assimilation with the West, the magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias, which advocate the "irrational" and the "primitive", appear to embody more powerful assertions of Latin American cultural difference.39

Carpentier and Asturias do not completely reject realism and a "rational" interpretation of the world. (If they did, their work would not qualify as magical

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39 However, as I contend in part two, their nationalism remains compromised. In addition, while Carpentier and Asturias portray autochthonous cultures with greater enthusiasm, this does not mean they portray them with any greater accuracy. In fact, their representations of non-Western societies reflect only their (albeit ambiguous) separatist agendas, just as Alegria's depiction of an indigenous Latin American community, for example, reflects only his assimilationist beliefs. In both cases, the "other" arguably remains equally unknown and, indeed, ultimately irrelevant.
realist.) Rather, they infect the realist genre with an "irrational" non-Western conception of reality, which they represent alongside a "rational" Western perspective as an apparently valid alternative. In *Men of Maize*, Asturias consistently offers two interpretations for the events that occur. The reader is not forced to choose between the two, but the mythological explanations for the events that take place often seem to be the ones that the author endorses. For example, in the final chapter of the book, entitled "Coyote-Postman"\(^40\), the reader can choose to believe either that the postman of San Miguel Acatán, Nicho Aquino, absconds with the mailbags or metamorphoses into his *nahual* (or animal spirit), the coyote, before he reappears on the coast as a boatman for the Harbor Castle. Asturias provides evidence to support both versions of events. The mailbag that Aquino carries at the time of his disappearance contains an unusually large amount of cash, the townspeople believe that Aquino is a thief, and Aquino himself, in recognition of his culpable status, adopts the life of a fugitive. However, Aquino's transformation into a coyote and journey into a mysterious underground world in search of his wife are narrated as fact. Aquino is guided in his pilgrimage by a firefly wizard, one of the men who fought with Gaspar Ilón to defend Indian land rights at the beginning of the novel and who alone survived the subsequent massacre by transforming himself into his *nahual*. The firefly wizard, who appears to Aquino in his *nahual* form of the Curer-Deer of the Seven Fires, forces Aquino to relinquish his precious cargo of mail and, significantly, destroys this emblem of Western "rationality" and "civilization", before he escorts him through a prolonged rite of passage that culminates in the oral revelation of the fate of Aquino's wife and the mythological (hi)story of his people's struggle. In the depths of a sacred ancestral cave, Gaspar Ilón himself recounts to Aquino the events that transpired from the time of the battle, when the firefly wizards cursed those who had betrayed them, through to the fulfillment of the curses of death and childlessness upon those traitors. In so doing, Gaspar Ilón summarizes and effectively sanctions the mythological trajectory of the narrative.

Carpentier employs a similar strategy of narration in *The Kingdom of This World*. At the end of the first section of the novel, for example, Carpentier offers two disparate interpretations of the events that occur at the public execution of Mackandal, the runaway Mandingo slave, who had embarked upon a crusade to exterminate the white landowners of Haiti and to create an empire of free blacks.

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\(^{40}\) "Correo-Coyote" (1967 (1949), p. 136)
The plantation owners, who gather to witness the spectacle, believe that they see Mackandal burn and die at the stake where he is tied. However, the slave population believe that Mackandal, who is ‘a houngan of the Rada rite, invested with extraordinary powers as the result of his possession by the major gods on several occasions’ and who possesses ‘the power to transform himself into a hoofed animal, bird, fish, or insect’, escapes from the flames. Carpentier, unlike Asturias, appears to lend more credence to the “rational” viewpoint. He writes: ‘very few saw that Mackandal, held by ten soldiers, was thrust into the fire, and that a flame from his burning hair drowned his last cry.’ However, at the end of the novel, Carpentier describes the various metamorphoses of Ti Noel, the central character of the novella, without any such eventual detraction. Ti Noel, who has lived many years and witnessed many forms of tyranny, inspired by Mackandal’s earlier miracles of transmutation, exercises his own powers of transfiguration in order to escape the renewed threat of subjugation. Ti Noel transforms himself into a bird, a stallion, a wasp, an ant and a goose. The narrator candidly reports, in prototypical magical realist style: ‘Ti Noel was surprised at how easy it was to transform himself into an animal.’

Towards a Single Concept of a Double Edged Magical Realism:
Locating Carpentier’s and Asturias’ “Kingdom” within Borges’ “Universe”

Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of This World* and Asturias’ *Men of Maize* marked a significant departure from the canonical parochial genres of Latin American literature primarily because of their distention and distortion of the realist form to accommodate the manifestly fantastic. Borges, too, broke with the nationalist tradition when he similarly stretched and skewed the realist genre to encompass the obviously unreal. Nevertheless, contemporary critics, following on from the early examples set by Flores and Leal, typically continue to separate the magical realist fiction of Carpentier and Asturias from that of Borges. Like Leal, they also tend to privilege the magical realist literature of Carpentier and Asturias. However, latter day preferences for the magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias are most...

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41 ‘*un houngan del rito Radá, investido de poderes extraordinarios por varias caídas en posesión de dioses mayores*’ (1997 (1949), p. 29).
42 ‘*del poder de transformarse en animal de pezuña, en ave, pez o insecto*’ (p. 33).
43 ‘*muy pocos vieron que Mackandal, agarrado por diez soldados, era metido en el fuego, y que una llama creciendo por el pecho encendido ahogaba su último grito*’ (p. 41).
44 ‘*Ti Noel se sorprendió de lo fácil que es transformarse en animal*’ (p. 138).
commonly based not on their perceived greater similarity to magical realist paintings but on their alleged political adherence to a postcolonial nationalist agenda. Indeed, although Leal contends that magical realist writing is analogous with a European art style, he also defines it, in yet another contradictory maneuver, as a ‘truly American literature’ (1995 (1967), p. 122), which suggests that the ostensible parochialism of the magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias also influenced his preference for their fiction. William Spindler, in ‘Magic Realism: A typology’ (1993), divides the magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias from the Borgesian style of magical realism solely on a political foundation. Spindler separates the literary genre into the categories of ‘anthropological’ (p. 80) magical realism and ‘ontological’ (p. 82) magical realism. He defines the ‘anthropological’ magical realism of writers such as Carpentier and Asturias by its representation of the ‘pre-industrial beliefs ... of developing countries’, support of ‘the claims of those groups which hold these beliefs to equality’ and the facilitation of ‘the creation of new national identities’. By contrast, Spindler describes ‘ontological’ magical realism as an ‘“individual” form’, which bears ‘no reference to the mythical imagination of pre-industrial communities’ and which celebrates ‘the total freedom and creative possibilities of ... the author’. Jeanne Delbaere, in ‘Magic realism: The energy of the margins’ (1992), advocates a similar twofold interpretation of magical realist fiction. She distinguishes the magical realism of Carpentier, which she believes is ‘intimately connected’ with Latin America, reflects indigenous cultural beliefs and manifests ‘a political determination to regain an identity largely eclipsed by colonialism and neo-colonialism’, from the magical realism of Borges, which she describes as ‘metafictional’, ‘intellectual’ and postmodern (pp. 76-7). 45 For both Spindler and Delbaere, as for Leal before them, Carpentier’s magical realism is the true magical realism.

The more common contemporary tendency to distinguish the magical realist texts of Carpentier and Asturias from those of Borges based on their positive commitment to a postcolonial nationalist political agenda is not incomprehensible. The magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias expose realism as a biased, limited and imperial view of reality and, through their supplementation of the realistic with the mythical, attempt to amend the realist form to reveal a more just, accommodating and anti-imperial (or perhaps even pre-imperial) vision of reality.

45 I discuss the relationship between postmodernism and the magical realism of Borges and, indeed, magical realism, in general, in chapter six.
In other words, the magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias appears to posit a new and more correct form of realism and a new and more correct version of reality. It presents itself as a postcolonial nationalist reconstructive strategy, which is how it most commonly has been interpreted. The magical realist fiction of Borges also exposes realism as a corrupted and restricted view of reality but, through its realistic representation of the manifestly fantastic, suggests that all representations of reality are inauthentic and flawed because reality is unknown and irrecoverable. In other words, the magical realism of Borges presents itself as a deconstructive strategy, which is how it is most typically characterized. Indeed, as I suggested earlier, because it often appears to undermine parochial representations and because it works to subvert the ideological validity of the realist genre and the ontological possibility of an objective reality, concepts that are arguably crucial to postcolonial revisions of imperial perspectives, it has often been criticized as an imperialist procedure.

However, while the magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias endeavours to establish an alternative form of realism and an alternative view of reality, the magical realist narrative strategy, as I suggested in my discussion of Borges, is something of a double-edged sword. It indiscriminately subverts both colonial constructions and postcolonial reconstructions. In fact, the magical realist modus operandi is inherently deconstructive rather than reconstructive. It necessarily implies, as the magical realist fiction of Borges foregrounds, a more radical subversion of realism and reality. The contamination of realism with fantasy, as the magical realist literature of Borges emphasizes, exposes realism as nothing more than a literary device and, consequently, the reality that it portrays as nothing more than a literary construct. Likewise, if reality is a site of contest, as it is in the magical realist texts of Carpentier and Asturias, then reality, per se, does not exist and realism is further undermined. The magical realism of Borges and that of Asturias and Carpentier are simply two sides of the same coin or perhaps, rather, two edges of the same sword.

García Márquez’ archetypal magical realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, like most contemporary magical realist texts, incorporates both the ostensibly reconstructive magical realism of Carpentier and Asturias and the ostentatiously deconstructive magical realism of Borges. As Dean Irvine puts it, in ‘Fables of the plague years: Postcolonialism, postmodernism, and magic realism in *Cien años de soledad*, García Márquez’ famous magical realist novel is
simultaneously and contradictorily about ‘[o]n the one hand ... the positive production of oppositional truth-claims ... [and] on the other hand, the provisionality of truth-claims’ (1998, p. 74). It also acknowledges its inevitable magical realist representational double bind.

One Hundred Years of Solitude, similarly to the magical realist texts of Borges, in its portrayal of the supernatural as natural, self-consciously challenges the authority of realism and its representations of reality. However, like Carpentier's The Kingdom of This World and Asturias’ Men of Maize, García Márquez’ novel specifically targets imperialist realist representations of Latin American reality. It also simultaneously attempts to uphold realist claims in order to amend imperialist versions of Latin American reality (and particularly imperialist renditions of Latin American history).° For example, as we have seen, the novel discloses how the Colombian military, in defense of foreign interests, massacred three thousand Colombian workers when they protested against their exploitation by the U.F.C., before they surreptitiously conveyed the incriminating corpses by train to the sea. Official reports about the labor strike subsequently denied that the murderous spree had ever taken place. Indeed, the U.F.C.’s lawyers, in order to avoid the need to address the workers’ demands, had already ‘established through a verdict of the court and proclaimed in solemn edicts the non-existence of the workers’.' Significantly, these “flights” from reality in the realist discourses of imperial history and law are preceded by the “flights” from reality in the magical realist novel of the most grounded characters. The discomfortingly socially guileless Remedios the Beauty, who is described as ‘the most lucid being’°° in the Buendía family and ‘the only one who remained immune to the banana plague’,° ascends into the sky as she folds bed sheets. Similarly, a butterfly cloud follows the other un-fashionably earthy character, the banana company garage mechanic Mauricio Babilonia, before he is crippled by a gun shot and disappears from Macondo prior to the massacre of other banana company workers as well as of reality.°° García Márquez’ realistic narration of the evidently unrealistic in Remedios’ sudden assumption and the butterfly plagued Mauricio is clearly intended to mock the authority of realism and its representations of reality. However, the flight of

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°° I discuss the importance of history to magical realism in the final chapter.
°°°° ‘el ser más lucido’ (p. 347).
°°°°° ‘la única que permaneció inmune a la peste del banano’ (p. 340).
°°°°°° The novel specifically links the two characters (p. 401).
Remedios and the butterflies of Mauricio also demonstrate, on a metaphorical level as well as by their fantastical presence in a realist narrative, the essential frailty of realism and the fundamental fragility of reality. Significantly, the attempted correction of historical lies in the novel is not only preceded but also followed by a patent corruption of historical truth. The narrator relates that rain fell in Macondo in the aftermath of the carnage for a period of 'four years, eleven months and two days'.\textsuperscript{51} In the aftermath of the imperialist treatment and García Márquez’ politically necessary anti-imperialist exposure of realism and reality as little more than linguistic constructs that one can ‘cavalierly fabricate’ (Gallagher 1973, p. 148), truth can no longer be unproblematically conveyed. With the heavenward flight of uncomplicated certitude from the Eden of Macondo, following the deception of the banana company, a biblical deluge of skepticism descends.

While so-called poststructuralist skepticism of this kind is often perceived as a reactionary imperial theory, as I indicated in my discussion of the ostracism of Borges from postcolonial interpretations of the magical realist literary category, García Márquez appears to propose that it is in fact an intrinsic postcolonial political experience. The manipulation of words and misrepresentation of the world by imperial powers has exposed in a very material way the unreliability of language and the instability of reality. The amnesia plague that besets the townspeople of Macondo before the banana plague similarly illustrates this point. During the amnesia plague, the residents of Macondo forget even the meaning of everyday objects in their world. José Arcadio comes up with a solution that acknowledges the dependence of the world upon the word as well as the non-fixity of the word and (consequently) the world:

[with an inked brush he marked everything with its name: table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, pan. He went to the corral and marked the animals and plants: cow, goat, pig, hen, cassava, caladium, banana. Little by little, studying the infinite possibilities of forgetfulness, he realized that the day might come in which things would be recognized by their inscriptions but their utility would not be recalled. Then he was more explicit. The sign that he hung on the neck of the cow was an exemplary demonstration of the way in which the inhabitants of Macondo were disposed to fight against forgetfulness: This is the cow, she must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee with milk. Thus they continued to live in a slippery reality, momentarily captured by words, but which would escape irretrievably when they forgot the values of the written letters.

At the entrance to the road to the swamp they had put up a sign that said Macondo and another larger one in the main street that said God exists. In all the houses they had written keys in order to memorize objects and feelings. But the system demanded so much vigilance and moral strength that many succumbed to the spell of an imaginary reality, invented by themselves, which was less practical but more comforting.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{51} ‘cuatro años, once meses y dos días’ (p. 431).
\textsuperscript{52} ‘Con un hisopo entintado marcó cada cosa con su nombre: mesa, silla, reloj, puerta, pared, cana, cacerola. Fue al corral y marcó las animales y las plantas: vaca, chivo, puerco, gallina, yuca,
Reality, as this distinctly Borgesian episode shows, is not transcendentally existent or objectively knowable. It is mediated and constituted by language, which is itself, as Jacques Derrida argues and as this passage suggests, not transcendentally present or objectively meaningful but reliant upon an abstract differential play that perpetually defers meaning (a process that Derrida, in Of Grammatology, calls the textual play of ‘différence’ (1977, p. 23).) The world is not some kind of extratextual ground or core. Words are, according to Barbara Johnson, in The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading, ‘the imposture at the very heart of things’ (1980, p. 14). If this is the case, García Márquez’ magical realist novel asks, in episodes such as the one above, what is the basis for a distinction between one ‘imposture’ and another? What are the grounds for a differentiation between the so-called fantastic and the so-called real? As the problems that Macondo’s inhabitants experience in their attempts to ascertain reality during the amnesia plague suggest, the truth is, in a radical way, much more difficult to represent than the lie. The amnesia plague, which reveals this allegedly reactionary poststructuralist uncertainty about authoritative representation and ontological reality, as Irvine points out, is contracted not from European or U.S. imperialists but from the Guajiros, who are, like the citizens of Macondo, victims of imperialist misrepresentation or of ‘violent erasure’ (1998, p. 67). García Márquez fails to resolve the magical realist poststructuralist or, perhaps, postcolonial crisis about representation and reality. The banana plague ultimately leads to the metafictional dissolution of the entire novel, which occurs when the last Aureliano Buendía, mired in a self-referential incestuous relationship, deciphers Melquíades’ scripts and realizes that his reality is nothing more than the magician’s fiction.\(^53\)

\(^{53}\) The novel explicitly links the lied about massacre of the striking Colombian workers to the end of the novel. The chapter in which the covered-up crime is described begins with the words: "[t]he events that would deal Macondo its fatal blow ..." (Los acontecimientos que habían de darle el golpe mortal a Macondo ...' p. 406).
While the influence of the magical realism of Borges is particularly evident in García Márquez’ deconstructive apocalyptic finale, this ending is essentially the result of a frustrated reconstructive impetus, which ties the magical realism of García Márquez to that of Carpentier and Asturias.

Anne Hegerfeldt, in ‘Contentious contributions: Magic realism goes British’ (2002), similarly to Irvine, recognizes the Janus-faced nature of magical realist narrative. She argues: 'the dual function of redeeming different world views while simultaneously deconstructing all claims to universal validity is the common purpose behind ... magic realist texts.’ (p. 65) However, the dueling nature of the 'dual' reconstructive and deconstructive impetuses, as García Márquez’ emblematic magical realist text demonstrates, results in an inevitable “self-deconstructive” cycle, which stirs the hurricane-force winds that sweep Macondo into final oblivion.

I stress the ultimately overwhelming deconstructive nature of magical realist literature in part two, in which I address another common fallacy about magical realism: that it constitutes a Latin American realism or, more generally speaking, a “marginal realism”. This theory, which was first suggested by Carpentier in an introduction to his seminal magical realist novel under the banner of the Latin American marvelous real, has proved to be bewitching. Leal, for example, numbers among its enchanted victims. While Leal defers to Roh’s formulation of magical realist art in his interpretation of magical realist literature, he also refers to Carpentier’s representation of Latin America as really marvelous and argues, even as he contends that the magical realist narrative genre is commensurate with European magical realist painting, that ‘[t]he existence of the marvelous real is what started magical realist literature’ (1995 (1967), p. 122). Leal, who remains entirely unaware of the contradiction, actually appears to base his equation of magical realist art with magical realist fiction on the resemblance that he detects between Roh’s characterization of magical realist painting as the portrayal of the magical that subsists in everyday reality and Carpentier’s defense of magical realist writing as the depiction of the marvelous that exists in Latin American reality. The similarity between the European characterization of magical realist art and the patriotic conceptualization of magical realist literature sheds doubt on the authenticity of the latter in a way that Borges, who was irritably skeptical of nationalist representations, would have delighted in. Not surprisingly, in this definition of magical realist fiction, Borges is resolutely ostracized.
Emir Rodríguez Monegal, in 'Realismo mágico versus literatura fantastica: Un diálogo de sordos' (1975; "Magical realism versus fantastic literature: A dialogue of sorts"), a paper he first delivered at a 1973 conference dedicated to Latin American magical realist fiction, correctly notes that magical realist narrative bears little resemblance to magical realist art. He also observes that Flores’ and Leal’s attempts to apply the European pictorial rubric to Latin American literature are riddled with contradictions. On these grounds, he rejects the magical realist label as an apt descriptive term for Latin American fiction, confining it to both its original significance and original context. However, as Anderson Imbert admonishes, in a paper he originally presented at the same conference, ‘words … change with history. Only a fanatic would have a mind to fix in the past the meaning of a word that continues to be very alive in the present.’

Magical realism is certainly one such phrase that has altered in significance since its inception and that continues to be ‘very alive in the present’. Despite the disinclination of ‘fanatics’ to recognize its semantic mutation and literary validity, magical realism has been categorically transformed from an obscure pictorial title, which originally denoted paintings that portrayed reality as something elusive and magical, to a renowned literary cognomen, which currently identifies writing that involves the representation of the supernatural as something evident and natural. Indeed, as Parkinson Zamora recognizes, this ‘shift is apparent in the earliest formulations of Magical Realism as a literary critical term.’ (2002, p. 36)

Certainly, most critics today recognize magical realism as a narrative category that is defined by its unique juxtaposition of the fantastic and the realistic. They also typically interpret the magical realist literary genre in the context of the Latin American postcolonial environment in which it emerged or the globally marginal political conditions in which it continues to be well nigh exclusively produced. However, the intimate association of magical realism with Latin America or marginal cultures, in general, as I shall argue in part two, has emerged as another primary source of dubious ideas about the literary genre.

54 ‘palabras ... cambian con la historia. Solamente a un fanático se le antojaría fijar en el pasado la significación de una palabra que todavía está muy viva en el presente’ (1976, p. 18).

However, as I pointed out earlier, Anderson Imbert fails to heed his own advice.
PART II
From Magical Realism to "Marginal Realism":
Interrogating a Foreign National(ism)

While one of the most common academic misinterpretations of magical realist fiction is that it forms a subsidiary dimension of European magical realist art, another widespread but radically different misconception (in a contradiction that exemplifies the confusion that surrounds the narrative genre) is that it constitutes a kind of "marginal realism". The magical realist text is said to provide a mimetic representation of a genuinely magical reality, which is purported to exist in a variety of marginal places that subsist outside of the hegemonic Western mainstream. Magical realist literature is most commonly associated with the marginal region of Latin America, perhaps because it originated there but also undoubtedly because Carpentier prefaced his pioneering magical realist novel with a treatise proclaiming Latin America's marvelous nature. As Carpentier's example suggests, marginal writers of magical realism have been some of the strongest advocates of the ostensibly nationalistic "magical margins" cultural premise. However, the hypothesis is an extremely dubious one. It is fundamentally inauthentic, politically dangerous and generically misrepresentative. The theory derives from identifiable European ideological sources and, indeed, ultimately has its foundations in the seasoned, exoticist and perfidious Western colonialist image of the irrational non-Western "other". The correlation between the "magical margins" propaganda, which accompanies magical realist literature, and Western cultural paradigms has undoubtedly contributed to the commercial success of the narrative genre in the Western world. However, it has also led some critics to renounce the magical realist literary category as a cliched, racist and mercantilist fraud. The idea that magical realism is a "marginal realism", like the notion that magical realist writing is derivative of magical realist painting, obscures the true nature of magical realist fiction. Magical realist texts characteristically represent the fabulous as factual in order to show not that the fantastic is real but that realism and the reality it represents are fantastical. As Borges demonstrates in his work, realism is little more than a beguiling literary device and reality a gratifying literary construct. As Carpentier and Asturias suggest, realism is also a potent political tool and the reality it fortifies a construct that is often specifically
gratifying to the West. The fact that interpretations of magical realism tend to stress that the magical is real rather than that realism is magical attests to the power of realism. However, it also confirms the power of the West, for whom that particular interpretation of magical realism is undoubtedly far more agreeable. Ironically, just as magical realist fiction often engages in an interrogation of the hegemony of specious Western constructions, an accurate redefinition of the magical realist genre, which appreciates its subversive political strategy, also necessitates a confrontation with the authority of spurious imperialist representations.
CHAPTER FOUR
Such Stuff as (Nationalist) Dreams Are Made On:
Carpentier’s Eulogy to a Magical Reality
and Manifesto for Magical Realism

Carpentier was arguably the first proponent of the idea that magical realism constitutes a kind of “marginal realism”. He published The Kingdom of This World with a foreword in which he argued that Latin America is a magical place. He also released an expanded edition of the introduction under the title of ‘On the American marvelous real’ (De lo real maravilloso americano) in a volume called Tientos y diferencias (“Preludes and Variations”) in 1967. The republication of the preface coincided with the publication of García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude and the concurrent “Boom” in Latin American literature, both of which saw the magical realist genre rise to prominence. Carpentier’s exegesis, which had previously accompanied his own magical realist text, also attracted a considerable amount of attention. In fact, “the prologue”, as it is known, is now of greater renown than the magical realist novel it had once supplemented (as well as the publication in which it was subsequently featured) and is one of the most crucial and frequently cited documents on magical realist fiction. As Rodriguez Monegal writes, in ‘Lo real y lo maravilloso en El reino de este mundo’ (“The real and the marvelous in The Kingdom of This World”),

[m]ultiplied by the commentary of critics and professors, reproduced in reviews and in essay collections, the prologue has been cited again and again until … it has become independent of the work that it preceded and one of the common places of the new Latin American literature. … To a certain extent, the prologue has become a prologue for the new Latin American novel.

Rodriguez Monegal refers to ‘the new Latin American novel’ rather than to the magical realist text, but the magical realist genre is arguably the most successful manifestation of ‘the new Latin American literature’ and is certainly the context in which “the prologue” is most commonly invoked. “The prologue”, to rephrase the

55 The original preamble, preceded by about twenty additional lines, is repeated wholesale in the concluding segment of this later treatise. I have reproduced this final section (part V) of ‘On the American marvelous real’ as an appendix to this thesis (see appendix B). My English translations of Carpentier’s argument can be cross-referenced to this, although I continue to indicate whether citations derive from the 1949 prelude or the 1967 addendum.

56 ‘Multiplicado por el comentario de críticos y profesores, reproducido en revistas y en colecciones de ensayos, el prólogo ha sido citado y vuelto a citar, hasta … independizarse de la obra que precedía; hasta terminar por convertirse en uno de los lugares comunes de la nueva literatura latinoamericana. … Hasta cierto punto, el prólogo se ha convertido en prólogo a la nueva novela latinoamericana’ (1971, p. 619).
words of Rodríguez Monegal, has been transformed from an introduction to a relatively undistinguished magical realist novel into a manifesto for the universally celebrated magical realist genre.

*Carpentier’s Theory of the Marvelous Real: A (Pluralistically) Dualistic Premise*

In a recognized but commonly trivialized discrepancy, Carpentier actually employs the alternative term of *lo real maravilloso* or the marvelous real in his famous “magical realist” tract. In addition (unlike Roh, who eventually abandoned his own label of magical realism for the more popular title of *The New Objectivity*), Carpentier continues to refer to the marvelous real in later essays even though literary critics demonstrated a clear preference for the magical realist appellation. In fact, in his 1975 essay ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’ (*Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso*), reproduced in his 1981 publication *La novela latinoamericana en visperas de un nuevo siglo y otros ensayos* (“The Latin American Novel on the Eve of a New Century and Other Essays”), Carpentier rejects the rival rubric of magical realism, confining it to its original context in German Expressionist painting (1981, p. 128). By this time, however, magical realism was understood almost exclusively as a literary concept, regardless of his restrictive (and perhaps a little resentful) assessment of the category. Magical realism had become the recognized signature for that peculiar form of narrative that involves the blasé commingling of the fantastic and the realistic, which he himself had contributed to develop with *The Kingdom of This World*. Despite Carpentier’s refusal to recognize the existence of the magical realist literary genre, his marvelous real is now commonly perceived as a subordinate synonym for magical realism.

However, a significant difference did originally exist between magical realism and the marvelous real as Carpentier first conceived it. Latin American literary critics, after they had appropriated the magical realist label from the European art world, employed the name to characterize a new genre of fiction (even if this was not always consistently defined.) Carpentier, who first published the essay that came to be known as “the prologue” on its own in *El nacional* (Caracas) in 1948, formulated the similar oxymoron of the marvelous real independently of its later renowned literary context. As Eva Lukavská argues, in ‘¿Lo real mágico o el realismo maravilloso?’ (“The magical real or marvelous realism?”), Carpentier
invented the cognomen of the marvelous real not to identify a new style of Latin American narrative, which he himself subsequently helped to pioneer, but to describe what he believed to be the unique nature of Latin American reality (1991, p. 69). Carpentier continued to uphold this nationalistic version of the marvelous real throughout his literary career. In ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’, he writes: ‘I speak of the marvelous real when I refer to certain events that have occurred in America, certain characteristics of the landscape, certain elements that have nourished my work.’

For Carpentier, the marvelous real denotes a quality of Latin American reality that informed his literature rather than his literature per se. Indeed, his fiction, which includes examples of not only magical realism but also realism and fantasy, is far too heterogeneous to be encompassed by any single heading. However, as “the prologue” later accompanied The Kingdom of This World, the marvelous real was interpreted, quite understandably, as a justification of that seminal magical realist novel. When Carpentier published ‘On the American marvelous real’ in 1967, just as magical realist fiction began to emerge from the local scene to attract international interest, the marvelous real was again perceived to be an explanation for this innovative narrative form. Consequently, while Carpentier’s label of the marvelous real may have been relegated to the status of a secondary synonym, his concept of the marvelous real, that is, his idea that Latin America is innately fantastical, was adopted as the theoretical foundation of the genre of magical realism.

In the fusion that occurred, the marvelous real became a literary designation in addition to a theory about Latin American reality and, vice versa, magical realism came to be regarded not only as a category of Latin American fiction but as the embodiment of a Latin American essence. In other words, magical realism or the marvelous real (for the two are now irrevocably linked as a result of their interdependent evolution) became alternate names for a unique classification that denotes both a genre of literature and a theory of reality.

In “the prologue”, Carpentier explains that he first became aware of the magical nature of Latin America in 1943 during a visit to Haiti, where ‘I found myself in daily contact with something that we can call the marvelous real.’ (1967 (1949), p.

57 ‘yo hablo de lo real maravilloso al referirme a ciertos hechos ocurridos en América, a ciertas características del paisaje, a ciertos elementos que han nutrido mi obra.’ (1981, p. 128)

58 As González Echavarria recognizes, the belated recognition of Carpentier ‘as a precursor, a theoretician, and a practitioner’ of magical realism following the republication of “the prologue” in 1967 is quite ironic, for Carpentier had, by this time, as I suggest shortly, abandoned magical realism for realism (1977, p. 108).
He writes that he subsequently came to recognize that Haiti formed a microcosm of Latin America and that the ‘presence and validity of the marvelous real was not the sole privilege of Haiti, but the patrimony of all of America’ (p. 120). The mysterious ‘something’ that Carpentier detects in Latin America and describes as the marvelous real is not a singular peculiarity. It is, rather, a multifaceted and sweeping phenomenon that encompasses the mythology, history, geography and even architecture of the area. Indeed, Carpentier’s catalogue of the features that purportedly distinguish Latin America as a magical place is so exhaustive in its scope and seemingly indiscriminate in its makeup that to determine precisely what he means by the oxymoron is quite difficult. In addition, Carpentier deploys the binomial in a twofold manner, which exacerbates the confusion. At the same time, recognition of its dual significance provides the key to a comprehensible organization of his motley characterization of the marvelous real. Carpentier employs the marvelous real to denote two essential and essentially discrete phenomena in Latin America: marvelous phenomena that people believe to be real, which I call the “real marvelous”; and real phenomena that he believes to be marvelous, which I call the “marvelous real”. Carpentier does not formally recognize his flexible utilization of the bilateral label, and neither do the majority of critics. However, the various entities, circumstances and events that he refers to in “the prologue” can be arranged into and understood in terms of these two distinct but complementary categories.

Carpentier’s marvelous real operates on two levels (as a theory of reality and a category of literature) and manifests dual meanings (which I call the “real marvelous” and the “marvelous real”), but it also demonstrates a double agenda. While “the prologue” constitutes an obvious panegyric to Latin America, it is also an unsubtle diatribe against European Surrealism.

The Surrealists, like Carpentier, claimed to represent an authentically fantastic reality. However, they located this genuinely magical realm not in any specific geographical region but in the abstract universal territory of the unconscious, which Freud had recently “discovered”. For the Surrealists, the fabulous dream zone of the unconscious was more authentic than the rational wakeful dimension of consciousness. The First World War, in which many of the Surrealists served, perhaps as much as the theories of Freud, whom the Surrealists revered,59

59 Freud, however, did not appear to reciprocate their admiration. He described the Surrealists as ‘100 per cent fools (or let’s rather say, as with alcohol, 95 percent.)’ (qu. Brandon 1999, p. 413)
contributed to expose what they perceived to be the subterfuge of logocentrism. Following the inconceivable rationale and unprecedented horrors of trench warfare, logic would undoubtedly have seemed to be somewhat illusory. For the Surrealists, the marvels of the unconscious appeared to be not only more dependable but also considerably more attractive than the reality of consciousness. André Breton, the leader of the Surrealist movement, declared in his 1924 ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’: ‘[w]hat is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic; there is only the real’ (1998, p. 15).

For Carpentier, however, the Surrealist fantastic, which he denounces throughout “the prologue”, is contemptibly unreal. Carpentier’s criticism of the Surrealist marvelous in his famous exegesis, as the peculiar vehemence of the vituperation suggests, is far from incidental. In fact, it is crucial to his theory of the Latin American marvelous real, which relies upon the Surrealist fantastic as its antithetical foundation.60

The “Real Marvelous” of Latin America
Versus the “Fake Marvelous” of Surrealism:
Inspired Delusion (à la Quixote) Versus Cynical Illusionism

As I suggested, Carpentier’s thesis that Latin America constitutes a genuinely marvelous reality can be condensed down to and analyzed in terms of two main arguments. On the one hand, Carpentier contends that Latin America is genuinely marvelous because the people who live there and even those who merely venture into that domain genuinely believe that the marvelous is real.

In “the prologue”, Carpentier refers to the ‘collective faith’ that the Afro-Haitians showed in the historical figure of Mackandal, which was so strong that it ‘produced a miracle on the day of his execution’ (1967 (1949), p. 119). The ‘miracle’ that Carpentier refers to, as he reveals in the novella that follows, is Mackandal’s supernatural flight from a burning stake at his public execution. However, Mackandal’s escape does not occur in any tangible sense. Mackandal does break free of the bonds that tie him to the pyre but, as Carpentier explicitly advises, is promptly recaptured and thrust back into the fire. The French authorities and slave owners, who gather to watch the execution of the Mandingo

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60 However, as I argue in the following chapter, his theory of the Latin American marvelous real also contradictorily depends upon the Surrealist fantastic for its ideological inspiration.
slave who had aspired to create an independent empire of free blacks in Haiti, bear witness to his demise. Only the faithful perceive Mackandal’s metamorphosis and escape. However, Carpentier certainly does not disparage the so-called miracle because of this, as his unqualified use of the term suggests. He appears to judge the legitimacy of the miracle not on the soundness of its basis in fact but on the strength of its foundation in faith. For Carpentier, the miracle can be said to be genuine or the marvelous can be said to be real in this instance because the Afro-Haitians sincerely believe that it is.

Carpentier also refers to the fantastical beliefs of the first Europeans in the “New World”. Some of the Spanish conquistadors of the Americas believed so strongly in the existence of certain fabled phenomena that they trekked for months and even years through an uncharted and formidable wilderness in pursuit of these coveted and elusive chimeras. In 1513, Juan Ponce de León scoured the swamps of Florida in search of The Fountain of Eternal Youth, a mythical spring of ancient and well nigh universal renown whose waters are purported to bestow immortality. In 1539, in the quest for El Dorado, the legendary country of gold that is reputed to boast no less than seven cities of gold, including the illustrious metropolis of Manoa, Gonzalo Pizarro made a famously arduous crossing of the Andes to the West of Quito, and his cousin Francisco de Orellana notoriously abandoned him to trace the course of the Amazon to the Atlantic. Carpentier writes that ‘sane Spaniards’ continued to search the Americas for El Dorado and The City of the Caesars, another reputed region of immense wealth, even during the so-called Age of Reason in the eighteenth century (p. 120). Carpentier is clearly astonished by the faith of these Spaniards in these myths, but he derides neither the credulity of the adventurers nor the credibility of the legends that inspired them. He again contends that the absolute faith that the conquistadors showed in the fables somehow legitimizes them. According to Carpentier, the marvelous can be said to be real in this case, too, because the European explorers of the Americas genuinely believed it to be so.

Significantly, Carpentier does not argue that the marvelous is literally real or physically present in Latin America. Indeed, he contends that the nature of the marvelous has little to do with the world of the real and that to assess fantastical phenomena in terms of factual evidence is entirely inappropriate. For Carpentier, the “real marvelous” exists only through a radical, instinctive and irrational faith
and can never be understood in terms of conservative, considered and logical criteria, which constitute its antithesis and its annihilation. He writes:

[to begin with, the sensation of the marvelous presupposes a faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with the miracles of saints, nor can those who are not Quixotes enter body, soul and goods into the world of Amadis of Gaul or Tirant le Blanc. Certain phrases of Ruilio from The Labors of Persiles and Segismundo about men transformed into wolves turn out to be prodigiously trustworthy because in Cervantes' time it was believed that people could suffer from lupine mania. The same can be said of the journey of a character who flew from Tuscany to Norway upon the cloak of a witch. Marco Polo accepted that certain birds flew while carrying elephants in their claws, and Luther saw a demon face to face and threw an inkwell at its head. Victor Hugo, so exploited by sellers of marvelous books, believed in apparitions because he was sure that he had spoken with Leopoldina's ghost in Guernsey. (p. 118)

Carpentier's notion of the "real marvelous" possesses a certain Quixotic quality, as he himself appears to concede in this section of "the prologue", where he refers to the literary harlequin and places him at the head of a distinguished list of historical counterparts. Carpentier, like Cervantes in Don Quixote, portrays the marvelous as a vision. However, unlike Cervantes, who treats the delusions of Don Quixote with affectionate mockery, Carpentier refers to the illusions of the Afro-Haitians and Spanish conquistadors of the Americas with respectful sincerity. He saves his skepticism and scorn for the Surrealists, whom he criticizes throughout "the prologue" for their evocation of what could be comparatively described as the "fake marvelous".

The Surrealists claimed that they evoked the "real marvelous" in their representations of the fantastical visions of their nightly dreams and the hypnotic trances, drug-induced hallucinations and automatic writing sessions with which they experimented at their Bureau of Research. They extolled the legends and fantastic literatures of Western cultures and the myths and abstract art of "primitive" societies, which they believed the unconscious had informed and imbued with truth. They also lauded sex, violence, anarchy and madness as experiences or states in which the primal irrationality of the unconscious held sway. The Surrealists became notorious for their ostentatious repudiation of the conventions and mores of European society. Matthew Josephson, in Life Among the Surrealists, accordingly describes Surrealism as 'an all-out revolt against the civilisation that had brought forth the long orgy of destruction' of the First World War (1962, p. 141). However, this characterization is truer of Dada (c. 1916-22), from which Surrealism evolved, than of Surrealism (c. 1924-45). Surrealism, unlike its anarchical predecessor and despite its avowed rejection of institutionalized religion, operated much like a doctrinal sect, which revered the
fantastical realm of the unconscious that the Surrealist faithful believed Freud, the primary deity in the Surrealist pantheon, had revealed as the promised land. In his 1924 manifesto, Breton, the self-appointed “Pope” of this neoteric religion, was moved to eulogize (and concerned to stipulate): “[t]he marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful” (1998, p. 14).

Carpentier, who lived in Paris from 1928 to 1939, followed Breton’s public exhortation, elucidated in his 1925 ‘A letter to seers’, to take ‘the orders of the marvelous’ (Breton 1998, p. 198) and joined the new cult of Surrealism. At a journalist’s convention in Havana in 1928, Carpentier, who had spent forty days in jail in 1927 for signing a manifesto against the Cuban Gerardo Machado dictatorship (1925-33), had a fortuitous encounter with the Surrealist poet Robert Desnos. Desnos, evidently sensitive to Carpentier’s still precarious position, offered Carpentier his papers so that he could flee to France. Carpentier relates that he found himself involved in the Surrealist movement within forty-eight hours of his arrival in Paris (1981, p. 97). The Surrealists, he recalls, ‘welcomed me like a brother’. They asked him to write for their reviews, and he obliged, contributing to Georges Bataille’s Documentos, Ribemont Dessaignes’ Biffure and even La Révolution Surréaliste (p. 98-9), which Breton, who was notorious for his authoritarianism, edited according to a strict code of Surrealist representation. Carpentier, the newly converted Surrealist acolyte, also sent an article to the Cuban periodical Social in which he praised Surrealism for ‘its aversion to skepticism’ (qu. González Eschevarria 1977, p. 58) and its ‘intense faith’ (qu. 59) and defended his spiritual brethren against the bourgeois accusation that, like other avant-garde artists, they were little more than ‘playful iconoclasts … dangerously incredulous individuals, for whom life lacks any profound meaning.’ (qu. 58)

However, in January of 1930, Breton ex-communicated the increasingly left-leaning Desnos, the future Castro-ite Carpentier and ten other would-be Communist apparatchiki for what he perceived to be their betrayal of his vision of Surrealism as sympathetic to but independent of Communism (Langowski 1975, p. 211). The outcasts published a pamphlet entitled Un cadavre (“A corpse”), in which they waged a vitriolic attack on the autocratic character of Breton. In a brief note entitled ‘Temoignage’ (“Testimony”), which appears on the final page of the

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61 Desnos later became renowned for his humanitarian actions during the French resistance and his fatal internment in a concentration camp.
tract, Carpentier relates a meeting he had with Breton in which the "Surrealist Pope" jealously denounced the Surrealist poet Paul Eluard (González Echevarría 1975, p. 230). In the same year, Carpentier also published his own article in the Havana periodical Carteles, entitled 'El escándalo de Maldoror' ("The scandal of Maldoror"), in which he again malignated the character of Breton, comparing him to Robespierre and Mussolini (Rodríguez Monegal 1971). Carpentier's resentment of the perceived despotism of Breton is understandable. Carpentier, after all, was a political refugee who had served a prison term and been forced into self-imposed exile due to his opposition to autocracy. However, while his hostility towards Surrealism proved to be enduring, it ostensibly ceased to be based on personal antipathy towards Breton. When Carpentier censures the Surrealists in his famous preface to The Kingdom of The World and in 'The baroque and the marvelous real', the foundation for his criticism, in what constitutes a radical shift from the earlier view he expressed in Social, is what he perceives to be their lack of faith in the marvelous and the subsequent contrived nature of their representations of the marvelous.

In "the prologue", Carpentier justifies his apparent about face. In the very first sentence, he writes:

[3] After having felt the unexaggerated spell of the lands of Haiti, having found magical warnings along the red roads of the Central Meseta, having heard the drums of the Petro and the Rada, I was compelled to compare this recently experienced marvelous reality to the tiresome pretension of creating the marvelous that has characterized [Surrealism]. (1967 [1949], p. 116)

Carpentier contends that the active faith in the marvelous that he witnessed in Haiti 'compelled' him to recognize the inanimate pretense of the Surrealist vision of the marvelous. He saw that while the Afro-Haitians summoned the "real marvelous" from living beliefs, the Surrealists, whom he describes as 'cheaply disguised magicians' (p. 118), conjured the "fake marvelous" from a medley of banal parlor games and a bag of stale aesthetic tricks, relying on "the old cliches of the Broceliana jungle, the Knights of the Round Table, Merlin the sorcerer and the Arthurian Cycle" (p. 117) and the stock 'devices' of 'ghosts, immured priests, lycanthropes, hands nailed to a castle door'. They also contrived the "fake marvelous" through the artificial union of 'objects unlikely to be found together' in the fashion of their idol Isidore Ducasse (or The Count of Lautréamont), who compared the protagonist of his fantastical prose poem Les Chants de Maldoror (1868; "Songs of Maldoror") to 'the fortuitous encounter of the umbrella and the

62 'me acogieron como a un hermano' (p. 98).
sewing machine on the dissecting table.' (p. 116) Carpentier argues that Surrealist art, in particular, in its attempt to imitate the eccentric images and bizarre concatenations of Ducasse ad infinitum and ad nauseam, degenerated into a series of ‘well-worn formulas’ (p. 117) and became little more than ‘a monotonous junkyard of sugar-coated watches, seamstresses’ mannequins, vague phallic monuments’.

The problem, Carpentier diagnoses in “the prologue” in the enlightened aftermath of his Haitian epiphany, is that the Surrealists forget ... that the marvelous begins to exist in an unequivocal manner when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, from an unusual and singularly flattering illumination of the unnoticed richness of reality, from an amplification of the scales and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that conveys it to a kind of “extreme state”. (p. 118)

The problem, he resolves, is that the Surrealists fail to understand that the “real marvelous” can only arise spontaneously out of what he describes as an “extreme state” of spiritual belief. Surrealism, which involved the ‘premeditated and calculated’ pursuit of the marvelous, ‘was never anything but a ruse.’ (1967 (1949), p. 119) The Surrealists, Carpentier continues, had neither the imagination nor the strength to achieve a genuine faith or to apprehend the genuinely marvelous. He argues:

undoubtedly there is scarce defense for poets and artists who ... establish secret societies, literary sects, vaguely philosophical groups, with saints and signs and arcane ends – none reached – without being capable of conceiving of a valid mysticism or of abandoning the most small-minded habits in order to gamble their souls on the terrifying card of faith.

While Carpentier indicates here that the Surrealists were simply too feeble to achieve the genuine faith necessary to experience the “real marvelous”, he goes on to imply that they were, as Europeans, fundamentally incapable of the artless conviction required to perceive the authentically magical. Culture rather than cowardice appears to be their ultimate foible. Carpentier, who approaches the argument tangentially, writes:

whereas in Western Europe folk dancing, for example, has lost all of its magical or invocatory character, rare is the collective dance in America that does not involve a deep sense of ritual, creating around itself an entire process of initiation: such are the dances of the Cuban santeria or the prodigious African version of the Corpus festival, which still can be seen in the town of San Francisco de Yare in Venezuela. (p. 120)

Latin Americans, according to Carpentier, enjoy a primordial state of spiritual wholeness, which allows them to feel the ‘deep sense of ritual’ that is essential to

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63 The accusation is not unreasonable. Surrealist art certainly declined in imaginative originality following the exploitation of the commercial market by Salvador Dali (ingeniously dubbed Avida Dollars by an indignant Breton) in the U.S.A. in his later years. Ironically, as I suggest in the following chapter, magical realism has been similarly accused of having degenerated into little more than a mercantivist cliché.
the experience of the marvelous as real. Europeans, by contrast, have ‘lost’ that primal position of religious integrity and, consequently, their ‘magical or invocatory’ ability and can only construct meaningless replicas of the “Platonic Forms” of the “real marvelous”.

The “Marvelous Real” of Latin America

Versus the “Marvelous Unreal” of Surrealism:

Authentic Wonders (à la Fidel Castro?) Versus Contrived Spectacle

While Carpentier presents the experience of the “real marvelous” as a rather enigmatic affair that requires a unique proclivity for faith, the perception of the “marvelous real”, on the other hand, appears to be a much simpler matter. In fact, he argues, in ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’: ‘[I]n terms of the marvelous real, all we have to do is to reach out our hands in order to grasp it.’

According to Carpentier, the eminently tactile and attainable property of the “marvelous real” manifests itself in a variety of forms in Latin America. To begin with, as he argues in “the prologue”, the “marvelous real” is apparent in ‘the virginity of the landscape’ (1967 (1949), p. 121), which boasts ‘magic’ (p. 117) flora. It is also evident in the architecture of the buildings that can be found in the region. In the extended version of “the prologue”, Carpentier dwells particularly on the ‘poetic ruins’ (1967, p. 115) of the Citadel of La Ferrière in Haiti, the monolithic fortress that is often regarded as the eighth wonder of the modern world, amidst which he claims he first discovered the marvelous real. He also catalogues a number of examples of pre-Columbian architecture as evidence of the “marvelous real”: ‘the towers of Tikal, the frescoes rescued from the jungle of Bonampak, the powerful enigma of Tiahuanaco, the majesty of the acropolis at Monte Albán, the abstract – absolutely abstract – beauty of the Temple of Mitla’.

‘The list,’ Carpentier asserts, ‘could go on forever’. However, the historical record of Latin America provides Carpentier with the principal testimony of the “marvelous real”. ‘Indeed’, he asks in the often-quoted conclusion to his renowned exegesis, ‘what is the history of the whole of America but a chronicle of the marvelous real?’ (1967 (1949), p. 121)

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64 ‘proneditado y calculado’ (1981, p. 130).
65 ‘En cuanto a lo real maravilloso, sólo tenemos que alargar las manos para alcanzarlo’ (1981, p. 135).
In “the prologue”, Carpentier identifies a host of historical incidents that he believes comprise instances of the “marvelous real”. For example, he evokes the history of Henri Christophe, the former cook who fought in the wars for Haitian independence from 1791 to 1804, served as President of the new republic from 1807 to 1811 and reigned as self-proclaimed King from 1811 to 1820. King Christophe, inspired by the extravagances of the French monarchy, created his own royal entourage, established a regal dress code, instituted an elaborate court ceremony and, upon the re-establishment of slave labor, built himself no less than fourteen palaces, one of which was The Citadel of La Ferrière. Christophe, afraid of an assault by Napoleon, fortified the walls of this indomitable fortress with the blood of hundreds of sacrificed bulls. Indeed, according to legend, Christophe himself lies entombed within a concrete floor of the uncompleted edifice, after he fell into wet cement when he committed suicide (with a gold bullet that he kept on a chain around his neck for this purpose) during a slave insurrection. In the expanded edition of “the prologue”, Carpentier specifies a number of other historical personages, who also contributed to the Latin American historical ‘chronicle’ of the “marvelous real”. He refers, for instance, to Mariano Melgarejo, the dictator of Bolivia from 1865 to 1871, who allowed his black stallion Holofernes to drink beer from the presidential table alongside ministers, bishops and generals (1967, p. 114). In ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’, Carpentier includes more recent events in his inventory of historical manifestations of the “marvelous real” and claims that, as with the more distant past, “[o]ur contemporary history presents us with unusual events every day.”

66 ‘Nuestra historia contemporánea nos presenta cada día insólitos acontecimientos.’ (1981, p. 125)
67 ‘el país peor situado para propiciarla’.
68 ‘un hecho insólito en la historia contemporánea ... que se añade a muchos hechos insólitos que para gloria nuestra y con magníficos resultados se han producido en la historia de América desde la Conquista hasta ahora.’

The Cuban
revolution may have comprised an important event in the historical chronicle of the “marvelous real” for Carpentier, but the Spanish conquest, which he refers to here as well as in “the prologue”, constituted an even more significant occasion.

For Carpentier, the Spanish conquest of the Americas is notable in two respects. To begin with, it comprises the first chapter in the historical chronicle of the “marvelous real” of the area. In the extended version of “the prologue”, he compares this momentous episode in the annals of history to the fantastical plots of tales of chivalry, which were popular in Europe in the fifteenth century. He focuses on the conquest of the Aztec Empire of Montezuma II by the Spanish expedition of Hernando Cortés, which Bernal Díaz del Castillo witnessed and recorded in *The Conquest of New Spain* (Verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España 1632). For Carpentier, Díaz del Castillo’s history of the conquest is “the only real and reliable book of chivalry that has been written” (1967, p. 114).

In Díaz del Castillo’s authentic version of the knightly tale (of which he is both the author and a protagonist), Carpentier writes,

> the evil doers are lords one could see and touch, unknown animals are real, unknown cities are discovered, dragons are seen in rivers and strange mountains in snow and smoke. Bernal Díaz, without suspecting it, had surpassed the exploits of Amadís of Gaul, Belisarius of Greece and Florismarte of Hircania.

Carpentier values the Spanish conquest of the Americas for the additional reason that the “discovery” of the “New World” also involved the discovery of the “marvelous real” in the landscape and architecture of the region. In “The baroque and the marvelous real”, he argues:

> the conquistadores saw very clearly aspects of the marvelous real in America, and to demonstrate this I want to recall the phrase of Bernal Díaz when he contemplates the city of México [Tenochtitlán] for the first time and exclaims ... “We were all amazed and said that these lands, temples and lakes are like the enchantments of which Amadís speaks.”

The opposition that Carpentier establishes between the “marvelous real” of Latin America and what could be comparatively described as the “marvelous unreal” of chivalrous tales entails another criticism of the inauthenticity of the Surrealist version of the marvelous, for the Surrealists heralded these legendary narratives of Europe as manifestations of the fantastical truth of the unconscious. In “the prologue”, Carpentier also makes a number of other comparisons between what he perceives to be the “marvelous real” of Latin America and the “marvelous unreal”

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69 “los conquistadores vieron muy claramente el aspecto real maravilloso en las cosas de América, y al efecto quiero recordar la frase de Bernal Díaz cuando contempla la ciudad de México por primera vez y exclama ... “Todos nos quedamos asombrados y disfamos que esas tierras, templos y lagos se parecían a los encantamientos de que habla el Amadís.”” (1981, p. 131).
of Surrealism. He juxtaposes the genuine ‘incredible intertwining’ of the native Caribbean flora with the Surrealist artist André Masson’s bizarre tangled paintings of ‘horses devouring birds’ (1967 (1949), p. 117). He contrasts the real structure of The Citadel of La Ferrière with the fantastical dungeons of the Venetian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s Imaginary Prisons (c. 1745), which the Surrealists admired (p. 119). He also compares Latin American historical personages with Surrealist literary characters, describing Henri Christophe, for example, as a ‘monarch of incredible undertakings, much more surprising than all the cruel kings invented by the Surrealists, who were very fond of imaginary tyrannies, though they never suffered one.’ (p. 119) According to Carpentier, in ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’, while the Surrealists ‘pursued the marvelous through books and prefabricated things’,70 ‘[t]he marvelous real, in contrast, which I defend and which is our own marvelous real, is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent in all that is Latin American. Here the unusual is commonplace, and always was commonplace.’71

As the nature of Carpentier’s inventory of the “marvelous real” indicates, the “marvelous real”, unlike the “real marvelous”, appears to denote the preternatural rather than the supernatural. In fact, as the above quotation from ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’ suggests, Carpentier later seems to confine the significance of the entire category of the marvelous real almost exclusively to the strange. The examples that he gives of the marvelous real in this essay involve mostly geographical, architectural or historical peculiarities. He even defines the marvelous in this paper as ‘[a]ll that is unusual’72 in what appears to be an attempt to distance it from its alternative significance as a synonym for the fantastic, which he had previously entertained and even encouraged in his original conceptualization of the marvelous real. Carpentier appears to have initiated this subtle modification of the meaning of the marvelous real in the extended edition of the original foreword to The Kingdom of This World. In ‘On the American marvelous real’, he adds to “the prologue” a lengthy discussion of the peculiar characteristics of other cultures and an inventory of ‘absurd facts’ (1967, p. 114) about Latin America.

70 ‘perseguía lo maravilloso a través de los libros, a través de cosas prefabricadas’ (1981, p. 129).
71 ‘Lo real maravilloso, en cambio, que yo defiendo, y es lo real maravilloso nuestro, es el que encontramos en estado bruto, latente, omnipresente en todo lo latinoamericano. Aquí lo insólito es cotidiano, siempre fue cotidiano.’ (p. 130)
72 ‘Todo lo insólito’ (p. 128).
This shift in Carpentier's conceptualization of the marvelous real from the "real marvelous" to the "marvelous real" coincides with a change in his fiction. The novels that follow *The Kingdom of This World* no longer involve the depiction of fantastical beliefs as real but, instead, regardless of their varied plots, consistently entail the documentation of the fantastical nature of the real. *Explosion in a Cathedral* (El siglo de las luces 1962), for example, a novel about the impact of the French Revolution on the Caribbean, features lavish descriptions of the Caribbean environment, while *Reasons of State* (El recurso de método 1974) depicts the peculiar antics of a Latin American dictator in exile. As Bell Gale Chevigny argues, in "Insatiable unease": Melville and Carpentier and the search for an American hermeneutic’, ‘[b]y the time Carpentier published *Explosion in a Cathedral* [in 1962], his claims for extreme American originality were muted’ (1986, p. 40).73

Carpentier's revision of the significance of the marvelous real, along with the deviation in his style of fiction writing, have undoubtedly contributed to the confusion that surrounds the literary genre of magical realism, with which the name of Carpentier and the rubric of the marvelous real are synonymous. The magical realist label, as I previously suggested, often has been inappropriately employed to describe realistic works that involve mere descriptions of strange events or lyrical evocations of the natural world. These include the later novels of Carpentier. Such misguided (and misleading) appropriations of the magical realist appellation usually arise from the mistaken association of magical realist writing with magical realist painting. However, Carpentier himself may have inadvertently encouraged the erroneous characterization of magical realist literature in terms of magical realist art. As I noted at the end of the last chapter, Carpentier's elucidation of the marvelous real resembles Roh's formulation of magical realism, particularly in 'On the American marvelous real' and in 'The baroque and the marvelous real', where Carpentier emphasizes the marvelous nature of the real rather than the real nature of the marvelous. In 'The baroque and the marvelous real', Carpentier explicitly distinguishes the marvelous real from Roh's magical realism, perhaps because he recognizes that his conceptualization of the marvelous real by this time bears a perceptible similarity to Roh's characterization of magical realism.

73 As I argue in the following chapter, *The Lost Steps* (Los pasos perdidos), which was published in 1953, already manifests a 'muted' version of his nationalistic theory of the marvelous real and also
However, while Carpentier attempted to downplay the fantastical element in his original theory of the Latin American marvelous real, perhaps because of the fantastical nature of magical realist texts themselves, the "real marvelous", rather than the "marvelous real", continues to be the more prominent meaning of the bilateral label. Indeed, a host of other writers and critics of the magical realist literary genre have echoed Carpentier's original claim that in Latin America or other marginal domains the marvelous, in both the sense of the supernatural and the preternatural or, alternatively, solely in the sense of the supernatural, is real. In addition, they have made explicit Carpentier's implicit suggestion that the narrative genre of magical realism is a "marginal realism".

_The Hypnotic Allure of the "Magical Margins": The Carpentierian Entrancement of Magical Realist Literary Criticism_

Asturias, Carpentier's co-pioneer of magical realist fiction, is one such proselytizer of the Carpentierian thesis that Latin America, because of its indigenous people's mythological beliefs, spectacular geography and tumultuous history, is a marvelous world. In Luis Harss' and Barbara Dohmann's _Into the Mainstream, Conversations with Latin-American Writers_, for example, Asturias refers to the 'oneiric, fabulous, imaginary reality' of the indigenous Latin Americans (qu. 1967, p. 79), the exorbitant nature of the Latin American landscape (p. 82) and odd episodes in Latin American history, such as the 'invisible dictatorship' (qu. p. 72) of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), who surrounded himself with witchdoctors and Indian fortunetellers and who was rarely seen by the people of Guatemala in the twenty years that he presided over them. Asturias also explicitly states that his magical realist fiction is organically informed by that genuinely magical reality. According to Asturias, the magical realism of _Men of Maize_ 'corresponds ... to the indigenous mentality, magical and primitive'\(^74\) and reflects 'the great voices of nature, the voices of the rivers, of the mountains' (qu. Harss & Dohmann 1967, p. 82). He claims: 'In Guatemalan life, which is that which pervades my novels, reality and the fantastic are mixed, so that it is impossible to separate them.'\(^75\) In addition, like Carpentier, Asturias compares magical realism

\(^74\) 'corresponde ... a la mentalidad indigena, magica y primitiva' (qu. Suárez-Murias 1982, p. 104).
\(^75\) 'En la vida guatemalteca que es la que invade mis novelas, están mezclados la realidad y lo fantástico, que es imposible separarlos.' (qu. Scarano 1998, p. 12)
with European Surrealism, which he rejects as 'too intellectual'. Asturias, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1967, the same year in which Carpentier released his extended version of "the prologue" and García Márquez published *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (an auspicious confluence of events that undoubtedly contributed to the "Boom" in publishing of magical realism and the popularity of the theory of the Latin American marvelous real), also evokes these Carpentierian arguments in his 'Nobel lecture' (Asturias 1967a) and 'Acceptance speech' (Asturias 1967b). Asturias refers to the magically permeated worldview of the indigenous Latin Americans (1967a), Latin America's 'geography of madness' (1967b) and the region's 'shocking' history. He also asserts that while 'our novels appear to Europeans as illogical or aberrant', they in fact 'contain reality' and relate 'what happened to us'. While Western audiences tend to view his magical realist novels as 'surrealist' (1967a), they are, in fact, realist.

García Márquez is another Latin American author who, as Vera Kutzinski avers, in 'The logic of wings: Gabriel García Márquez and Afro-American literature', consistently proposes as the 'founding principle' of magical realism a nationalistic thesis that is 'strongly suggestive of the Carpentierian concept of a "marvelous American reality"' (1989, p. 172). Indeed, García Márquez, who has iterated well nigh verbatim the essential tenets of Carpentier's hypothesis of the Latin American marvelous real throughout his literary career and who enjoys an international literary celebrity, may have been more successful in disseminating Carpentierian ideas about Latin America and magical realism than Carpentier himself. When he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, García Márquez delivered an address that recalls "the prologue" even more than the earlier Nobel addresses of Asturias and which has become a kind of second manifesto of magical realism. In his 'Nobel lecture: The solitude of America', García Márquez refers to the beliefs in such marvelous phenomena as the Fountain of Eternal Youth and El Dorado, which inspired the Spanish conquistadors of the "New World" during their travels and travails. He focuses on Antonio Pigafetta, the Florentine navigator who accompanied Magellan on his first voyage around the world and who believed that such fabulous creatures as 'hogs with navels on their haunches, clawless birds whose hens laid eggs on the backs of their mates, and others still, resembling tongueless pelicans, with beaks like spoons' existed in the Americas. García Márquez also refers to the 'outsized reality' of Latin America and evokes the

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strange history of the region. He mentions, for example, ‘General Antonio López de Santa Anna, three times dictator of Mexico’, who ‘held a magnificent funeral for the right leg he had lost in the so-called Pastry War’. In addition, García Márquez suggests that while magical realism may beggar belief, it is in fact a Latin American realism. In a passage that is quoted perhaps as frequently as the conclusion to “the prologue”, he writes: ‘creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable.’ García Márquez’ ‘Nobel lecture’, as Erik Camayd-Freixas argues, in ‘Reflections on Magical Realism: A return to legitimacy, the legitimacy of return’, ‘confirms his devotion to Carpentier’ (1996, p. 587). In The Fragrance of Guava, Conversations with Gabriel García Márquez (Gabriel García Márquez, El olor de la guayaba, Conversaciones con Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza 2000), García Márquez demonstrates a similar dedication to Carpentier’s ideas about the magical nature of Latin America and explicitly avers that magical realism constitutes a Latin American realism. He attributes the magical realism of One Hundred Years of Solitude to the ‘exuberant imaginations of African slaves … [and] pre-Columbian natives and … the Andalusian taste for fantasy and the Galician cult of the supernatural’ and describes magical realism as a method of ‘capturing and recounting a world of omens, cures, premonitions and superstitions … that is very much ours, very much Latin American’. Indeed, he even indicates that he belongs to that ‘world’, relating that his grandmother, with whom he lived as a young child, initiated him into the realm of superstitions and premonitions (p. 19), in which he continues to believe as an adult (pp. 146-7). García Márquez also suggests that the magical realism of One Hundred Years of Solitude reflects the geographically disproportionate nature of Latin American reality. He argues: ‘[r]ivers with boiling water, storms which make the earth tremble, cyclones which carry houses through the air, are not invented things but the dimensions of nature in our world’. He also justifies the magical realism of his famous novel in terms of the strange events that Latin Americans regularly experience. He asserts:

77 ‘la imaginación desbordada de los esclavos negros africanos … [y] nativos precolombinos y … la fantasía de los andaluces y el culto de los gallegos por lo sobrenatural.’ (Apuleyo Mendoza & García Márquez 2000, p. 68)

78 ‘captando y refiriendo un mundo de presagios, de terapias, de premoniciones, de supersticiones que era muy nuestro, muy latinoamericano.’ (p. 77)

79 ‘[l]os ríos de aguas hirvientes y las tormentas que hacen estremecer la tierra, y los ciclones que se llevan las casas por los aires, no son cosas inventadas, sino dimensiones de la naturaleza que existen en nuestro mundo’ (p. 78)
[c]veryday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things. ... In Comodoro Rivadavia, in the extreme south of Argentina, winds from the South Pole swept a whole circus away and the next day fishermen caught the bodies of lions and giraffes in their nets. ... You only have to open the newspapers to see that extraordinary things happen to us every day.\textsuperscript{80}

In fact, García Márquez specifically alleges that the marvelous episodes in \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude} are the real experiences of Latin Americans. He claims:

\textit{... After I wrote One Hundred Years of Solitude, a boy appeared in Barranquilla confessing that he had a pig's tail. ... I know ordinary people who have read One Hundred Years of Solitude with much pleasure and with much care but without any surprise because, after all, I have told them nothing that does not resemble their experience of life.} \textsuperscript{81}

Other contemporary Latin American writers have also repeated the arguments of Carpentier (or, perhaps, the Carpentierian arguments of García Márquez) in reference to their magical realist literature, which they suggest is a Latin American realism. Isabel Allende, the Chilean author of the best-selling magical realist staple \textit{The House of the Spirits} (La casa de los espiritus 2001 (1982)), which tells the story of the family of a clairvoyant and telekinetic heroine named Clara before the democratically elected rise and following the ignominiously orchestrated fall of Salvador Allende (the author’s uncle), is one of them. Allende claims that magical realist literature ‘relies on a Latin American reality’ (qu. Foreman 1995, p. 286). ‘Magical Realism’, she asserts, ‘is not a literary device; it’s how I live.’ (qu. Hornblower 1995, p. 66) Allende refers to the mythological beliefs of her grandparents, with whom, similarly to García Márquez, she lived as a child, and her own personal faith in supernatural phenomena (in Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 20). She believes, for instance, that her deceased grandmother, who was, she alleges, a clairvoyant with the power to move a sugar bowl across a table with her mere gaze and who provided the model for Clara, is her guardian angel. Allende also contends, sounding remarkably like García Márquez:

\textit{... we can register the most extravagant, evil, obscene, incredible or magnificent facts - which in Latin America, are not hyperbole, because that is the dimension of our reality. ... In Latin America we don’t have to stretch our imaginations. Critics in Europe and the United States often stare in disbelief at Latin American books, asking how the authors dare to invent those incredible lies ... It is very hard to explain to critics that these things are not a product of our pathological imaginations. They are written in our history; we can find them every day in our newspapers.} (Allende 1989, pp. 45-6)

\textsuperscript{80} ‘La vida cotidiana en América Latina nos demuestra que la realidad está llena de cosas extraordinarias. ... En Comodoro Rivadavia, en el extremo sur de la Argentina, vientos del polo se llevaron por los aires un circo entero. Al día siguiente, los pescadores sacaron en sus redes cadáveres de leones y jirafas. ... Basta abrir los periódicos para saber que entre nosotros cosas extraordinarias ocurren todos los días.’ (p. 48)

\textsuperscript{81} ‘Después de escrito Cien años de soledad, apareció en Barranquilla un muchacho confesando que tiene una cola de cerdo. ... Conozco gente del pueblo raso que ha leído Cien años de soledad con mucho gusto y con mucho cuidado, pero sin sorpresa alguna, pues al fin y al cabo no les cuento nada que no se parezca a la vida que ellos viven.’
Luisa Valenzuela, the Argentine author of the magical realist novel *The Lizard's Tail* (Cola de lagartija 1983), which presents a deranged Peronist political agitator called Witchdoc, who lives underground and nurtures a testicular cyst that he believes is about to give birth, also explicitly argues that magical realism is an 'incontrovertible realism' (qu. Picon Garfield 1985). Valenzuela, like Asturias, links her magical realism to the mythological beliefs of 'the Latin American Indians', with whom she claims an affinity (qu. Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 316). In addition, Valenzuela contends: '[O]ur reality is very strange' (qu. Cunningham 1991, p. 35). Like Carpenter, she claims that the Spanish conquistadors of the New World were 'marvelous' (qu. Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 320). She also refers to latter day Latin American historical figures such as José Lopez Rega, the corrupt 'Sorcerer' of Argentina who influenced the Peróns' rule and upon whom the Witchdoc is based, and Eva Perón herself, the subject of a grotesque postmortem cult of worship that features in Valenzuela's novel, as people who act as 'pivots, bridges or shifters' to blur 'the separation between what we usually call reality and fiction' (qu. Picon Garfield 1985). Valenzuela even rejects Surrealism in favor of magical realism, which is, she claims, by contrast to Surrealism, 'totally realistic!' (qu. Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 316)

Critics from Latin America and around the world have also invoked the precepts of Carpenter, often filtered through García Márquez, to explain magical realist literature as a Latin American realism. Rodríguez-Luis, for example, argues that magical realism reflects the magical nature of Latin America, which derives from its extraordinary natural phenomenon and mythically minded people (1991, p. 104). Gene Bell-Villada, in *García Márquez: The Man and his Work* (1990), paraphrases García Márquez' Carpenterian construal of the magical realist literary genre. He writes that magical realism is a reflection of the 'disproportion ... of reality in Latin America, with its rivers so wide one often cannot see across them, and its earthquakes and tempests' and of 'popular myths, beliefs, and home remedies ... folk legends and superstitions' (p. 12). For Bell-Villada, 'the most significant achievement of García Márquez is his having led the art of fiction back to real life' (p. 14). Donald Leslie Shaw, in *Jorge Luis Borges: Ficciones* (1990), also echoes Carpenter's or García Márquez' characterizations of the magical realist literary genre. He argues that it is 'based on the astonishment which certain aspects of reality, both historical and contemporary, in the subcontinent [sic] can
still produce, as well as on the magico-mythical outlook of its indigenous and black inhabitants' (p. 30). Humberto E. Robles is another critic who affirms both Carpenter's and García Márquez' explanations of the magical realist writing style. In 'The first voyage around the world: From Pigafetta to García Márquez', Robles compares Carpenter and García Márquez to Pigafetta and argues that they all 'share prevailing concerns – to come to grips with the marvellous quality of Latin American reality' (1989, p. 198). According to Robles, who basically restates the sentiments of García Márquez' 'Nobel lecture', Carpenter and García Márquez understand that in surroundings where the teratological is an everyday occurrence, the demands on the imagination are not to invent, but to make believable an unbelievable, yet authentic reality'. Franco, who recapitulates Carpenter's theory of the Latin American marvelous real, writes that García Márquez' famous magical realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 'reminds us that in a continent conquered by men who ... were haunted by tales of El Dorado, a continent in which nature has almost invariably triumphed over man, the marvellous must have a place in literature.' (1971, p. 347) Franco argues that reality in Latin America is 'too complex and bizarre' for realism and that writers such as García Márquez, who have 'used fantasy', represent 'a truer picture of society' (p. 300). *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, she proclaims, 'is the novel that finally persuades us of the inadequacy of realism in dealing with the Spanish-American environment' (p. 346). Ángel Valbuena Briones, in 'Una cala en el realismo mágico' ('A sample in magical realism'), similarly contends that 'to make sense of American reality one needs an illusory dimension, a fantasy or a myth'. In his description of the extraordinary Latin American world, which he suggests necessitates the hyperbolical magical realist genre, he evokes not only the “magical margins” arguments of Carpenter and García Márquez but also the magical realist literature of Borges and even contributes his own exorbitant claim regarding Latin America's unnaturalness. He contends: 'American reality, with its people, cities, rivers and mountains, is populated by legends, fantastic beings, labyrinths and is witness to the reversal of the laws of physics.' Jonathon Cohen and Marguerite Suárez-Muriaz reprise Carpenter's contrast of the Surrealist marvelous and the marvelous real. According to Cohen, in *Latin American Writing Today*, the 'dream

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62 'para dar sentido a la realidad americana se necesita una dimensión ilusoria, una fantasía o un mito.' (1969, p. 233)

63 'La realidad americana, con sus hombres, ciudades, ríos y montañas se puebla de leyendas, seres fantásticos, laberintos, y ocurre el trasvase de las leyes de la física.'
landscapes [and] juxtapositions that are self-consciously evoked in the streets of Paris take real form’ in Latin America (ed. 1967, p. 13). Suárez-Murias, in ‘El realismo mágico en Hispanoamérica: una definición étnica’ (”Magical realism in Hispano-America: An ethnic definition”), argues that an ‘element of faith is the factor that distinguishes magical realism from Surrealism’.  

However, despite the Carpentierian ‘territorialization’ (Chanady 1995, p. 131) of magical realism by Latin Americans, writers outside of that region have also written magical realist texts and, what is more, reprinted the Carpentierian suggestion that magical realism constitutes a “marginal realism”. Toni Morrison, the Afro-American Nobel Laureate and author of the magical realist novel Beloved (1988 (1987)), in which the infanticide victim of a former slave woman returns to life to haunt her in nineteenth century post-emancipation U.S.A., is among them. She suggests that magical realism reflects the ‘cosmology’ of the Afro-American community, which ‘accepted what … could be called superstitions and magic’ (Morrison 1985, p. 342). Morrison, like García Márquez and Allende, explains magical realism with reference to her own family’s faith in the supernatural. She writes: ‘I grew up in a house in which people talked about their dreams with the same authority that they talked about what “really” happened. They had visitations and did not find that fact shocking.’ (qu. Davis 1993, p. 415). According to Morrison, ‘they had some sweet, intimate connection with things that were not empirically verifiable.’ She adds: “[i]t’s just that when it comes from discredited people it somehow has some other exotic attachment: thus the word “magic”.’ Morrison even argues for a literal rather than a metaphorical interpretation of the fantastical events that occur in her novels. Of Song of Solomon (1989 (1977)), for example, in which various Afro-American male characters are said to fly, Morrison asserts that ‘my meaning is specific: it is about black people who could fly’ (qu. LeClair 1993, p. 372). For Morrison, who suggests that her work is a reflection of that ‘indefinable quality … that is curiously black’ (qu. McKay 1993, p. 409), magical realism is not a Latin American realism but an Afro-American realism.

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84 ‘element de fe es el que desliza al realismo mágico del surrealismo’ (1982, p. 104).
85 The representations of human flight in the novel, however, are decidedly more ambiguous. Indeed, the text clearly suggests that the feats of levitation that Mr Smith, Pilate and Milkman accomplish, which coincide with their deaths, occur only in the characters’ mists and are thus to be interpreted metaphorically. Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin, in A World of Difference: An Intercultural Study of Toni Morrison's Novels, for example, interpret the novel’s representations of male flight as allegorical criticisms of male avoidance of familial or social responsibilities (1994, p. 80). Magical realist literature, as I argue further in chapter six, often defies authorial propaganda and
Ben Okri, the Nigerian author of the Booker Prize winning magical realist novel *The Famished Road* (1991), which portrays the adventures of the mythical Yoruba *abiku* or spirit child Azaro, who flits between the worlds of the impoverished living and the grotesquely dead, suggests that magical realism is an African realism. He contends that the magical realism of his novel is 'a kind of realism' (qu. Ross 1993, p. 338), 'looking at the world ... from the inside of the African world view' (qu. p. 337). He argues: 'the mythic dimension ... is a very important part of our world view. It's not separable from anything else.' Okri also distinguishes magical realism from Surrealism based on its cultural authenticity.

Mudrooroo, who identifies as an Aboriginal Australian, suggests that the magical realism of his *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991), in which the Aborigines confined to Flinders Island by government edict in the nineteenth century conjure their animal "Dreaming" companions, is an Aboriginal realism. In *Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, Mudrooroo describes the Aboriginal world as a 'maban reality' (1997a, p. 83), 'stemming from the time of our ancestors' (p. 82), which is characterized 'by a firm grounding in ... reality ... together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality' (p. 97). He nominates his own *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* as an example of a 'maban reality' text, which is, Mudrooroo avers, 'akin to magic realism' (p. 96).

Salman Rushdie, the Indian expatriate author of the Booker Prize winning magical realist novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), which depicts the hyperbolic adventures of Saleem Sinai, a telepathic and fantastically keen-smelling protagonist, who is one of one thousand and one supernaturally gifted children born on India's independence day, argues for a less exclusive interpretation of magical realist literature. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie characterizes magical realism as the expression of 'a genuinely "Third World" consciousness' (1991, p. 301). He contends

"In the works of Márquez, as in the world he describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun. It would be a mistake to think of Márquez' literary universe as an invented, self-referential, closed system. He is not writing about Middle-earth, but about the one we all inhabit. Macondo exists. That is its magic." (p. 302)

The Anglo-Australian Tim Winton and the Anglo-Canadian Jack Hodgins disagree with Rushdie's representation of magical realism as a Third World realism, for these First World authors, albeit of postcolonial nations, also believe

encourages non-literal interpretation of the magical events that it represents with what is, as I have already suggested and as I will argue further, only an ironic literalness.
that their magical realism is a “marginal realism”. Winton, for example, asserts that the magical realism of his novel *Cloudstreet* (1991), in which a pig speaks and an aboriginal man walks on water in an otherwise recognizable twentieth century Western Australia, is a ‘true realism: the supernatural and the natural accepted as one thing, as inclusive’ (qu. Bennett 1992, p. 65). Indeed, Winton even compares magical realism with Surrealism, which he rejects for having ‘faked it’. Hodgins, the author of the magical realist novel *The Invention of the World* (1994 (1977)), which portrays the story of Donal Kenneally, the tyrant of an Irish émigré community on Vancouver Island, who was reportedly born of the union of a woman and a bull and who, as a young man, creates and kills his own twin, similarly claims: ‘[T]his thing called “magic realism” is not magic at all. It’s real. I don’t write anything unreal or unbelievable or even improbable.’ (qu. ed. Hancock 1980, p. 10)

Literary commentators have been as receptive of the various “magical margins” suggestions of these internationally marginal writers of magical realist literature as they have been of the original and specifically Latin American argument. Indeed, James Hardy and Leonard Stanton, in an essay on the purportedly magical realist fiction of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, have not even required any authorial prompting to speculate that Gogol’s marvelous literature derives from the marvelous nature of nineteenth century Saint Petersburg. In ‘Magical realism in the tales of Nikolai Gogol’, Hardy and Stanton aver that Gogol’s fantastical short story ‘The Nose’ (1836) reflects ‘the inherently surreal quality of daily life in St. Petersburg’ in the nineteenth century (2002, p. 128). They contend:

the things that required explanation were the ordinary and the everyday, while the wondrous, the supernatural, the incomprehensible could be expected to occur as a matter of course. In St. Petersburg, the wondrous and the supernatural is the ordinary, while the truly incomprehensible is what happens to everyone every day. (p. 134)

While the argument of Hardy and Stanton is rather bewildering, the number and caliber of marginal writers of magical realism who claim that the narrative genre constitutes a “marginal realism” is quite persuasive. However, this widespread support for the Carpentierian “magical margins” thesis is fundamentally misguided and misleading.
CHAPTER FIVE
When (Nationalist) Dreams Turn Sour:
Curdling the Carpentierian Fantasy of the “Magical Margins”

Carpentier promotes his theory of the marvelous real as an indigenous hypothesis, which demonstrates not only Latin America’s cultural independence from but also cultural superiority to Western culture, as embodied by the Surrealist movement. However, his “magical margins” concept is an extremely questionable premise in terms of its authenticity and its politics. While Carpentier suggests that his doctrine derived from his observation of the marvelous reality of Haiti in 1943, it actually evolved from his internalization of the bohemian predilections of the European avant-garde at the turn of the twentieth century. The European avant-garde at this time exhibited arguably two principal characteristics: an attraction to the “primitive” and a concurrent fascination with the “irrational” (or a discontentment with the “civilized” and a concomitant dissatisfaction with the “rational”). These two exact same traits constitute the fundamental features of Carpentier’s ideology of the marvelous real, which is based upon the “irrational” beliefs of the “primitive” substratum of the Latin American population as well as the “irrational” nature of Latin American history, geography and architecture. This is not a mere coincidence. Carpentier, in his literary career, came under the sway of, firstly, Modern Primitivism and, subsequently, Surrealism, two movements that exemplified, in their respective obsessions with the “primitive” and the “irrational”, the iconoclastic preoccupations of the European avant-garde. Carpentier’s hypothesis, largely because of its paradoxical dependence on the exoticist paradigms of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, is less a genuine representation of Latin American reality than a dubious re-presentation of what are essentially revamped imperialistic archetypes. It is also less an affirmation of the cultural autonomy of Latin America than a confirmation of the cultural authority of the hegemonic West. Perhaps inevitably, the “magical margins” propositions of other marginal writers of magical realist literature, which reveal a remarkable resemblance to Carpentier’s seminal supposition, also manifest a strikingly similar inauthenticity (which may be, as Borges suggests, an inexorable affliction of nationalistic discourses) and articulate an analogously ambiguous message (which also may be endemic to essentialist expressions of cultural difference.)
Carpentier’s Seduction by the Modern Primitive: 
Out of Africa (via Europe) and into Afro-Cubanism

Europe has long demonstrated a penchant for the “primitive”. According to Elazar Barkin and Ronald Bush, in their introduction to Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism, a Western fetish for “other” cultures dates ‘as far back as antiquity’ (eds 1995, p. 2). However, in the first decades of the twentieth century, European society, which had been radically transformed and deeply disturbed by massive industrialization and global warfare, became progressively disillusioned with itself and, at the same time, increasingly attracted to “primitive” cultures. In the history of Western art, the “primitive” has been variously identified with a host of “other” cultures (including those of India, Egypt and Japan.) However, Modern Primitivism, as this latest inclination for the exotic came to be known, became focused on so-called Tribal Art or art nègre, terms that indiscriminately encompassed the cultural products of Africa, Afro-America and Oceania. This fascination with “black art”, which characterizes the primitivist resurgence of the twentieth century, appears to have been inspired by several factors. The “scramble for Africa”, in which the European imperial powers raced each other to plunder the riches of the “Dark Continent” in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, constituted probably the primary influence. In Africa, as Barkin and Bush write, the imperial invaders ‘encountered exquisite indigenous art, treasure which they immediately looted ... and a new fad, “primitive art”, swept Europe.’ (p. 1)

Tribal and other “primitive” artworks inspired European artists, such as Pablo Picasso, whom William Rubin, in Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the

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86 The high profile Afro-American political and cultural movements that emerged in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century provided another stimulus. Afro-Americans such as William DuBois along with the Jamaican expatriate Marcus Garvey created Pan-African nationalist movements that attracted international attention. (However, their embrace of the African was arguably influenced by and was certainly received within the context of the Africanist fad that Western colonialism had already aroused.) Afro-American literature, particularly during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, distinguished itself, and Afro-American ragtime, jazz and blues music became enormously popular with the European and U.S. public. (However, their warm reception in the West was also influenced by even as it fed the primitivist inclination that Western imperialism in Africa had already inspired.) The romantic escape of the French painter Paul Gauguin to Tahiti in 1890, which reactivated the centuries old myth of the Polynesian idyll, as William Rubin suggests, constituted another catalyst for the primitivist trend, particularly in the realm of fine art (ed. 1988, vol. 1, p. 6). Tribal Art, which was perceived to privilege form over matter and to use an ideographic rather than a descriptive mode of representation, became popular with Western artists in the twentieth century for the additional reason, as Kirk Varnes evers, in ‘Gauguin’, that Western art had by this time developed an anti-naturalist and abstractionist tendency of its own (1988, p. 201).
*Tribal and the Modern*, calls ‘the key protagonist of twentieth-century primitivism’ (ed. 1988, vol. 1, p. 241), to produce some of the most celebrated art of the twentieth century. Their influence can also be seen in some of the most eminent avant-garde schools of the time, such as Fauvism, Cubism and Dada. In addition, a multitude of books appeared that referred to the subject of “black” or “primitive” culture and lifestyle, including Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913), art critics Paul Guillaume’s and Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Sculptures Nègres* (1917; “Negro Sculptures”) and anthropologist Lucien Lévy Bruhl’s *La mentalité primitive* (1922; “The Primitive Mind”). European universities also conducted courses on the subject of the “primitive” in its variety of guises. However, Modern Primitivism was certainly not a movement that was confined to the realm of the artistic avant-garde or intellectual elite. According to Barkin and Bush, Modern Primitivism became something of ‘a road show, a public entertainment’ (eds 1995, p. 9). Cultural artifacts from Africa and Oceania as well as other “primitive” localities were sold both to specialist collectors and artists and to the public in marketplaces. They were also on show in both avant-garde galleries, which displayed genuine “primitive” artifacts alongside Modern Primitivist artworks, and public museums, which held International and Colonial Expositions that showcased authentic “primitive” curios and replicas of “primitive” villages. In addition, the public attended theatres and cabaret-halls throughout France to be entertained by touring Afro-American musical performers, such as Louis Armstrong and Josephine Baker.

Josephine Baker came to enjoy enormous fame in Europe during this time, perhaps because she epitomized the Modern Primitive. In the twentieth century, the traditional image of the “primitive” as innocent, pure and peaceful, which formed the basis of the venerable Western myth of the “noble savage”, was supplanted by a more radical image of the “primitivo” as irrational, sensual and untamed. Europeans had previously perceived the “primitive” in a similar way, but this characterization had formerly provided the basis for the alternative time honored myth of the “ignoble savage”. Modern Europeans interpreted the “primitive” as superstitious, erotic and uncivilized in accordance with this centuries old stereotype but, disaffected by conventional Western society and defiant of customary Western wisdom, romanticized those characteristics as evidence of a superior spirituality, physicality and authenticity.
Carpentier, as Camayd-Freixas argues, in ‘Magical Realism as primitivism: An alternate verisimilitude’, was indoctrinated into ‘the new international cult of the primitive’ (1988, p. 415) that first entranced Europe in the early twentieth century even though he lived on the other side of the Atlantic. Carpenter, as he himself confesses, as a young poet in Havana, like many writers and artists around the world, consumed the latest Parisian avant-garde reviews (1981, p. 93), imitated what he found in them (p. 91) and was obsessed ‘by one sole idea ... to go ... to Paris’. Confined to Cuba (at least for the time being), as González Echevarría documents, in Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home, Carpentier became one of the principal advocates of the European avant-garde (1977, p. 36). He published essays on Jean Cocteau, Picasso and Claude Debussy, each of whose work manifests the influence of African-esque primitivism. He also co-founded the Cuban avant-garde periodical Revista de Avance and, more significantly, began to demonstrate a preoccupation with Afro-Cuban culture in his own writing. In fact, Carpentier played a decisive role in the emergence in the 1920s and 30s of a movement that came to be known as Afro-Cubanism. During this time, he published a couple of poems, several short stories, two lyrical scores, a scenario for a ballet and a novella, entitled ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! (1933) (an Afro-Cuban nánigo phrase that translates as “God be praised” (Scarano 1999, p. 12)) and subtitled Historia Afro-Cubana (“Afro-Cuban Story”), which all uniformly reveal an interest in Afro-Cuban culture.

Similarly to indigenism, Afro-Cubanism was partly a reaction to the political environment that prevailed in Latin America in the early part of the twentieth century, which was, as I suggested earlier, characterized by national pride and resentment of Western imperialism. In this political climate, many Latin American writers focused on the non-Western elements of their cultures in an ostensible attempt to formulate an autonomous identity for their region. While the indigenous

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87 Many critics claim that Carpentier lived in Paris from 1912 to 1921 and underwent his secondary education there. However, Carpentier, addressing this prevalent misunderstanding, writes that he spent only three months in a Parisian school in 1913 while his parents were on vacation in Europe (1981, pp. 88-9).
88 ‘por una sola idea ... irse ... a París’ (p. 92).
89 ‘Liturgia’ (1930; “Liturgy”) and ‘Canción’ (1935; “Song”).
90 ‘El sacrificio’ (1923; “The Sacrifice”), ‘El milagro’ (1925; “The Miracle”) and ‘Histores de lunas’ (1933; “Histories of Moons”).
91 ‘Dos poemas afro-cubanas’ (1930; ”Two Afro-Cuban Poems”) and ‘Poèmes des Antilles: Neuf chants sur de textes de Alejo Carpentier, musique de Marius-François Guillard’ (1931; “Poems of the Antilles: Nine Songs with Lyrics by Alejo Carpentier, Music by Marius-François Guillard”).
communities of Latin America provided a convenient source of what could be described as indigenous difference for most writers on the mainland, in Cuba, where the native population had been eradicated centuries ago, this option was not so readily apparent. The Afro-Cuban community, which had remained apart from mainstream society and had maintained its ancestral traditions within that segregated environment, as González Echevarría suggests, offered Cuban writers, such as Carpentier, an alternative and viable source of authentic if not autochthonous distinction (1977, pp. 43-4).

However, while the Afro-Cubanist writers may have focused on the African as a marker of difference from European culture, European culture, as González Echevarría recognizes, nevertheless ironically contributed to influence the choice of this emblem of national independence. To begin with, 'Indians did not enjoy the vogue in the European avant garde that Africans [did]' (p. 64). Indeed, while the European movement of "primitivist utopianism" (p. 42) provided a source of inspiration for the entire Latin American movement of "nationalistic primitivism", its effect on Afro-Cubanism is pronounced. This becomes evident when one compares Afro-Cubanism with the correlative phenomenon of indigenism. Indigenism, as I previously suggested, was an ultimately conservative literary movement, which retained its ties to the traditional realist genre and a concomitant positivist ideology. Despite its patriotic intentions, it portrayed the national emblem of the "primitive" with great ambivalence, either overtly criticizing or more subtly neutralizing the "otherness" of the indigene. The indigene was either an "ignoble savage", an incorrigible brute who constituted an impediment to the progress of the nation, or a "noble savage", a genteel figure who lived in accordance with the standards of the West. Afro-Cubanism, on the other hand, with its roots in Modern Primitivism, rejected conventional forms of representation and thought. Seemingly truer to its nationalist agenda, it depicted the "primitive" with far fewer reservations, emphasizing and celebrating its "otherness". The "ignoble savage" was now the star of the show, while the Western model of "rational civilization" had gone decidedly out of vogue. These were lessons that Carpentier and the other leaders of the Afro-Cuban movement had clearly learned from the European avant-garde, of which they were avowed aficionados. In fact, prior to the Afro-Cuban movement, Cuban writers depicted

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53 Although, as Coulthard reveals, Cuban writers of the little known siboneista school of the mid-nineteenth century did write a number of Indianist works (1962, p. 6).
the Afro-Cuban as an obstacle to progress in much the same way that indigenist writers portrayed the indigene. In *Hampa afro-cubana: los negros brujos (apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal*) (1906; “Afro-Cuban Underworld: Black Sorcerers (Notes for a Study of Criminal Ethnology”), for example, Fernando Ortiz portrays the Afro-Cuban community as a miscreant element that must be subdued in order to ensure the advance of the nation. Only after interaction with the European avant-garde did Cuban writers such as Carpentier and even Ortiz, ‘who suffered a radical conversion’ (González Echevarría 1977, p. 48) and espoused the Afro-Cuban movement, begin to embrace the Afro-Cuban as a marker of national distinction and to scorn the former ideal of Western modernity as passé.

According to Coulthard, the Afro-Cubanist writers themselves acknowledge the European origins of the movement. However, they make a distinction. When they took up the European fashion for Negro art, they claim, they did so with more sincerity than Europeans, for Negro art had a deeper significance for them. The Cuban Negro is Cuban and his art and mode of being, his special sensibility, are part of the basic patrimony of the people of Cuba. (1962, p. 29)

Afro-Cubanism, according to the defenders of the movement, is not a slavish imitation of the Modern Primitivism of Europe but a proud reclamation of the “primitive” culture of Cuba. In fact, Afro-Cubanism, they effectively imply, as a genuine representation of the Modern Primitive (that is, of the contemporary Afro-Cuban), is the real thing.

Such claims, however, are largely untenable. To begin with, while the Afro-Cubanist writers claimed that Afro-Cuban culture constituted their ‘patrimony’, the foundation for this affirmation is extremely dubious. As Coulthard points out, most of the members of the Afro-Cuban movement were “white” (1962, p. 34). In addition, the Afro-Cubanist writers predominantly belonged to the affluent and intellectual elite, while the Afro-Cuban people, by contrast, formed an impoverished and undereducated subclass in what was at the time an economically and culturally divided nation. Indeed, the Afro-Cubanists had much more in common with the Europeans from whom they attempted to distinguish themselves than with the Afro-Cubans with whom they purported to possess such an intrinsic bond. Carpentier, for example, was the son of migrant parents: a French man, who was an architect; and a Russian woman, who had studied medicine in Switzerland. According to Harss and Dohmann, Carpentier preferred to speak French, which

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54 Indeed, according to Coulthard, Nicolás Guillén was the sole exception.
was his first language, and spoke Spanish with a French accent (1967, p. 45). He also wrote some of his Afro-Cubanist texts in French. In fact, Carpentier, who later worked as a cultural attaché to France for the Cuban government, lived more than twenty years of his life in France.\footnote{Carpentier resided in France from 1928 to 1939 (following his self-imposed exile from Machado’s Cuba) and from 1968 to 1980 (the year of his death.)} Perhaps not surprisingly, as González Echevarría reveals, a number of Latin American critics and writers both at the time and later regarded Carpentier not as an Afro-Cubanist or even Cuban writer but as a Cuban-French or even French author (1977, p. 38).

In keeping with their lack of proximity to and intimacy with Afro-Cuban society, the Afro-Cubanist writers also failed to demonstrate a new or more profound understanding of Afro-Cuban culture in their work. Coulthard argues: ‘the overwhelming impression left by the writers of the Afro-Cuban movement is that the Negro was little more than a doll or a puppet which they made to jump and writhe about to the accompaniment of Cuban popular instruments’ (1962, p. 33) and, moreover, to the tune of European popular stereotypes. In ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! (1989 (1933)), for example, Carpentier’s Afro-Cuban hero Menegildo Cué dances, worships, copulates and kills in accordance with the role of the “ignoble savage” that Modern Primitivism had defined for him. Indeed, even the Afro-Cubanist poet Emilio Ballagas concedes, in the introduction to his Antología de poesía negra hispano americano (1935; “Anthology of Black Hispanic American Poetry”) (which features Carpentier’s Afro-Cubanist poem ‘Canción’), that Afro-Cubanist literature lacks authenticity and reveals a ‘touristic’ character (qu. González Echevarría 1977, p. 50). This undoubtedly reflects the decidedly ‘touristic’ excursions to Afro-Cuban rituals, which the Afro-Cubanist writers regularly made (González Echevarría 1977, p. 49 & Carpentier 1967, p. 44) and which informed their work. Fernando Alegría, in ‘Alejo Carpentier: Realismo mágico’ (“Alejo Carpentier: Magical realism”), similarly contends that Afro-Cubanist literature exposes the Afro-Cubanist writer as an ‘observer’ of rather than a partaker in the Afro-Cuban community (1960, p. 352). Indeed, he describes Carpentier’s seminal Afro-Cubanist novella as less a genuine representation of Afro-Cuban culture than a dubious practice in ‘scientific exoticism’ (qu. González Echevarría 1977, p. 70). This criticism is not unwarranted. Carpentier’s ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! includes, in addition to the bildungsroman that traces the life of Cué, descriptions of rituals, quotations of ritualistic prayers and songs, as well as a glossary of Afro-Cuban
terms. In its original edition, "Ecúe-Yamba-O!" also included, in addition to the main narrative and these textual fragments, as González Echevarría describes,

photographs and drawings of extremely weird objects and beings ... an altar with the figure of a virgin standing on a set of bull’s horns, flanked by, on one side, a black man brandishing an axe and accompanied by a woman and, on the other, a roughly constructed rag doll without a face and with what look like rosary beads wrapped around its body. Yet another drawing depicts a man or mannequin with a triangular mask, puffs of straw on its feet, feather in what appears to be a hand, and a stick in the other. (1977, p. 65)

Carpentier’s fetishistic collage of what Alegria identifies as the ritual objects of Afro-Cuban ńánigo ceremonies (1960, p. 349) hardly qualifies as an insightful portrait of Afro-Cuban ńánigo society. It is, more accurately, as González Echevarria suggests, a voyeuristic exaltation of its ‘alluring otherness’ (1977, p. 61). For the Afro-Cubanist writers, Afro-Cuban culture was clearly not an intimately familiar reality but rather a seductively foreign phenomenon.

The Afro-Cuban movement had faded from the cultural scene by 1940. According to González Echevarría, its decline was due to the irreconcilable paradox of the ‘phantom of its European origin and its claim to autonomy’ (p. 50) as well as to the indecorous contradiction between its ‘pour épater les bourgeois frivolity’ (or ‘for the shock of the bourgeois frivolity’) and the ‘heightened sense of political mission [that] eventually crept into the Afro-Cuban movement as the situation in Cuba became intolerable’ (p. 49).  Carentier himself later renounced the Afro-Cuban movement for much the same reasons that González Echevarría identifies as the foundations for its overall demise, namely, the specter of its origin in European primitivism and the superficiality of its representation of Afro-Cuban culture. In Tientos y diferencias, Carentier reflects:

[In] an epoch characterized by its great interest in Afro-Cuban folklore recently discovered then by the intellectuals of my generation, I wrote a novel - "Ecúe-Yamba-O!" - whose characters were blacks of the rural classes of the period and which was published ... during the height of European “nativism” ... Well, after twenty years of research ... I realized that everything profound, truthful, universal about the world that I had pretended to portray in my novel had remained outside the reach of my observation.

Carpentier claims that the fraudulence of "Ecúe-Yamba-O!" became apparent to him as the result of ‘twenty years of research’, during which he attended courses in ethnology at The Sorbonne in Paris, undertook field trips in Cuba, Haiti (in 1943),

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96 In fact, Coulthard writes that ‘Afro-Cubanism evolved into a militant literature of protest against discrimination’, which was led, significantly, by its only black member, Guillen (1962, p. 35).

97 “En un época caracterizada por un gran interés hacia el folklore afronacional recién descubierto” por los intelectuales de mi generación, escribí una novela – Ecúe-Yamba-O – cuyos personajes eran negros de la clase rural de entonces y que estaba publicado ... durante el apoteosis de “nativismo” europeo ... Pues bien: al cabo de veinte años de investigaciones ... me di cuenta de que todo lo hondo, lo verdadero, lo universal, del mundo que había pretendido pintar en mi novela había permanecido fuera del alcance de mi observación.” (1967, pp. 11-12)
Mexico (in 1944) and Venezuela (in 1947 and 1948) and read, as he himself puts it, 'everything I could find' on Latin America (qu. Harss & Dohmann 1967, p. 40). However, as Carpentier himself also suggests in the preface to a 1989 republication of ¡Ecué-Yamba-O!, his repudiation of Afro-Cubanism appears to have been inspired by another arguably more significant determinant. In the prologue to this later edition of his Afro-Cubanist novella, Carpentier explains that he had initially 'opposed its reissue, because after ... The Kingdom of This World, I saw ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! as a crude, picturesque thing without profundity.' The Kingdom of This World (1949), which was published almost twenty years after ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! (which was written in 1927 but not published until 1933), marked not only the culmination of his 'twenty years of research' but also his formulation of a new nationalistic theory of Latin American reality. Carpentier, who first repudiated ¡Ecué-Yamba-O! in a series of articles in El nacional in the early 1950s (González Echevarría 1977, p. 63), immediately following the publication of The Kingdom of This World, appears to invalidate the old nationalistic movement of Afro-Cubanism primarily in order to validate his new patriotic premise of the marvelous real.

While Carpentier repudiates Afro-Cubanism in favor of the Latin American marvelous real, his revised parochial discourse remains focused on the “primitive” Afro-Caribbean cultures of Latin America, which it continues to portray according to the renovated Modern Primitivist image of the exotically illogical “ignoble savage”. However, Carpentier’s modified patriotic thesis also extends beyond the mythologically minded “primitivistic” cultures of Latin America to encompass the allegedly logic-defying nature of the landscape and history of that region. According to Carpentier’s new nationalistic ideology, Latin America is no longer the cardinal realm of the “primitive” but the quintessential terrain of the “irrational”, which he calls the marvelous. However, Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real continues to be marred by the ‘phantom’ of a European origin and the ‘frivolity’ of bourgeois exoticism, for which, according to González Echevarría, he rejected Afro-Cubanism. In the case of the marvelous real, that ghost of European culture is Surrealism, with its fetish for the “irrational”, which Breton, significantly, also defined as marvelous.

98 'me opuse a su reimpresión, porque después de ... El reino de este mundo, veía Ecué-Yamba-O como cosa novata, pintoresca, sin profundidad' (1989, p. 10).
Carpentier’s association with Breton’s Surrealist coterie may have been nominally brief and decidedly torrential, but it was nevertheless highly influential. To begin with, the veneration of the marvelous that Breton encouraged in his Surrealist faithful undoubtedly inspired the idealization of the marvelous that provides the basis for Carpentier’s concept of the Latin American marvelous real. In ‘The baroque and the marvelous real’, Carpentier specifically addresses and categorically rejects Breton’s ebullient description of the marvelous as beautiful (1981, p. 129). However, Carpentier’s own enthusiasm for the marvelous is such that he bases his new notion of Latin American cultural identity on the concept. In addition, the idea that the marvelous is real, which is Carpentier’s fundamental thesis, was also Breton’s basic premise. In “the prologue”, Carpentier vehemently rejects the Surrealist fantastic as false, but he retains the terms of the argument. For Carpentier, the marvelous continues to be real, albeit exclusively in Latin America. While these parallels between Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real and Breton’s proclamations on the Surrealist marvelous are rather general in character, similarities that are more precise in detail also exist. In fact, the twin propositions that make up Carpentier’s philosophy, which I have called the “real marvelous” and the “marvelous real”, form conspicuous echoes of two hypotheses that Breton promoted in the earlier context of the Surrealist movement. As Elaine Karr argues, in ‘Transposicion del surrealismo frances al “real maravilloso” latinoamericano: El caso de Miguel Ángel Asturias con Hombres de maíz’ (“The transposition from French Surrealism to the Latin American ‘marvelous real’: The case of Miguel Ángel Asturias and Men of Maize”), ‘a curious coincidence’ exists between the tenets of Carpentier’s theory and of Breton’s Surrealism (1982, p. 115).

The notion that the “primitive” experiences the marvelous as real, which constitutes a cardinal principle of that dimension of Carpentier’s ideology that I have called the “real marvelous”, also formed an essential doctrine of Breton’s Surrealism. Surrealism, perhaps more than any of the other avant-garde movements of the early part of the twentieth century, was suffused by the predominant Modern Primitivist ethos. The Surrealists, like many of their contemporaries, were attracted to and influenced by “primitive” art. Breton,
Eluard and Louis Aragon all collected "primitive" art, which the group displayed in their exhibitions (Maurer 1988, p. 546). "Primitive" art also influenced the work of a great number of Surrealist artists, most notably, Max Ernst, Masson and Alberto Giacometti. However, the Surrealists also admired and were inspired by what they believed to be the "primitive" worldview. The Surrealists believed, as Evan Maurer explains, in 'Dada and Surrealism', that the "primitive" experiences a world in which the division between the unconscious and the conscious realms does not exist and in which the intangible manifestations of the unconscious mind, such as dreams and myths, are as real as the tangible visions of the conscious mind (1988, p. 541). This was not a notion that was unique to the Surrealists but was the popular scientific belief of the time, nourished by the centuries old Western stereotypes of the "irrational primitive" that Modern Primitivism had revived and that contemporary esteemed "ethnologists" such as Freud and Lévy Bruhl had re-authorized. However, the Surrealists were perhaps unique in that they argued this state of being constitutes the ideal form of existence. In his 1924 'Manifesto of Surrealism', in which Breton identified the aim of the Surrealist movement as 'the future resolution of ... dream and reality ... into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality' (1998, p. 14), he essentially defined the Surrealist objective as the attainment of an authentic bilateral "primitive" ontology. On various occasions, Breton explicitly aligned the Surrealist philosophy with the "primitive" worldview. In 1945, for example, he proclaimed: 'the most profound affinities exist between so-called "primitive" thinking and surrealist thinking in that they both aim at getting rid of the hegemony of consciousness' (Breton 1978, p. 109). However, while Breton affirmed the 'affinities' between the "primitive" and the Surrealist faith in the illogical, he also conceded the precedence of the "primitive" experience of the fantastical. In fact, he specifically privileged what he believed to be the marvicious consciousness of Latin American "primitive" cultures. Breton evolved a particular interest in Latin American "primitive" societies, largely because of the incidental proximity of Latin America to his political haven of the U.S.A during the Second World War. He undertook a number of what Harss and Dohmann refer to as 'semi-archaeological expeditions into [Latin America's] tribal past' (1967, p. 39), visiting Mexico and Martinique in 1941 and the Dominican Republic and Haiti in 1945. While in Haiti, Breton attended a voodoo ceremony and consequently delivered a lecture to an audience of young Haitian poets, in which he announced: 'we have found ourselves linked from the beginning with
“primitive” thought, which remains less alien to you than to us and otherwise demonstrates a remarkable strength in Haitian voodoo.’ (Breton 1978, p. 259) The “‘primitive’ thought’ that Breton refers to here, which manifests itself with ‘remarkable strength in Haitian voodoo’, is clearly a synonym for “irrational” thought or the capacity for faith in the fantastical. Breton, some eight years before Carpentier expressed his analogous theories in his famous manifesto, argued not only that the “primitive” possesses a genuine belief in the marvelous but also that the “primitive”, indeed, specifically the Haitian “primitive”, possesses a more natural faith in the marvelous than the European Surrealist.\(^9\) Carpentier was certainly aware of Breton’s ideas when he composed his own argument. In “the prologue”, Carpentier refers to Breton’s and Masson’s 1948 co-publication *Martinique charmeuse de serpents* (“Martinique Snake Charmer”), a collection of poems, illustrations and other pieces on Caribbean subjects, which includes Breton’s 1945 ‘Speech to young Haitian poets’. Carpentier, who peculiarly never mentions Breton throughout his entire diatribe against the Surrealists,\(^10\) denounces the futility of Masson’s representations of the Caribbean landscape (1967 (1949), p. 117). However, in a 1975 interview, Carpentier alleges that Breton was equally humbled when confronted by Haitian voodoo. He asserts (without revealing his sources): ‘upon contact with the active, present, powerful marvelous … the Great Pope of Surrealism was at the point of fainting from fright’.\(^11\)

The notions that the magical inheres within reality, that it manifests itself with particular potency in Latin America and that the Surrealist marvelous, by contrast, is an artificial construct, which make up the second tenet of Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real, were also ideas that Breton suggested earlier than Carpentier. Breton, for example, in his first manifesto, refers to the ‘marvelous’ qualities of ‘romantic ruins’ and old castles (1998, p. 16) and, in his 1937 publication *Mad Love*, presents the marvelous as something that subsists

\(^9\) Carpentier’s theory of the “real marvelous”, as González Echevarría argues, also reveals another European influence, namely, that of Oswald Spengler (1977, p. 123). In *The Decline of the West* (Der Untergang des Abendlandes 1918-22), which González Echevarría describes as ‘an immediate best-seller whose impact in Latin America was instantaneous and pervasive’ (p. 55), Spengler characterizes the “New World” as an Edenic enclave of cultural authenticity, free from the dire “Old World” afflictions of self-consciousness and doubt. Spengler may very well have influenced Breton’s representation of Latin Americans as natural Surrealists. According to González Echevarría, he almost certainly influenced Carpentier’s characterizations of the faithful “primitive” and the faithless Surrealist, upon which his theory of the “real marvelous” relies (p. 123).

\(^10\) Perhaps significantly, Breton had earlier failed to mention Carpentier in his 1930 ‘Second Manifesto of Surrealism’, in which he responded to the criticisms of the composers of ‘Un cadavre’, except for those whose ‘public activity is too unimportant’ (1998, p. 135).
within tropical landscapes (as well as other more prosaic phenomena). In his 1942 'Prolegomena to a third Surrealist manifesto or not', he specifically rhapsodizes about ancient Latin American ruins (1998, p. 284) and, in _Martinique charmeuse de serpents_, as Maurer writes, idealizes the Caribbean's 'strange and enticing scenes of wild, untrammeled nature' (1988, p. 548). In his 'Speech to young Haitian poets', Breton praises the 'overwhelming charms' of Haiti, in particular, (1978, p. 259) and the extraordinariness of the Haitian Revolution. Mexico also fascinated him. In fact, following a 1938 visit to Mexico, Breton declared that nation to be 'the surrealist place par excellence' (qu. Brandon 1999, p. 437). Breton, echoing a venerable Western exoticist reverie of the existence of Bytnonesque magical faraway lands, essentially envisions Latin America as some kind of antipodean wonderland where the fantastical anomalies and bizarre contrasts that the Surrealists admired as manifestations of the irrational unconscious naturally exist. In his theory of the "real marvelous", Carpenter embraces Breton's vision of Latin America as an enchanted land where the Surrealist marvelous finds its natural physical expression in the region's flora, architecture and history. Breton, as Harss and Dohmann aver, appears to have 'opened [Carpentier's] eyes to the ... wonders of his homeland' (1967, p. 39). Indeed, in the 1975 interview to which I referred earlier, Carpenter quotes Breton's eulogy to Mexican reality and even acknowledges, in an extremely rare but typically paradoxical admission, the Surrealist influence on his nationalist awakening. He asserts: '[m]y passage through Surrealism returned me more Latin American than ever.'

Just as Modern Primitivism provided the aesthetic and ideological framework for the movement of Afro-Cubanism, Surrealism essentially supplied the aesthetic and ideological blueprint for Carpenter's theory of the Latin American marvelous real. However, while Carpenter and the other leaders of the Afro-Cuban movement candidly acknowledged their debt to Modern Primitivism, Carpenter, who articulates a hostile opposition to Surrealism throughout "the prologue", generally vehemently denies the relevance of Surrealism to his new hypothesis. Chanady, in 'The territorialization of the imaginary in Latin America: Self-affirmation and resistance to metropolitan paradigms', describes Carpenter's 'paradoxical

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101 'en contacto con la maravilloso activo, presente, vigente ... el Gran Pontifice del surrealismo, estuvo a punto de desmayarse de espanto' (qu. Karr 1982, p. 103).

102 The conquistadors, as Carpenter himself recognizes, had similarly perceived Latin America as an enchanted place where the fabulous scenarios of chivalrous tales miraculously materialized.
rejection' of Surrealism as 'a symbolic parricide' inspired by 'the inevitable anxiety of influence of [the] formerly colonized' (1995, p. 138). However, Breton may have aroused a postcolonial 'anxiety' in Carpentier in another way.

Surrealism, with the commencement of the Second World War, essentially relocated to America. Salvador Dalí, with his ostentatious behavior and marketing savvy, as Ruth Brandon writes, in *Surreal Lives: The Surrealists 1917-1945*, became 'the lionized centre of attention' (1999, p. 409) in the U.S.A. Breton, whom Maurice Nadeau, in *The History of Surrealism*, characterizes as a 'tireless travelling salesman of the movement' (1973, p. 218), met with more success in Latin America. Breton already had a number of Latin American disciples, such as the Cuban painter Wilfredo Lam, who had been converted, like Carpentier, in Paris and who had, unlike Carpentier, remained faithful. Lam illustrated Breton's *Fata Morgana* in 1940 and sailed with Breton from Marseilles to Martinique in 1941. However, Breton's visits to and sermons in Latin America attracted many more Surrealist proselytes and inspired several Surrealist magazines. Aimé Césaire, for example, co-founded the Surrealist journal *Tropiques* in Martinique in the year of Breton's arrival.104 Surrealism and, indeed, Breton himself became particularly popular in Haiti. According to Franklin Rosemont, in the tribute to Breton that constitutes his introduction to *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, Breton played 'a role in bringing down the Haitian dictatorship [of Élie Lescot (1941-46)] when, addressing the university students in Port-au-Prince [in 1945], he avouched the revolutionary spirit of Surrealism' (Breton 1978, p. 94). The students, Rosemont contends, subsequently 'adopted a militant and even insurrectional tone in their newspaper, *La Ruche*, which in a special edition, under the heading, 'Hommage à André Breton', published his speech with other Surrealist material.' (p. 95).105 Another Haitian review, the *Haiti-Journal*, also published an interview with Breton during his sojourn there. Breton reciprocated the interest and regard of the Haitians. He praised the inherent Surrealism of their voodoo faith. He also arranged for the work of the Haitian painter and voodoo practitioner Hector Hippolyte to be exhibited at the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition and wrote

103 'Mi paso por el surrealismo me volvió mas latino-americano que nunca.' (qu. Karr 1982, p. 103)
104 Interestingly, Césaire, like Carpentier, inspired by a similarly contradictory combination of nationalism, zeal and Modern Primitivist and Surrealist philosophies, went on to co-intrigate the pan-African movement of Nègritude, which bears remarkable similarities to both Carpentier's discourse of Afro-Cubanism and his theory of the Latin American marvelous real.
105 The students also subsequently staged violent demonstrations and sparked a labor strike, which contributed, certainly more than Breton's words, to precipitate Lescot's flight from Haiti and the installation of a new government.
an essay on Hippolyte, which he included in *Martinique charmeeuse de serpents*, along with other pieces extolling the Caribbean region and its culture.

Carpentier, as I have suggested, was very conscious of Breton’s movements in and thoughts about Latin America. For Carpentier, who had dedicated himself to becoming ‘a representative Latin American writer’ (ed. Rodriguez Monegal 1977, p. 517) and to depicting a unique Latin American identity, as the nationalistic Afro-Cubanist movement first demonstrated and as his patriotic theory of the Latin American marvelous real subsequently reinforced, Breton’s attempted annexation of Latin American culture into the European Surrealist movement would have posed a significant threat. According to González Echevarría, by ‘subsuming’ Latin American culture within ‘a European enterprise’, Breton essentially denied the singularity of the Latin American experience and thus threatened to ‘neutralize’ or undermine Carpentier’s separatist agenda (1977, p. 59). Breton’s universalistic threat to Carpentier’s parochial program, as González Echevarría recognizes, ultimately provides the stimulus for Carpentier’s ‘critique of the [Surrealist] movement’ (p. 60).

Carpentier’s response is not only to criticize Breton’s Surrealist movement but also to turn the tables, as it were, on Breton’s universalizing endeavor, by subsuming Surrealist principles within his parochially exclusive theory of Latin American reality. However, while Carpentier denounces European Surrealism as a fraud and hails the Latin American marvelous real, on the other hand, as the genuine article, his assertions, like the similar claims about Afro-Cubanism, are utterly unfounded. To begin with, Carpentier’s hypothesis of the Latin American marvelous real, like the former movement of Afro-Cubanism, as Camayd-Freixas argues, remains based on the ‘aesthetic revolution of the European avant-garde’ (1998, p. 415). In addition, Carpentier’s premise inadvertently “self-deconstructs”, via a number of paradoxes of self-consciousness (which have a tendency, as Borges recognizes, to afflict nationalist representations), to betray its intrinsically inauthentic nature.

*Illegitimate Offspring:*

*The Fundamental Foreignness of the Marvelous Real*

Carpentier’s theory of the marvelous real not only derives from identifiable European doctrines but also betrays a fundamentally extrinsic perspective, which
further undermines its purportedly autochthonous legitimacy. Carpentier argues, for example, according to the tenet that I have called the "real marvelous", that the marvelous is real in Latin America largely because its "primitive" inhabitants sincerely believe it is. As González Echevarría argues, the concept of a 'peculiar consciousness devoid of self-reflexiveness and inclined to faith' is not a perspicacious truth about "primitive" existence but 'an onto-theological assumption' about "primitive" life (1977, p. 125), based upon what Camayd-Freixas refers to as the European 'text of the archaic society' (1998, p. 416). It already reveals Carpentier's exterior standpoint. However, even if this conceptualization of the faithful "primitive" is an accurate representation of the "primitive" worldview, as González Echevarría asks, '[w]here does Carpentier stand?' (1977, p. 126). Carpentier clearly attempts to situate himself in the camp of the Afro-Haitians, whose natural and genuine faith, he alleges, allows them to apprehend manifestations of the "real marvelous". He certainly attempts to distance himself from the side of the Surrealists, whose self-conscious and disingenuous artistic endeavors, Carpentier believes, result only in representations of the "fake marvelous". However, as González Echvarria asks, '[i]f marvelous reality only reveals itself to the believer, what hope can Carpentier have of elevating himself to the state required in order to perceive it?' Indeed, Carpentier's premise of the "real marvelous", which relies upon a self-conscious awareness of the marvelous beliefs of the Afro-Haitian community, inherently betrays his personal estrangement from those mythological tenets, for if he shared them, their fantastical nature would not be apparent to him. Rodriguez Monegal acknowledges this innate disparity in Carpentier's premise. He writes: '[a]t the level of Ti Noel (which is also that of Mackandal and Bouckman and all of the slaves) the magical is real. At the level of the author, the magical is marvelous.'

As González Echvarria argues, Carpentier's hypothesis of the "real marvelous" inexorably betrays 'a spurious European perspective, since it is only from the other side that alterity and difference may be discovered – the same seen from within is homogenous, smooth, without edges' (1977, p. 128). Carpentier's thesis of the "real marvelous", which manifests a conspicuous appreciation of 'alterity and difference', inevitably locates him on the 'other side', to which he condemns the European Surrealists, rather than on the 'same' side of the Afro-Haitian faithful, to

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106 *Al nivel de Ti Noel (que es tambien él de Mackandal y Bouckman Y todos los esclavos) lo mágico es real. Al nivel del autor, lo mágico es maravilloso.* (1971, p. 643)
which he claims to belong. Carpentier, who also refers to the marvelous beliefs of
the European explorers of the “New World”, suggests that Latin America inspires a
faith in the magical even in its European interlopers. However, the fantastical
illusions of the European conquistadors and later adventurers represent not the
genuine faith that Latin America can generate but the exoticist fantasies that
foreign domains in general have a tendency to stimulate. Carpentier’s vision of
Latin America as some kind of a hallucinogenic utopia is little more than one such
exoticist reverie.

In later discussions of his theory of the Latin American marvelous real, as I
suggested earlier, Carpentier appears to try to shake off the original tenet of the
“real marvelous”. The Lost Steps (Los pasos perdidos 1985 (1953)), the semi-
autobiographical realist novel that follows The Kingdom of This World, not only
illustrates but also appears to explain this change of heart. In this novel, Carpentier
no longer attempts to represent a “primitive” view of the world from the alleged
inside. In fact, he concedes that he is inexorably exterior to the “primitive” world.
According to Ian McDonald, in ‘Magical eclecticism: Los pasos perdidos and
Jean-Paul Sartre’, ‘El reino de este mundo exemplified Carpentier’s theory of
lo real maravilloso as an inside view, then Los pasos perdidos ... suggests the
ultimate impossibility of such a view.’ (1980, p. 10) González Echevarría
similarly contends that The Lost Steps provides a ‘telling transition’ from The
Kingdom of This World in which Carpentier ‘turn[s] himself into the object,
unfolding and fragmenting the self of his prologue – interrogating his own mask.’
(1977, p. 154) The Lost Steps ‘is the text through which reflexivity and self-
consciousness dissolve the mock faith of The Kingdom of This World.’ In The Lost
Steps, Carpentier’s narrator is an anonymous man, who returns to his birthplace of
Venezuela from his residence in the West and journeys into the Orinoco hinterland
on a commission to investigate the origins of music. The autobiographical
resonance of the novel is unmistakable. Carpentier himself, when he published the
novel, was a returned expatriate, he had made several forays into the Venezuelan
wilderness, and he was an acknowledged musicologist who had published a
seminal study on Cuban music, La Música en Cuba (1946; “Music in Cuba”). In

107 “The prologue”, as González Echevarría writes, is ‘fraught with contradictions’ (1977, p. 126),
which contribute to its “self-deconstruction.” This is one of them. While Carpentier claims that
faith in the marvelous is the exclusive property of Latin Americans, his list of the faithful includes
various European conquistadors as well as Cervantes, Luther and Hugo. Indeed, Carpentier’s thesis
that Latin Americans alone hold genuinely felt marvelous beliefs is a patent absurdity, for “what
could possibly be specifically Latin American in that?” (p. 112)
The Lost Steps, the narrator finds himself attracted to what he perceives to be the authentic existence of the "primitive" inhabitants of Latin America. He returns to the modern world but then attempts to retrace his steps back to 'the Valley where Time had Stopped'. However, he is unable to do so. Carpentier's narrator resigns himself to his exclusion from the "primitive" world as an inevitable repercussion of his self-conscious attempts to achieve inclusion. Motivated by 'an idea of renunciation' and driven by 'his effort to understand,' he reasons that he was inexorably incapable of an authentic communion with or genuine understanding of "primitive" culture. In a later passage in the novel, Carpentier acknowledges the inherent paradox of self-consciousness that underlies and undermines the modern penchant to embrace the "irrational" existence of the "primitive" being. Close to the end of The Lost Steps, the wiser narrator reflects:

"For more than twenty years, a weary culture had tried to rejuvenate itself and to find new powers in the cult of the irrational. But now I found ridiculous the attempts of those who blandished masks of Bandiagara, African ibeyes, fetishes studded with nails against the stronghold of The Discourse of Method, without knowing the real meaning of the objects that they had in their hands. They were looking for barbarism in things that had never been barbarous when fulfilling their ritual function in their own setting. By labelling such things "barbarous", they were putting themselves in the thinking or Cartesian position, the precise opposite of the truth they were pursuing."

This passage undoubtedly involves a primary criticism of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, but it also possesses discernible autobiographical relevance and can be interpreted as a tacit acknowledgement by Carpentier of the innately contradictory and inauthentic nature of his own former theoretical espousal of the "irrational" worldview of "primitive" societies.

However, while Carpentier appears to reject the thesis of the "real marvelous", he continues to abide by the premise of the "marvelous real". The Lost Steps, for example, is replete with descriptions of the awesome proportions of Venezuelan landscapes. For Carpentier, the "marvelous real" is an uncomplicated self-evident

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109 "una idea de renuncia".
110 "se esfuerza por comprender".
111 "Durante más de veinte años, una cultura cansada había tratado de rejuvenecerse y hallar nuevas savias en el fomento de fenómenos que nada debieran a la razón. Pero ahora me resultaba visible el intento de quienes blandían máscaras del Bandiagara, ibeyes africanos, fetiches clavados de clavos, contra las ciudadelas del Discurso del Método, sin conocer el significado real de los objetos que tenían entre las manos. Buscaban la barbarie en cosas que jamás habían sido bárbaras cuando cumplían su función ritual en el ámbito que les fuera propio - cosas que al ser calificadas de "barbaras" colocaban, precisamente, al calificador en un terreno cogitante y cartesiano, opuesto a la verdad perseguida." (p. 310)
112 Indeed, the title of The Lost Steps, which is identical to that of an earlier publication by Breton, Les pas perdus (1924), suggests that this novel is perhaps as much another criticism of Breton's presumptuous attempts to align himself with the "primitive" as an auto-critical exercise. Carpentier thus apparently continues to echo his nemesis even as he criticizes him.
characteristic of Latin American reality. However, in fact, it also manifests a
dubious extrinsic perspective.

Carpentier claims that Latin Americans need merely reach out and touch their
physical surroundings in order to grasp the "marvelous real". However, in the
words of Anderson Imbert, '[w]ith the same logic – or lack of logic – one could
say that the astronaut Neil Armstrong touched "what is romantic" about the moon,
knowing that the moon is only romantic to those who contemplate it with the eyes
of a poet'. Latin America is not objectively marvelous any more so than the
moon is actually romantic. Latin America is only marvelous to those who
contemplate it from a certain viewpoint, which may be, as Anderson Imbert
suggests, the sentimental perspective of a poet or, perhaps, in Carpentier's case, a
patriot. However, it is also simultaneously and fundamentally the disingenuous
stance of an outsider. According to Borges, as we have seen, the sentimental
nationalist, who self-consciously attempts to construct a positive image of his or
her nation, inevitably views his or her nation from a distinctly extraneous position.
Alonso, invoking the anti-nationalistic argument of Borges, contends:

[what we have in the autochthonous discursive situation is an anthropology that cannot
recognize itself as such, precisely on account of the overwhelming and dizzying familiarity
between subject and object that is constitutive of it ... the particular characteristics of the
autochthonous discursive situation conspire to foster the illusion that the cultural exegete has
immediate and uncomplicated access to the phenomena of his own culture, when in fact the
enterprise is grounded on the sort of interpretive construct revealed by Borges' critique. (1990,
p. 5)

He writes: '[p]aradoxically enough, then, there would appear to be a common
rhetorical ground underlying both the discourse of the ardent cultural nationalist
and that of the gawking, exoticizing foreigner.' (p. 4) Carpentier certainly appears
to qualify as a victim of the illusion that Alonso describes. Indeed, the entire point
of Carpentier's extended version of "the prologue", which contains a protracted
discussion of the inexorable foreignness of "other" cultures before it culminates in
his earlier treatise on the marvelous real, seems to be that he possesses an innate
and privileged insight into Latin American reality. However, Carpentier's thesis of
the marvelous real inherently betrays the perspective of the 'gawking, exoticizing
foreigner' that Borges and Alonso recognize inevitably afflicts nationalist
representations. As Philip Swanson argues, in Landmarks in Modern Latin
American Fiction, "the very idea of "marvelling" at Latin American reality

113 [c]on la misma lógica – o falta de lógica – podría decir que el astronauta Neil Armstrong tocó
"lo romántico" de la luna, siendo que la luna sólo es romántica para quien la contempla con ojos
de poeta" (1976, p. 15).
suggests non-participation, looking on from the outside, even a European perspective’ (ed. 1990, p. 9). Jean-Pierre Durix, in Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magical Realism, similarly writes that Carpentier, who ‘implicitly adheres to the feeling of wonder experienced by the conquistadors’ (1998, p. 105), tacitly betrays his fundamental status as an outsider. Indeed, Carpentier, who explicitly attributes the discovery of the “marvelous real” to the European conquistadors, inadvertently acknowledges the extrinsic perspective that is essential to its apprehension. Carpentier cites Díaz del Castillo’s bedazzled account of Tenochtitlán and reflects: ‘[h]ere is the European man in contact with the American marvelous real’.114 Carpentier himself, whose premise of the Latin American marvelous real inherently manifests a similar sense of astonishment at Latin America, appears to be a ‘European man’ in contact with American reality.

As Alegria argues, Carpentier ‘can give the impression of being … an occidental attracted to the American exotic’ (1960, p. 354) rather than a Latin American relating the American familiar. This is truc of Carpentier’s entire theory of the Latin American marvelous real, which manifests an exclusive attraction to the Latin American “other”. Carpentier focuses on the Haitian voodoo faith (rather than the Catholicism of the majority of Latin Americans), the excitingly rugged aspects of Latin American landscapes (rather than the tamer features of that region’s topography) and eccentric historical episodes (rather than more ordinary events.) Indeed, Carpentier’s hypothesis of the Latin American marvelous real appears to be marked by the same touristic spirit that Ballagas detected in the Afro-Cuban movement. Significantly, Carpentier claims to have discovered the Latin American marvelous real not during the course of his prolonged residence in Cuba but during a brief vacation to Haiti. In addition, while Breton possibly guided Carpentier’s focus on Haiti, another Frenchman literally took him there. Carpentier visited Haiti in the company of the French actor Louis Jouvet, who invited Carpentier to accompany him on a theatrical tour of that nation (Carpentier 1981, p. 102). Rodriguez Monegal comments on the ‘curious destiny of Carpentier who always discovers the new world by the hand of some representative of French culture.’115

114 ‘[h]e aquí el hombre de Europa en contacto con lo real maravilloso americano.’ (1981, p. 131)
Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real, perhaps not so curiously, given its identifiably European foundations and inherently exoticist perspective, is not only of dubious authenticity as a cultural representation; it is also highly ambiguous as a patriotic statement. While the agenda behind Carpentier’s premise, with its proclamation of Latin America’s cultural superiority to European Surrealism, may seem to be parochial, it also reveals itself to be, as its obedientance to that European avant-garde movement suggests, contradictorily cosmopolitanist. In addition, it arguably operates less as a strategic affirmation of Latin American cultural difference than as a fatalistic confirmation of tactically imperial “othering” stereotypes and, thus, ultimately serves not a nationalist but an imperialist ideological program.

Carpentier was one of a plethora of Latin American cultural figures in the twentieth century, who responded to renewed postcolonial nationalism and neo-imperialist intimidation and, as Pedro Henriquez Ureña, a critic from the Dominican Republic, puts it, went ‘in search of an expression that is most perfectly ours’ (qu. Alonso 1990, p. 45) or, perhaps, distinctly not “theirs”. Carpentier’s philosophy of the marvelous real, which he presented as ‘a privileged category for the apprehension and understanding of Latin American reality’ (Alonso 1990, p. 166) and as a demonstration of Latin America’s difference from and even superiority to Europe, formed an extremely popular parochial hypothesis, as its recapitulations attest. However, the concept of the Latin American marvelous real that Carpentier promoted as uniquely “ours” was, in fact, fundamentally “theirs”. As González Echevarría argues, while Carpentier ‘denounced Western tradition’ with intensifying vehemence throughout the course of his literary career, ‘[his] search for a Latin American consciousness and mode of expression became, paradoxically, more European.’ (1977, p. 19) Indeed, his parochial strategy was consistently based on ‘the idea that this or that [European] system of thought, this or that [European] artistic trend had to be adapted to the Latin American situation ... by ... making Latin America surreptitiously the natural or privileged object of that system or trend’ (pp. 19-20). Carpentier’s hypothesis of the Latin American

112 ‘curioso destino el de Carpentier que siempre descubre el nuevo mundo de la mano de algún representante de la cultura francesa’ (1971, p. 632).
marvelous real, which entailed the effective nationalization of the Surrealist ‘system of thought’ about the marvelous, and the prior movement of Afro-Cubanism, which essentially involved the expropriation of the European ‘artistic trend’ of Modern Primitivism, certainly evidence this peculiar strategy. However, according to González Echevarría, the contradictory combination of ‘militant mundonovismo’ (or, literally, “New-World-ism”) and ‘servile imitation’ constitutes a consistent characteristic of not only Carpentier’s various patriotic representations but also Latin American nationalistic constructions in general (1977, p. 37).

Alonso similarly recognizes the paradoxical strategy of wholesale European cultural mimicry in the elaboration of a Latin American cultural identity as a feature of Latin American parochial literature. He argues that while Latin American literature manifests a preoccupation with cultural autochthony, it also partakes in ‘an almost indiscriminate appropriation of discourses that [are] considered “modern”’ (1990, p. 22). Alonso does not suggest that Latin American literature attempts an indiscriminate expropriation of modern discourses. This is probably because his focus is the novela de la tierra (or regionalist novel), which embraces the Western discourse of realism but which does not propose that Latin America is somehow its quintessential terrain. However, Alonso offers an explanation for the act of cultural appropriation, which remains just as valid for the practice of cultural expropriation that González Echevarría identifies. According to Alonso, the cultural larceny that Latin American parochial literature of the twentieth century consistently commits is inspired by ‘the somewhat ingenious intention of attaining modernity itself in the process of wielding [its discourses]’.

Affirmations of cultural difference constitute only a nominal disavowal of the Western world (p. 29).

Latin American nationalistic literature in the twentieth century appears to be motivated by two fundamentally contradictory impulses: the urge to construct an independent cultural identity for Latin America and the arguably even more powerful desire to attain cultural assimilation with the imperialist West. The

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116 Carpentier’s later representation of Latin America as ‘the chosen territory of the baroque’ (‘la tierra de elección del barroco’ 1981, p. 126) also manifests this paradoxical tactic. Interestingly, during his earlier Afro-Cubanist phase, Carpentier defined his cultural position as a ‘two-way translator of exemplary European techniques and American essences’” (qu. González Echevarría 1977, p. 38). Carpentier later rejected this dual role when he renounced his Afro-Cubanist novella as a ‘hybrid product’ (‘producto híbrido’ (1989, p. 10), ‘“nationalist”, trying to be, at the same time, “vanguardist”’ (‘“nacionalista”, tratándose, a la vez, de ser “vanguardista”’). Nevertheless, his nationalistic offerings continued to be decidedly ‘hybrid’ in nature.
indigenist genre certainly reveals such a paradoxical agenda. It focuses on the indigenous community as a marker of the cultural autonomy of Latin America. However, ironically, its very representation of the indigenous community, influenced by the Western discourse of realism (and its attendant philosophy of positivism), which the indigenist writers adopted wholesale, exhibits a contrary desire for cultural unanimity with the West. Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real, as I suggested earlier, appears to embody a kind of corrective gesture to the ambiguous parochialism of the indigenist genre, and the same can be said of the Afro-Cuban movement that preceded it. However, they nevertheless demonstrate an equally contradictory agenda. Carpentier’s discourse of the marvelous real and its Afro-Cubanist forerunner accentuate the “primitive” and the “irrational” in what appears to be an emphatic assertion of the cultural difference of Latin America from the modern world. However, ironically, that very espousal of the “primitive” and the “irrational”, which was inspired by the avant-garde discourses of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, evidences a contrary craving for cultural inclusion with the modern world. In addition, while Carpentier alleges that his discourses are more genuine and more authoritative than their European counterparts, this contention, which is of tenuous validity, appears to be little more than an attempt to stake a more genuine and authoritative claim to cultural modernity. Alonso argues: ‘even the most vehement proposals of cultural autochthony in Latin America seem to be motivated by the ulterior desire to make possible Latin America’s participation in contemporaneous history, in ... modernity.’ (p. 29)

In fact, Carpentier’s ulterior agenda appears to have involved the facilitation of not only Latin America’s participation in modern culture but also its usurpation of the Western stronghold on that “Holy Grail”. As I suggested earlier, imperial Europe had long decreed that Latin America (and, indeed, each of its colonies around the world) was primitive and irrational (which constituted traditional synonyms for philistine and ignorant), while it hailed itself, by contrast, as civilized and rational (which formed conventional synonyms for cultured and sophisticated.) This manichean division of the world into the “irrational primitive” and the “rational civilized” provided the ideological justification for colonial conquest and also functioned well beyond the official end of colonial rule as the implicit rationale for continuing Western global dominion. Carpentier was acutely aware of this ethnocentric worldview. In one of a series of articles that he
published in *Carteles* in 1941 under the title of ‘El ocaso de Europa’ (“The Dusk of Europe”), he writes: “[w]ith how much cruelty did [Europeans] always know how to throw in our faces our “indigenism”’ (qu. González Echevarría 1977, p. 39). However, with the emergence of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, the “indigenism” that Carpentier had experienced as such an insult was transformed into something of an accolade. The European avant-garde rebelliously reversed the traditional values of the manichean system and extolled the “primitive” and the “irrational”, which had together formerly denoted backwardness, depravity and inferiority, as representative of modernity, authenticity and preeminence. Carpentier seized upon this opportunity to counter the ethnocentrism that he had previously experienced. In the same article in *Carteles*, with the unmistakable pleasure of vengeful spite, he writes of those ‘very same superior spirits’ who had vilified Latin America for its “indigenism”’ and yet who “today long to find themselves on our Continent – the last refuge of a freedom and joy of living that those who handed down to us languages, principles, and rituals have lost forever.’ Carpentier embraced the avant-garde movements of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism as an opportunity for Latin America to not only partake in European culture but also, as this quotation suggests, usurp its hegemonic status. Carpentier espoused the Western idea that he, as a Latin American, enjoyed a privileged access to the “primitive” and the “irrational” and promoted his brand of Modern Primitivism, Afro-Cubanism, and his version of the Surrealist marvelous, the Latin American marvelous real, as more authentic than their European counterparts. Latin America, Carpentier effectively implied, was not only the rightful home of the “Modern Primitive” or of the Surrealist marvelous but also the legitimate locus of Modern Primitivism or Surrealism. Latin America, Carpentier essentially argued, was the real home and new powerbroker of modern culture.

However, while Modern Primitivism and Surrealism may have rhetorically reversed the Western-centric hierarchy of the manichean antithesis, this did not, as Carpentier hoped, entail a reciprocal inversion of the manichean structure of cultural authority. This was largely because this apparent reversal did not involve a genuine challenge to the Western bias of the manichean allegory at all. According to JanMohamed, the manichean paradigm not only comfortably brooks but also is inherently comprised of ‘interchangeable oppositions’ (1986, p. 82).

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117 Carpentier may have been regarded as a French writer in Cuba, but he was certainly not embraced as such in France.
While ‘the exchange function of the allegory remains constant … the generic attributes themselves can be substituted infinitely (and even contradictorily) for one another’ (p. 83). Thus, the “primitive” and the “irrational”, which had previously denoted backwardness and ignorance (according to the traditional stereotype of the “ignoble savage”), could come to symbolize the diametrical characteristics of modernity and sophistication (according to the contemporary version of the “ignoble savage”) within the same Western primitivist discourse. Indeed, JanMohamed argues that any particular representation of the colonial “other” is of ultimate irrelevance. He contends: ‘the imperialist is not fixated on specific images or stereotypes of the Other but rather on the affective benefits proffered by the manichean allegory, which generates the various stereotypes.’ (p. 87) Imperial Europe is interested in the colonial “other” only insofar as it provides a malleable cultural commodity (p. 83), which can be configured within the flexible economy of the manichean allegory in response to its political imperatives, narcissistic meditations or subliminal xenophobia or (as in the case of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism) supraliminal xenophilia. Thus, the apparent reversal of the traditional values of the manichean opposition by Modern Primitivism and Surrealism did not, as Carpentier believed, embody any real challenge to the Western-centric hierarchy of the manichean system. The “irrational primitive” remained an imperialist metonym, which effectively justified Western political hegemony, an egocentric projection, which confirmed the West’s self-appointed supreme identity, and a cultural plaything of “rational civilization”, which ultimately remained supreme. Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, as Marie-Denise Shelton argues, in ‘Primitive self’, ‘emerged out of two contradictory propositions: the poetic, which claims that Western culture is deficient and moribund, and the official, which affirms it as the perfect and ultimate state of humanity.’ (1995, p. 327)

Carpentier’s espousal of the manichean stereotype of the “irrational primitive” hardly helped to facilitate Latin America’s arrogation of the crown of global cultural supremacy from what was, after all, the only nominally outdated “rational civilization” of the imperialist West. Indeed, his acquiescence to the ideological caprices of the European avant-garde only further confirmed Western culture in its self-proclaimed status as global leader and further confined Latin America to its colonial appointment of sycophantic mimic. In fact, like Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, whose beguiling rhetoric he naively swallowed and faithfully
regurgitated, Carpentier ultimately represents the “irrational primitive” not as the new face of modern culture but, rather, as the old face of cultural “otherness”. Trapped within the imperialist machinations of the manichean system, Carpentier’s theory of the marvelous real ultimately serves only the manichean allegory’s Western mastermind.

While Carpentier (like the Modern Primitivist and Surrealist movements from which he took his lead), as Durix puts it, ‘simply reverts the order of priorities without truly questioning the terms of the argument’ (1998, p. 110), the essentialist paradigms of the manichean system are eminently questionable. To begin with, as I have argued, they certainly do not constitute fact. While Carpentier, in obedient accordance with the colonial stereotype, represents Latin America as the natural home of “primitive” and “irrational” thought and behavior, this is not an accurate representation. While people with “irrational” beliefs can be found in the Latin American populace and peculiar events can be identified in Latin American history, the characteristics of “primitive” and “irrational” thought and behavior are by no means representative of Latin American cultural identity. Indeed, as Debra Castillo argues, in ‘Latin American fiction’, any endeavor to uniformly characterize the cultural identity of Latin America, a region that is comprised of ‘approximately twenty-five countries with different histories, different traditions, different political systems, different geographies, different languages’, is inexorably doomed (1993, p. 607). Cultural definitions of what Castillo describes as the ‘slippery’ ‘concept of “Latin America”’ are inevitably as imprecise and misleading as that geographical label, glossing over and eliding the massive disparities that prevail within that “single” socio-geographical domain. In fact, according to Castillo (and a number of other critics, such as Alonso (1990) and González Echevarria (1990)), only ‘the search for this unremediably absent definition’, which Latin American literature has long manifested, ‘marks the essential unity of “Latin American” cultural identity’ (p. 608). Borges, who not only consistently exposed the inherent slipperiness or deceitfulness of nationalist representations but also obsessively emphasized the irremediable absence or illusory nature of an essential reality, would have undoubtedly delighted in this latest decidedly ironic definition of Latin American cultural identity. In addition, while the characteristics of “primitive” and “irrational” thought and behavior are not representative of Latin America, neither are they exclusive to Latin America. People with mythological beliefs, for example, inhabit a wide range of societices
around the globe, including cultures in the “rational civilization” of the Western
world, although they are arguably more prevalent in marginal communities that are
affected by economic underdevelopment and, consequently, substandard
education. Similarly, while the narrative of Latin American economic and political
history may chronicle some extraordinary episodes, involving so-called Boom and
Bust cyclical economies, eccentric and/or terrible political dictatorships as well as
egregious and brutal military crackdowns, such events are not specific to the Latin
American past. Indeed, they can be found in the histories of various societies
around the globe, including those of the “rational civilization” of the West.
However, such episodes are arguably currently more common in marginal nations
or, more specifically, in former colonies, where the legacies of resource
exploitation, the lessons of colonial (mis)rule and the tensions of social divisions
(or forced unions) and, in many cases, neo-imperialist economic exploitation,
Western political manipulation (notably by the C.I.A.) and unconscionable
weapons sales beget havoc. This leads us to my third point. The characteristics of
“primitive” and “irrational” thought and behavior are not inherent to Latin America
or, indeed, to any marginal (or even dominant) society. As Abiola Irele argues, in
The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, referring to the purportedly
innate ‘mystical constitution of African society’, this is not ‘a particular trait of
African society’ but ‘a feature of all traditional societies in which the level of
technical development is still too low for ... a rational mastery of the natural
environment which excludes a recourse to the mystical and the supernatural’
(1990, p. 83). Significantly, advancement of ‘the level of technical development’,
which Irele suggests would constitute a possible antidote to a ‘mystical
constitution’, is largely dependent upon advancement of the level of economic
development, which is, in turn, largely dependent upon the economic policies of
the imperialist West. Similarly, curious and iniquitous historical episodes are not
native to Latin America or to any other marginal (or dominant) nation. In fact, in
Latin America (and, indeed, Africa and other former colonized places around the
globe), these events have often been the direct result of Western economic policies
and political practices both during the colonial period and beyond it. Norman
Thomas di Giovanni, in his introduction to After the Despots: Latin American
Views and Interviews (Graham-Yooll 1991), refers to both the West’s inaccuracy
and hypocrisy in its representation of Latin America as the home of economic and
political irrationality and its complicity in and exploitation of Latin America’s genuine economic and political instability. He writes:

Europe ... until only a generation or so ago itself ridden with vile dictators and repressive regimes and the perpetrator of the most destructive war in history, still looks on Latin America with incomprehension, seeing it mainly in terms of economic chaos, political instability, and irrational bloodshed. The record of the U.S. is more complex and hypocritical. North American governments hold Central America in virtual enslavement and, via the chequebook and other less subtle forms of intervention, manipulate the rest of the Latin New World. At the same time, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadoreans, and Cubans provide large parts of the U.S. with cheap labour. (in Graham-Yool 1991, p. xi)

Carpentier embraced the manichean stereotype of the “irrational primitive” not only without questioning the validity of the essentialist terms of the manichean argument, which are, according to Borgesian logic, inevitably false, but also, as Durix adds, ‘without questioning the implications of [his] essentialist stance’ (1998, p. 110), which arc, as I have suggested, decidedly pernicious.

Postcolonial critics commonly recognize the inherent inauthenticity of essentialist discourses of cultural identity, such as Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real. However, they nevertheless also often defend them in terms of what the Australian critic Barry Morris, in ‘The politics of identity: From Aborigines to the first Australian’, calls their ‘politics of difference’ (1988, p. 76). Indeed, in Australia, Aboriginal essentialism (if not Australian essentialism, per se) has a number of supporters among cultural commentators. Stephen Muecke, for example, in ‘Lonely representations: Aboriginality and cultural studies’, concedes that cultural representations may be ideological constructions, but he also contends that ‘sound strategic reasons’ exist ‘for investing in essentialist versions’ of cultural identity for marginal communities (1992, p. 42). According to Morris, one of these ‘reasons’ is that essentialist assertions of cultural difference facilitate resistance to cultural assimilation (1988, p. 76). Jeremy Beckett, in Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality, defends Aboriginal cultural essentialism on the grounds that it is necessary for the affirmation of culturally specific political ‘rights’ (ed. 1988, p. 6). Howard Creamer, in ‘Aboriginality in New South Wales: Beyond the image of cultureless outcasts’, less cynically refers to the ‘self-actualising aspect’ (1988, p. 56) of essentialist constructions of marginal identity.

However, the essentialist position that Carpentier assumes in regards to the colonial stereotype of the “irrational primitive” is arguably illegitimate both as a cultural representation and as a political tactic. Contrary to the ‘sound ... reasons’ that champions of strategic essentialism typically cite, Carpentier’s theory of the
marvelous real ultimately complies with Western ideas rather than challenges them. It thus defends the hegemonic ‘rights’ of the imperialist West rather than the political autonomy of Latin Americans and actualizes the West’s self-appointed sovereign identity rather than the independent identity of Latin Americans, who ultimately appear as little more than exotic entertainment for Western xenophiles.

To begin with, as I have suggested, Carpentier’s essentialization of Latin American cultural identity, which ‘runs the risk’, as Said argues, ‘of just being a mirror opposite [of] the … tyranny it disputes’, is 'as exclusivist, as limited, provincial, and discriminatory in its suppressions and repressions as the master discourses of colonialism and elitism.' (in eds Guha & Spivak 1988, p. viii) It also effectively ratifies the European and North American suggestion that Latin American ‘economic chaos, political instability, and irrational bloodshed’ (di Giovanni in Graham Yooll 1991, p. xi) derive from the chaotic, unstable and irrational nature of Latin Americans. As Alonso suggests, Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real, with its ‘fetishizing’ of the characteristics of “primitiveness” and “irrationality” (read substandard education, political instability and economic underdevelopment), draws ‘attention away from the very concrete situation of exploitation from which [they] arise’ (1990, p. 32). This process of internalization and transcendentalization absolves the imperialist West of any responsibility for Latin American “irrationality” and “primitiveness” by making those economic contingencies and colonial legacies appear essential and immutable facts of Latin American existence. In fact, in its reinforcement of the justification for colonial conquest (that is, of the idea that Latin America is too “primitive” and “irrational” to be capable of political autonomy or economic independence), it continues to provide the West with the justification for its past as well as its current political and economic interventions. In the manichean worldview that Carpentier endorses, the West’s identity is that of a benevolent global guardian rather than that of an unjust imperial autocrat. While the internalization of the colonial stereotype of the “irrational primitive” by Latin Americans fortifies the imperial West’s “God complex”, it instills in Latin Americans what Castillo, in Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism, calls ‘a kind of pan-Latin inferiority complex’ (1992, p. 4). It encourages in Latin Americans a fatalistic resignation to what they believe to be their inexorably “primitive” and “irrational” nature, which only further facilitates the West’s imperialistic activities and fortifies the West’s supremacist identity. Carpentier romanticizes these
“national characteristics” in an attempt to engender what could be comparatively described as a kind of pan-Latin pride in inferiority. However, Carpentier’s strategy not only equally justifies the West’s imperialism and buttresses its ascendant identity but also rouses its exoticism. Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real, conceived from a Western perspective of touristic exoticism, perhaps not surprisingly, also appeals to the exoticist tourists of the Western marketplace. Carpentier’s premise, which embraces the colonial image of Latin America as the exotic “other” of the imperial West, effectively reaffirms the Western vision of Latin America as a kind of foreign Disneyland for the delectation of local xenophiles. In the words of Martin, it ultimately represents Latin America as the ‘home of irreality, where people are larger or smaller than life: there for [Western] entertainment, specimens in the national-geographic catalogue of planetary showbiz safaris (in short, less than human).’ (1989, p. 224)

In Carpentier’s postcolonial nationalist hypothesis, as Graham-Yool suggests, Latin Americans are not autonomous individuals but, rather, ‘surrogate actors in the fantasies of older cultures’ (1991, p. xv).

These dubious ‘implications’ underlie and undermine not only Carpentier’s postcolonial nationalist theory but also all marginal parochial essentialist discourses, which perhaps inevitably fall into the antithetical trap of the manichean allegory and consequently fulfil the imperialist agenda of its Western architect.118

As Homi Bhabha argues, in ‘Representations and the colonial text: A critical exploration of some forms of mimeticism’, ‘[T]he Nationalist critic caught in the problematic of image analysis, speaks against one stereotype but essentially, and inevitably, for another.’ (1984, p. 105) Meanwhile, the fact that those stereotypes are ‘a discourse … engaged in a form of transformative “work” is effaced’ (p. 106). In other words, cultural representations that play the political game of essential difference inevitably perpetuate the imperialist manichean ideological construct, when it, in fact, needs to be interrogated. As Bhabha demonstrates,

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118 The Négritude movement, to which I referred in an earlier footnote and which provides an interesting parallel to Carpentier’s discourse of the Latin American marvelous real, constitutes a prime example. The inventors of this movement, the Martiniquan Césaire and the Senegalese poet Léopold Senghor, like Carpentier, embraced the manichean stereotype of the “irrational primitive”, which Modern Primitivism and Surrealism had reinvigorated, in order to proclaim not only Africa’s difference from but also cultural superiority to the Western world. However, Négritude, similarly to Afro-Cubanism and the marvelous real, manifests not only an inherent inauthenticity but also delivers a decidedly equivocal nationalistic message. As Wole Soyinka famously and pithily declared (in an observation that Borges would have undoubtedly appreciated): “[a] tiger does not proclaim its tigritude” (qu. Nkosi 1981, p. 19). In addition, as Ireele points out, while Négritude
while some postcolonial critics contend that marginal assertions of cultural difference are tactically sound, others argue that such proclamations merely sustain the status quo and, rather than fulfill a radical program of cultural decolonization, facilitate only a reactionary process of cultural recolonization. Castillo, for example, argues that the marginal writer who emphasizes cultural difference inevitably makes 'a space for the ineluctable reappropriation of the margins – as anthropological study, as exotica, as the obscure other whose only function is to circumscribe or define the center – for other purposes.' (1992, p. 220). António Cândido, in 'Literature and underdevelopment', similarly contends that literature which promotes what is most distinctive about the local reality, establishing a regionalism which seems to be an affirmation of national identity ... can be really an unsuspected way of offering to European sensibility the exoticism it desires, as a distraction, making this regionalism into an acute form of dependency within independence. (1980, p. 277)

In fact, Chevigny argues that even 'the very need to establish ... difference reveals dependence, Western culture remaining a necessary reference point' (1986, p. 40). In a similar vein, Benedict Anderson, in Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1991), suggests that the postcolonial nationalist discourse itself, as an imitation of imperialist ideologies of nationhood, inherently reveals a continuing fundamental and paradoxical subservience to Western culture. Partha Chatterjee, in Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse, protests at the apparently inexorable status of a Naipaul-ian "mimic man" that has been ascribed to the postcolonial "other" in his or her responses to imperialism. He argues:

[history, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imagination must remain forever colonized (1986, p. 5).

While his frustration is certainly understandable, the inherent non-autochthony and political dubiousness of essentialist postcolonial cultural discourses is nevertheless undeniable.  

The West's enthusiasm for parochial fiction from its former colonies surely constitutes a further cause for skepticism about the purportedly politically presented itself as a challenge to a racist system, it left 'intact ... the racial hierarchy established by the colonial ideology' (1990, p. 83) and thus continued to serve that imperial program.  

119 While postcolonial writers would appear to be "damned if they do and damned if they don't", as Paul Smith writes, in Representing the Other: Race, Text, and Gender in Spanish and Spanish American Narrative, '[t]his is the difficult and continuing challenge of representing the other: to refuse both homogenization and fetichization, to resist both the reassuring comforts of the same and the vicarious pleasures of the exotic.' (1992, p. 220)
challenging nature of postcolonial assertions of cultural difference. In *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (1981), the South African writer and critic Lewis Nkosi discusses the West’s predilection for literature from Africa that emphasizes Africa’s cultural difference from the modern Western world. He writes:

> Europeans bored with the familiar, have sometimes assumed that anything to do with mud huts, masks and fetish cults is somehow superior to works dealing with modern Africa - an unjustified conclusion that has had at least one deleterious effect of encouraging a proliferation of ersatz novels about magic, religious cults and other lurid tales, all laced with the obligatory proverb on each page. (p. 7)

The U.S. critic John S. Brushwood, in ‘Reality and imagination in the novels of García Márquez’ (1985), identifies a similar Western preference for Latin American literature that portrays Latin American identity as “other” according to the colonial stereotype of the “irrational primitive”. Brushwood writes: ‘I have substantial reservations concerning this emphasis on difference ... readers in the U.S. seem not especially interested in hearing about Latin Americans who are like us. They prefer the emphasis on the apparently exotic.’ (p. 14) Indeed, Nkosi and Brushwood are so cynical about the cultural or political legitimacy of contemporary postcolonial nationalist texts that they suggest such literature is less a challenging demonstration of political autonomy and cultural pride than a tailored bid for publishing success in the Western marketplace. Alegria levels similar charges specifically at Carpentier’s theory of the Latin American marvelous real. He suggests that ‘Carpentier writes, like the Spanish chronicles of the Conquest, for a European public’ rather than in defense of a nationalist agenda (1960, p. 354).

Carpentier’s concept of the Latin American marvelous real, with its embrace of the colonial stereotype of the “irrational primitive”, which the European movements of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism had xenophilically valorized, certainly constitutes a compromised postcolonial nationalist discourse. Carpentier, as Camayd-Freixas less cynically believes, may have presented his parochial premise as ‘a form of cultural self-affirmation, identity construction, and resistance to metropolitan paradigms’ (1996, p. 583). However, his theory of the Latin American marvelous real, contrary to the nationalist intentions that Camayd-Freixas discerns, is ultimately more an ‘affirmation’ of the West’s imperial agenda and its constructed imperialist ‘identity’ because of its misguided compliance with rather than ‘resistance’ to Western imperialistic ‘paradigms’.
Can't Help Falling in (and Out of) Line with Carpentier:  
Interrogating Devotees of the "Marginal Realist" Ideological Program

The "magical margins" hypotheses promulgated by other marginal writers of magical realism for the literary genre are remarkably reminiscent of Carpentier's theory of the marvelous real not only in terms of their doctrines but also, perhaps not altogether surprisingly, their dubiousness. Because of the widespread and spurious nature of the "magical margins" propaganda, magical realist literature itself has earned something of a bad reputation.

To begin with, a number of fellow advocates of the Carpentierian thesis that magical realism is a "marginal realism", much like Carpentier himself, paradoxically derived their purportedly authentic and ostensibly nationalistic "magical margins" notions from the European avant-garde. Asturias, for example, lived in Paris from 1923 to 1933, during what Camayd-Freixas calls the 'heyday' of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism (1998, p. 415). He studied ethnology at The Sorbonne for five years under a French expert in Amerindian cultures (Harss & Dohmann 1967, p. 76) and investigated the "irrational" alongside the Surrealist virtuosos of unreason (Scarano 1999, p. 11). As Rodriguez Monegal suggests, the 'dual guidance' of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism is as evident in the development of Asturias' "magical margins" vision of Latin America as it is in Carpentier's similarly construed concept of the Latin American marvelous real (1977, p. 511). In Guatemala in 1923, just before he went to Paris, Asturias completed a doctoral thesis on the "Indian problem", which endorsed positivist advancement and effectively recommended cultural genocide for the Mayan people (Martin in Asturias 1993, p. xii). However, in Paris in 1930, he published a radically different text on Mayan society entitled Leyendas de Guatemala (1930; "Legends of Guatemala"), which celebrates the mythological beliefs of the Mayan community and presents the indigenous Guatemalan not as a national quandary but as a cultural asset. Asturias' nationalistic embrace of the "irrational primitive" in this 'Neo-Indianist' (ed. Swanson 1990, p. 4) text, like Carpentier's parochial promotion of that venerable stereotype in his contemporaneous Afro-Cubanist work, was clearly and contradictorily inspired by the European avant-garde poetic reinvigoration of that manichean cliche. Similarly, Asturias' allegedly authentic depiction of the marvelous world of the Latin American "primitive" in his later magical realist text, like Carpentier's, is suspiciously reminiscent of the
romanticized “surreality” that Breton, himself influenced by Modern Primitivist ethnological doctrines, ascribed to “primitive” reality. Indeed, Asturias specifically describes the fantastically infused marginal ontology of the Mayan people as a genuine version of ‘that which the Surrealists around Breton wanted’. He also describes Guatemala, echoing Breton’s portrait of Mexico, as a ‘Surrealist country’. Asturias, like Carpenter, clearly derived his “magical margins” vision of Latin American reality from Breton’s Surrealist ideologies.

Other more contemporary writers of magical realism who support the Carpenterian proposition that the narrative genre is a “marginal realism” also appear to have similarly derived their “magical margins” hypotheses from the European avant-garde movements of Modern Primitivism and Surrealism, the impact of which reverberated throughout the twentieth century. The two-dimensional indigenous existence that Valenzuela argues provides the basis for her magical realist and purportedly “marginal realist” narratives, for example, like the binary “primitive” worlds that Carpenter and Asturias characterize, is very much a Bretonian idealized “Surreality”. Valenzuela herself acknowledges the similarity and complains: “[t]hat’s why Americans think the Latin American novel is surrealist” (qu. Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 316). Despite her deprecation of Surrealism here, at other times Valenzuela sounds like a latter day Surrealist disciple, declaring her admiration for Freud (in Price 1990, p. 97) and propounding the ‘astounding’ wisdom of the unconscious (qu. p. 103). Like Breton, she also specifically lauds the ‘magical world’ of Mexico (qu. García Pinto 1988, p. 198), where she attended, similarly to Breton in Haiti, what she describes as ‘strange’ religious ceremonies. Mudroorooy also betrays the Surrealist ideological

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120 'lo que deseaban los surrealistas en torno a Breton’ (qu. Carrillo 1983, p. 53).
121 ‘Guatemala est un pays surréaliste’ (qu. Karr 1982, p. 104)
122 According to Tommaso Scarano, in ‘Notes on Spanish-American magical realism’, the Surrealists not only introduced Carpenter and Asturias to the marvelous nature of Latin America but also to one another (1999, p. 13). While one can only speculate on a possible collaboration between the two writers, the influence of Surrealism and Modern Primitivism on each of them is certain. Not surprisingly, while the pioneers of magical realism, Carpenter and Asturias, aver that the literary genre derived from the magical nature of Latin America, critics have often demurred and, instead, linked its evolution to the European avant-garde. Camayl-Freixas, for example, argues that magical realism ‘is rooted, both historically and aesthetically, in the primitivism of contemporary art that has pervaded since the avant-garde certain tendencies in modern painting, sculpture, music, and dance’ (1998, p. 415). Durix contends that magical realism ‘could probably not have existed without the Surrealist movement’ (1998, p. 129). However, while the European avant-garde certainly contributed to the original development of the narrative convention that distinguishes magical realist fiction, namely, the representation of the magical as real, the literary genre cannot be subsumed by the Modern Primitivist or Surrealist rubrics. Magical realism, which does not always represent “primitive” beliefs, cannot always be explained in terms of Modern Primitivism, and it is also, as I argue in the following chapter, ultimately distinct from Surrealism.
foundations of his "magical margins" thesis. While Mudrooroo proposes that his
magical realist novel represents a marvelous Aboriginal reality, he also explicitly
affiliates the Aboriginal worldview, which is said to be shaped by the so-called
Western denominated "Dreamtime", with the Surrealist movement, with its respect
for dreams (1997a, p. 59). Indeed, Mudrooroo asserts, in Writing from the Fringe:
A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature: "[i]t is precisely in surrealism" (1990, p.
38) that Aboriginal writing can "get at the very underlying stuff of Aboriginality
residing in the condensed and concentrated obsessions of the unconscious or the
individual dreaming" (p. 37) and thus achieve "an authentic Aboriginality" (p. 38).
Okri, who defines magical realism as an African realism, as we have seen, also
compares magical realism with Surrealism if only to disparage the authenticity of
the European avant-garde movement. However, the confluence of Okri's version
of African reality with the Surrealist vision of "primitive" life and, perhaps even
more so, Okri's awareness of the similarity between the two effectively undermine
the alleged autochthony of his African rendition of the Carpentierian "magical
margins" argument.

However, whether or not links can be drawn between the Carpentierian "magical
margins" assertions of contemporary practitioners of the magical realist literary
genre and the European avant-garde is ultimately irrelevant, for these Carpentierian
declarations fundamentally manifest, like Carpentier's premise itself, their
inauthenticity.

Most proponents of the Carpentierian theory of the "magical margins", such as
Asturias, Valenzuela, Mudrooroo and Okri, primarily base their hypotheses on the
Carpentierian principle of the "real marvelous". As Camayd-Freixas argues,
advocates of the idea that magical realism is a "marginal realism" typically "lean
towards an ethnological version of Magical Realism" (1996, p. 584). That is, they
generally contend that "Magical Realism issues from an alternate world view one
might call "primitive"" (p. 584), which is unique to a particular "ethnic and cultural
enclave", be it in the Third World or the First (p. 586), and according to which "the
natural and the supernatural become interchangeable." (1998, p. 417) In addition,
supporters of the Carpentierian thesis of the "real marvelous", even more explicitly
than Carpentier himself, commonly claim to possess a spiritual affinity with those
cultural 'enclaves' and their hybrid worldviews, which they purport to thus
faithfully represent in their magical realist texts. However, while they profess to
depict 'the "primitive" from within, with an endogenous view' (Camayd-Freixas
1998, p. 414), their avowals of autochthony, like Carpenter’s similar assertions, simply cannot be substantiated. Asturias, for example, declares himself ‘The Great Speaker’123 of his Mayan ancestors and consistently appropriates what he believes to be their authentic magically inclusive worldview. He affirms, for example, that ‘[t]he indigenous people and ourselves generally have two realities: one palpable, the other dreamlike.’124 However, Asturias lived much of his life in Europe, concedes that he does not speak any indigenous languages and confesses that his incursions into Mayan psychology are at best intuitive and speculative. Of his professedly intimate and genuine portrayal of Mayan life in *Men of Maize*, he admits: ‘I heard a lot, assumed a bit more, and invented the rest.’ (qu. Harss & Dohmann 1967, p. 89). He also confesses that he used the Surrealist technique of automatic writing to compose those passages that supposedly depict the Mayan worldview (p. 82), which he, significantly, wrote during his European residency (Martin in Asturias 1993, p. xv). In fact, Gray Díaz argues that Asturias is often completely misguided in some of his speculations about Mayan beliefs (1988, p. 108). Valenzuela similarly proclaims an alliance with the indigenous Latin Americans, whose alleged fantastical inclined worldview she claims to share. She asserts: ‘I am much closer to the American Indians than to the Spanish conquistadores. If I could choose, I would prefer to be an Aztec or a Mayan.’ (qu. Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 321) However, Valenzuela is an urban Argentine, who comes from the geographically opposite end of the Latin American continent to the ‘American Indians’ of her primitivist fancy and who is ideologically ‘much closer’ to the European culture she rejects than to the Aztec and Mayan cultures she ‘prefers’. Mudrooroo, who has written a number of textbooks on Aboriginal life and lectured on Aboriginal culture in Australian universities, presents himself as something of an inside authority on Aboriginal reality. Indeed, Mudrooroo, who demonstrates a controversial propensity in his literary criticism to read other Aboriginal fiction in terms of their ‘degree of Aboriginality’ (1990, p. 37) or ‘Indigenality’ (1997a, p. 191), often appears to uphold himself as something of a moral arbiter of Aboriginal authenticity. However, in an incident that provoked a veritable media frenzy among the reactionary Australian mainstream press and inspired indignant outrage from some Aboriginal groups, Mudrooroo’s identity as a biological Aborigine was itself called into question, when his family (apparently

unwilling to be classified alongside him as Aborigines in racist Australia) revealed that he was, in fact, of Irish and Afro-American descent. Okri claims to offer an authentic inside view into the mythologically enchanted reality of ordinary black Nigerians. However, while he may be a Nigerian born black man, he lived in London as a child, studied at Essex University in England as an adult, lives in England and writes in English. While these writers suggest that they share and thus convey the mythological perspective of the marginal communities that feature in their magical realist and purportedly “marginal realist” literature, as Camayd-Freixas suggests, their magical realist novels “are not first-person narratives in the voice of a tribesman” (1998, p. 414). Durix similarly argues that while magical realism “is reputed to involve a return to native lore and folk magic”, this assertion “must be relativized. Much of this literature ... originates ... in the upper layers of society” and is written by authors who are “closer to European culture than to popular beliefs.” (1998, p. 115) In the words of Timothy Brennan, in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, the authors of magical realist texts are overwhelmingly ‘Third World cosmopolitans’ (1989, p. viii) (or even First World cosmopolitans) rather than Third World “primitives”. Indeed, as I have suggested, the “magical margins” theses that they propagate, which appear to be, in their uniformity and banality, little more than ‘pastiches’ of European primitivist conventions (Camayd-Freixas 1986, p. 585), expose their cosmopolitan alliances. However, even if their depictions of magical “primitive” perspectives are valid, as

124 ‘Los indígenas y nosotros tenemos generalmente dos realidades: una realidad palpable y una realidad soñada.’ (qu. Durix 1998, p. 110; my emphasis)

125 Mudrooroo’s denunciations of the authenticity of the literature of Aboriginal writers, such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Sally Morgan, as Vickie Laurie notes, in ‘Blacks question aboriginal writer’, ‘made him a sitting target for criticism from Aborigines in the wake of revelations of his own “inauthenticity”’ (1996, p. 2). While some Aboriginal groups called for Mudrooroo’s books to be destroyed (Jopson 1997) and the mainstream white Australian press expressed cynicism about his perceived duplicity, Mudrooroo, as John Barnes argues, in “Mudrooroo – An Australian view”, is hardly a “career Aborigine” (1999). Colin Johnson’s adoption of the identity of Mudrooroo, as Barnes wisely counsels, “should not ... be confused with cases of imposture (...) or assumed “second identity” (...)”. Rather, Mudrooroo’s situation should be read in the context of the larger tragedy of dispossession and cultural deprivation experienced by the indigenous people in Australia. Mudrooroo was treated as and genuinely believed he was an Aborigine throughout his life. This was certainly, as Mary Ann Hughes suggests, a more “logical conclusion, coming from a small town in the West Australian wheatbelt country”, than that “his genetic inheritance linked him to African America.” (1998, p. 23) Mudrooroo himself reflects, in “Tell them you’re Indian”: “having been officially designated the native ... I had to go along with that, though in a different climate I might have claimed my Irish ancestry ... But racism intruded in denying me this identity.” (1997b, p. 263) (Significantly, other Australian writers who claim Aboriginal ancestry, such as Archie Weller and Roberta Sykes, have had similar experiences to Mudrooroo.) By contrast, the white female painter Elizabeth Durack, who assumed the identity of Aboriginal male artist Eddie Burrup, and the white male writer Leon Carmen, who adopted the identity of Aboriginal female author Wanda Koolmatrie (and whose novel was subsequently pulped), consciously faked Aboriginal identities out of apparently little more than commercial motivation.
Durix contends, ‘[i]t seems difficult to admit’ that these urbane authors would share a worldview according to which ‘there is no dividing line between what appears real and what more positivist thinkers would call the supernatural’ (1998, p. 115). In fact, their suggestions that they do indeed inhabit that particular ontology, like Carpentier’s similar claims, “self-deconstruct” to expose their personal extrinsicity vis-a-vis that hypothetical attitude. For, far from being unable to distinguish between the ‘real’ and the ‘supernatural’, their contention that the magical is real ironically relies upon their ability to make this very distinction. As González Echevarría contends, their claim to share the “superstitious” beliefs of “primitive” cultures and their ‘desire to abolish the difference between the self and the other’ is effectively ‘undermined … by the use of terms such as “magic”’ to denote those “superstitious” tenets, which clearly remain in the realm of the culturally “other” (1977, p. 127). He argues:

the fact remains that “magic” is the term used by the pioneers of ethnology at the end of the nineteenth century and early in our own to describe religious rituals and certain beliefs which the researcher did not share. The term “magic” serves as an instrument by means of which the observer takes distance from the “supernatural” that he describes from a European perspective and for the understanding of Europeans. (p. 116)

Indeed, as González Echevarría suggests, the theory of the “real marvelous”, which underlies these contemporary hypotheses of the “magical margins”, as it does Carpentier’s seminal theory of the Latin American marvelous real, manifests a dubious anthropologically clothed exoticism. It exhibits, as Camayd-Freixas avers, the ‘remnants of an old Western ethnocentrism’, which ‘designates the other, what the metropolis is not, that which is not recognized as adapted to our “today” … [as] “marvelous” precisely because it is seen as aberrant’ (1998, p. 420).

The alternative but complementary Carpentierian argument that magical realism is a “marginal realism” because it reflects the magical geographies and fabulous histories of marginal realities, to which latter day writers of magical realism also subscribe, similarly “self-deconstructs” via the same paradox of self-consciousness, to reveal an innate inauthenticity, as I demonstrated earlier. In the words of González Echevarría, while champions of the Carpentierian supposition of the “marvelous real” ‘proclaim magic to be here’, such declarations manifest an ironic ‘double or meta-alienation … [for] we have to see it from the other side to see it as magic.’ (1977, p. 128) William Rowe similarly argues, in ‘Gabriel García Márquez’, that ‘the image of [the margins] as … magical derives from a European stance … To the people actually living in them, those places are not … marvellous’ (1987, p. 192). Significantly, in many cases, contemporary writers of
magical realist texts and proponents of the “magical margins” hypothesis, like their predecessor Carpentier, have spent long intervals outside of or no longer reside within the marginal territories they represent as extraordinary.

Brian Edwards, Bruce Healey and Hazel Rowley, in Beyond Realism, refer to the role of nostalgia in the production of magical realist novels, such as García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude (1987, p. 23). Nostalgic parochialism or, perhaps, a less sentimental and more politically strategic nationalism appears to have provided a significant inspiration for Carpentier’s fellow proponents of the “magical margins” premise, as it did for Carpentier himself. Writers of magical realist literature and defenders of the “marginal realism” thesis, like their forebear, as Durix points out, commonly manifest a concern with defining a unique marginal cultural identity in resistance to Western neo-imperialist cultural hegemony (1998, p. 149). García Márquez, for instance, as a journalist in the 1960s, wrote an article entitled ‘Colombian literature: A fraud to our nation’ in which he lamented the dearth of Colombian authors who possessed ‘an authentic sense of what is national’ (qu. Bell-Villada 1990, p. 40). He himself subsequently attempted to remedy the situation with his enigmatic magical realist novel and its accompanying “magical margins” explanation. García Márquez became famous for that text and its justification, but he also garnered attention for his extra-literary anti-imperialistic alignments, such as his friendship with Castro and his participation in the campaign of Panamanian President Omar Torrijos to regain control of Canal land from the U.S. Morrison also expresses a concern with defining a distinct Afro-American cultural identity and with resisting white U.S. hegemony. She claims that she attempts to capture in her novels “the something that defines what makes a book “black”” (qu. McKay 1993, p. 409). She also asserts that she writes exclusively for ‘my people’ (qu. LeClair 1993, p. 370) and that from ‘my perspective, there are only black people.’ (qu. p. 374) In addition, she avers that white critics cannot understand her writing. She argues: ‘[i]t’s like having a linguist who doesn’t understand your language tell you what you’re saying’ (qu. p. 377). The Australian novelist Winton has made his postcolonial nationalistic political agenda similarly clear. Reflecting on a sojourn in Europe, Winton asserts:

[when I got to Europe I knew the moment I set my foot down that I wasn’t European. I’d been brought up all my life to think I was .... [However, upon my return to Australia] I knew this is where I belong. I know my continent, I know my country. I certainly know my landscape ... I’m connected to the land and the landscape and the sea, and the colour of the light, and the
smell of the eucalypts ... I wouldn't say it's a kind of new Aboriginality ... but it's a feeling of belonging. (qu. Bennett 1992, p. 62).

While Europe is Winton's antagonist, white Australia is Mudrooroo's foe. Indeed, Mudrooroo concedes that his dialectical representation of Aboriginal culture as a 'maban reality' is an oppositional tactic, which 'has arisen as a direct counter to assimilation' (1997a, p. 43). For Mudrooroo, it embodies a strategic rejection of 'Australian realism' (1990, p. 59) and its underlying imperialistic positivist ideology. Nevertheless, as we have seen, he also simultaneously and contradictorily defends the authenticity of his essentialist representation of Aboriginal identity.

However, like Carpentier's philosophy of the Latin American marvelous real, these contemporary discourses of the 'magical margins' provide neither authentic representations of marginal realities nor successful declarations of cultural autonomy. This is largely because of their continued dependence upon time worn ethnocentric manichean paradigms. As Cândido puts it, what proponents of the Carpentierian doctrine of the 'magical margins' have done is to adopt a projected identity of cultural 'otherness' in an attempt to 'transform ... exoticism' into 'a spiritual state' and to reconstruct an ideological device of Western imperialism into an ideological 'instrument of national affirmation' (1980, p. 264). However, as Shiva Naipaul argues, in An Unfinished Journey, '[r]acial metaphysics is a cul-de-sac' (1988, p. 21). The transcendentalization and internalization of the colonially imposed manichean identity of exotic 'otherness' achieves little more than to confirm strategic racist stereotypes and, thereby, excuse Western imperialist activity. As the Peruvian writer and erstwhile presidential candidate Mario Vargas Llosa demonstrates when he asserts that the 'traditional' Latin American 'difficulty

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120 While Winton appears to deny the Aboriginal influence on his patriotic 'feeling', a magically inclined "Aboriginal" worldview features strongly in his nationalistic magical realist novel and its accompanying "marginal realist" thesis. Just like his Latin American counterparts, Winton dubiously co-opts the imagined indigenous "other" in his articulation of a "white" cultural identity. In Australia, as in Latin America, as Lattas argues, "[t]he dominant culture of whites ... searches for its authenticity and identity in the primordial Other it has placed on its own margins" (1997, p. 242). This trend, which perhaps first manifested itself in Australia in the Aboriginalist poetry of the Jindyworobak movement (1938-1953), is today almost everywhere evident in mainstream representations of Australian identity, such as those promoted in the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games Opening Ceremony. The Aborigine, as Lattas suggests, is endowed with a "sacred quality" (1997, p. 241) and, in the words of Beckett, 'put to work as a national emblem' (ed. 1988, p. 206), providing white Australians with a spiritual link with the land and a legendary history. Mudrooroo actually supports the appropriation of Aboriginal mythological culture by non-Aboriginal Australians as the basis for a unique Australian identity, inspired by the belief that this will encourage the kind of respect for Aboriginal myths that is given by the Western world to Greek legends (1997a, p. 2). However, locking the Aborigine into the stereotype of the "irrational primitive", as I have suggested, is an ultimately perilous political tactic.
... in differentiating ... between reality and fiction ... is, probably, one of the reasons why we are so impractical and inept in political matters' (1987, p. 5), the Carpentierian "magical margins" thesis insidiously leads to imperialistic sounding conclusions of marginal political ineptitude. In addition, as José Antonio Portuondo writes, in 'Literature and society', the 'hyperbolic exaltation' of the magic or the absurd quality which the daily expression of a persistent underdeveloped vision of reality tends to have among us' provides exoticist nourishment for 'depraved European palates' (1980, p. 286).

According to Said, in his renowned study of the pervasiveness of Oriental stereotypes, with 'the epic scale of U.S. global power and the national domestic consensus created by the electronic media ... [n]ever has there been a consensus so difficult to oppose nor so easy and logical to capitulate to unconsciously.' (1993, pp. 391-2) Indeed, the unprecedented ubiquity of manichean stereotypes of cultural identity, in general, which have been universally disseminated by the Western media, may have certainly contributed to compel proponents of the Carpentierian "magical margins" thesis to espouse those dubious stereotypes. However, the potent desire of the Western marketplace for cultural expressions of the 'quaintly exotic' (Castillo 1993, p. 614), an age old fetish that manifested itself in avant-garde primitivism but arguably currently masquerades under the contemporary guise of multicultural enthusiasm, may have also played a part.

The Western world, which possesses the largest publishing houses and the largest book buying audiences, effectively dictates the cultural expressions of marginal writers. As Penny Van Toorn argues, in 'Discourse/patron discourse: How minority texts command the attention of majority audiences', 'the dominant culture issues minority writers with their license to speak' (1990, p. 103). According to Van Toorn, this license is issued only if minority writers 'satisfy' certain 'criteria ... which the dominant society decides' (p. 102). These criteria generally dictate that the marginal author must represent his or her culture as a pseudo-zoological 'exhibit, an object of curiosity ... packaged ... for consumption by the dominant community' (p. 103). Van Toorn concludes: '[t]he minority speaker who reaches a

127 Vargas Llosa, who 'possesses a formidable gift for realism of the non-magical kind' (Rushdie 1991, p. 315), as exemplified by his extremely accomplished historical novel The War of the End of the World (La guerra del fin del mundo 1981), nevertheless has successfully managed to avoid the confusion of fact and fantasy that he suggests defines Latin American cultural identity.

128 According to Anne Brewster, in Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalization, '[t]he discourse of multiculturalism ... defines ethnicity according to visible, folk-markers of difference' (1995, p. 80), which makes cultural difference easily digestible for the hegemonic audience as exotic "otherness".
wide audience has jumped out of the frying pan only to land in the fire, as it were, breaking out of the role of the mute, named object only to be confined to the role of the circumscribed speaking object.'

In Australia, for example, which is Van Toorn's particular concern, Aboriginal writers, despite the fact that they are mostly Westernized urban citizens, are obliged to comply with the popular image of what Tim Rowse, in 'Middle Australia and the noble savage: A political romance', calls 'the approved "authentic" Aborigine' (1988, p. 174). Mudrooroo himself reflects on the pressure to produce images of Aboriginality that conform to the 'naked-and-standing-on-one-leg-with-woomera-and-spear noble savage stereotype', who exists 'in a timeless cultural Dreamtime' (1997a, p. 49). If Aboriginal writers fail to comply with this reactionary stereotype, they not only frequently risk publishing exile but also are commonly charged with cultural inauthenticity. As Ian Anderson suggests, in 'Black bit, white bit', 'cultural essentialism now defined the "authentic" Aborigines by their cultural forms, as surely as biological essentialism had once fixed them by their racial characteristics.' (1994, p. 118). Consequently, Aboriginal writers, as Beckett argues, are 'caught between the attribution of unchanging essences (...) and the reproach of [in]authenticity' (ed. 1988, p. 194).

Mary Ann Hughes, in 'The complexity of Aboriginal identity: Mudrooroo and Sally Morgan', refers to the 'magnetic pull towards positioning [oneself] as "other"', which contemporary culture encourages (1998, p. 25). However, Brennan suggests that proponents of the "magical margins" thesis are not exploited victims but, rather, entrepreneurial exploiters of Western xenophobia. Brennan points to García Márquez' Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which he promotes Latin America as a "magical margin" and refers to the fantastical narratives of the explorer Pigafetta as ostensible proof of his parochial premise. However, as Antonello Gerbi argues, in Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, such 'visionary' accounts of the "New World" were not factual documents inspired by 'scientific curiosity' but calculated stories motivated by 'the thirst for glory, the desire for riches' (1985, p. 36). Christopher Columbus, for example, was 'concerned with justifying his enterprise in the eyes of Queen Isabella' (p. 36), while the 'shrewd and canny' Pigafetta wanted to catch the attention of would-be royal sponsors (p. 104). Other writers of adventure tales
wanted ‘to exploit the ... eternal hunger for tales of marvels and fantasy.’ (p. 45) Brennan, who similarly evokes the questionable motives behind explorers’ chronicles, suggests that the incentives behind García Márquez’ magical representation of Latin America may be similarly dubious. He writes of García Márquez’ reference to Pigafetta that ‘[t]he conventional problematic of “truth” and “fiction” are here expressed in an imperial context by a Third-World author whose acknowledged debt to his former masters is a lesson in how to lie appealingly.’ (1989, p. 67) Mudrooroo arguably arouses similar suspicions when he acknowledges that ‘the media often prefer representation of the Aborigine which is supposedly “authentic”, meaning being as black as possible, and as Other as possible’ (1990, p. 147) but nevertheless encourages Aboriginal authors to espouse ‘maban reality’ in order to ‘gain a wider readership’ (1997a, p. 97).

A number of critics, particularly in recent years, have leveled similar accusations at magical realist fiction itself. Alberto Fuguet, a Chilean writer of contemporary urban realist fiction, in ‘I am not a magic realist!’, for example, claims that magical realist literature appeals to and encourages a Western ‘cult of the underdeveloped’ and is a fundamentally racist, economically motivated and ‘color-by-numbers’ literary cliche (1997). Fuguet quotes the Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas, who also believed that magical realism is a completely disingenuous, commercially driven and ideologically irresponsible literary genre. According to Arenas, magical realism’s ‘dominant theme is nothing more than a desire to pander to the magic-starved sensibilities of North American and European readers.’ ‘By taking the path of exoticism, and with the paternalistic support and understanding proffered by the Europeans and North Americans, one can easily reach fame and fortune, and, sometimes even the Nobel Prize.’ This sought after Western

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120 However, in a typical contradiction, he also contends that, ‘even today, scratch many an Indigenous person and beneath his or her contemporary skin, or the persona he or she shows to the white world, you will still find the old hunter or gatherer.’ (p. 39)
121 Ironically, García Márquez, when he was interviewed prior to delivering his Nobel Lecture, referred to the upcoming event as a ‘great opportunity’ to ‘try and break through clichés about Latin America.’ (qu. Simons 1982, p. 7). However, despite his stated objective, García Márquez, as I have argued, in fact achieved little more than to perpetuate clichés about Latin America, which inspires Brennan’s suspicious speculations about his actual motives.
122 Fuguet is also a co-editor of the anti-magical realist Latin American literary anthology MeOnDo (eds Fuguet & Gómez 1996), the title of which, as Roman de la Campa writes, in ‘Magical realism and world literature: A genre for the times?’, ‘provides an obvious parody of [Fuguet’s and Gómez’ concerns about] the ongoing commodification of magical realism’ (1999, p. 208).
123 Ironically enough, Arenas’ The Color of Summer (El color de verano 1990), a ribald satire in which the pet sharks of “Fifo” patrol the strait of Florida and display not only a carnivorous but also a carnal taste for human flesh, arguably qualifies as a postmodern example of magical realism (a phenomenon that I describe in chapter six). As I suggest shortly, magical realist literature itself cannot be held fully accountable for the dubious press that accompanies it.
recognition, however, is achieved at the expense of perpetuating ethnocentric cultural stereotypes. Martha Bayles, who expresses similarly cynical sentiments about magical realism, in ‘Special effects, special pleading’ (1988), specifically accuses Toni Morrison of what could be described as cultural prostitution. Bayles argues that Morrison quickly ‘got the hang of magic realism’ (p. 34) and invented an ‘enchanted village called blackness’ (p. 37) after she witnessed the book-selling ‘conflagration’ that García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude ignited in Western bookstores (p. 34). However, Bayles contends that ‘this attempt by Morrison to transform black folklore into painless enchantment comes dangerously close to reviving the spirit of antebellum nostalgia, updated as a Disney cartoon full of yam-spinning “darkies” with droll names.’ (p. 38)

Paul West, in a less cynical appraisal of the agendas of writers of magical realism, suggests that marginal authors of magical realist texts feel ‘obliged’, under the pressure of public and publishers’ expectations, ‘to toe the line of magical realism’ (1985, p. 52). The responses to Mudrooroo’s fiction demonstrate the subtle pressure exerted on marginal writers to do precisely this. Mudrooroo’s realist narrative representation of a traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal character in Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World (1983), for example, was criticized as ‘a form of cultural transvestism ... running the risk of self-parody’ (Arthur 1985, p. 58). Mudrooroo, seemingly heeding the lesson, subsequently published a magical realist version of Doctor Wooreddy’s tale in Master of the Ghost Dreaming, which was, by contrast, praised as a text that ‘comes closer than any Aboriginal writing in English to date to making available for a white readership ... the connection that exists between Aboriginal myth and Aboriginal life.’ (Hosking 1992, p. 18)\(^\text{133}\) This latter magical realist novel also captured worldwide critical attention. Indeed, Mudrooroo, who has, as I have suggested, criticized Aboriginal writers who do not dwell on the ‘connection that exists between Aboriginal myth and Aboriginal life’, appears to have been so thoroughly caught in the “magical realist” Aboriginalist trap that he has become not merely its casualty but also its champion. However, even the Australian

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\(^{133}\) The novel was also read as not authentic enough: as ‘an absurd pasitche’ (Indyk 1992, p. 252) ‘formed out of elements drawn from Aboriginal legends, New Age mysticism, Australian colonial history and Hollywood space movies such as Star Wars.’ (p. 250) Nevertheless, the point is that it was treated not as a piece of fiction but as an anthropological artifact that was to be judged not for its literary merit but for its degree of cultural representativeness. For white Australia, as Philip Jones, an Anglo-Australian anthropologist at the South Australian Museum, indicatively argues, in his unlikely review of Master of the Ghost Dreaming, ‘The Dreaming disturbed’, ‘authenticity is inevitably an issue in this novel’ (1991, p. 46).

Patricia Hart, in *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende* (1989), while certainly not as cynical as other critics about the motives of writers of magical realism, expresses considerable concern about the literary genre in light of both the exoticist and the derogatory interpretations that it has inspired. While some critics have interpreted magical realism, as we have seen, in what is only an apparently complimentary way, as a representation of the magical nature of the margins, other critics have advanced the unambiguously derisive twin argument that the narrative category demonstrates the “irrational” nature of its marginal authors. David Jones, for example, in ‘Magical realism’, writes of Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* that “[t]he bizarre little fantasies come sputtering out with an inconsequential brevity, like ideas thrown up at a script conference for a Latin-American soap opera or horror film’ (1985, p. 26). Roger Kaplan, in ‘Beyond magic realism’, in what itself constitutes quite a sly trick of interpretation, argues:

> the paraphernalia of tricks going under the name of “magic realism” – the deliberate obscurities, linguistic games, and irrational narrative devices, not to speak of the arbitrary use of time and space and the introduction of fantasy … [are] a result of knowing that one’s writing is based on false premises. A novelist who feels compelled to say that Yankee imperialism is responsible for his country’s problems, and yet who knows perfectly well that this is untrue, is, understandably, going to seek refuge in stylistic games and literary cover-ups. (1984, p. 65)

As a consequence of the vulnerability of magical realism to such racist and reactionary interpretations, Hart argues that the literary genre should be rejected. She asserts that magical realism, which promotes the idea that the margins are home to ‘ignorance and superstition’, is not ‘an appropriate vehicle for chronicling

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134 Mudrooroo himself recognizes this in ‘Maban reality and shape-shifting the past: Strategies to sing the past our way’, in which, in a conspicuous “post-identity crisis” about face, he praises Morgan’s *My Place* for its ‘movement towards a maban reality.’ (1996, p. 2) However, he nevertheless complains that ‘urban Aborigines’ have tended to be critical of the authenticity of ‘maban reality’, while ‘non-Aboriginal Australian film-makers, for example Peter Weir (The Last Wave), Bruce Beresford (The Fringe Dwellers) and Henri Safran (Stormboy) … have not been averse to including elements of maban reality in their films’ (p. 3). While Mudrooroo finds this fact ‘interesting’, he fails to draw the obvious conclusions about the exoticization of Aboriginal identity, which representations of Aboriginal reality as a maban reality fundamentally entail.
the problems of Latin America, for the technique itself participates to some extent in these very problems.' (1989, p. 60) Writers of magical realism, mindful of the ethnocentric and right wing misinterpretations that the category provokes, have also expressed concern. Morrison, for example, reports that she originally objected to the magical realist label itself as ‘another one of those words that covered up what was going on ... It was a way of not talking about the politics ... a way of not talking about what was in the books’ (qu. Davis 1993, p. 414). Peter Carey, Australian author of the magical realist novel Illywhacker (1993 (1985)), is similarly skeptical about the magical realist classification. He confesses:

I liked the term magic realism when I first heard it and I always thought that this was a lovely way to describe the sort of writing one finds in Illywhacker ... Then later it became a tag that was thrown around so much that it started to get soiled. In my mind it became a sort of cheap cliche. I became wary of being labeled a magic realist. (qu. Willbanks 1991, pp. 55-6)

Carey has reason to be ‘wary’, as Illywhacker appears to have been a popularly misinterpreted casualty of the “marginal realist” assumptions that accompany the magical realist text. Illywhacker, whose narrator, Herbert Badgery, learns a disappearing trick from a persecuted Chinese migrant and quite literally packages Australia as The Best Pet Shop in the World, is a magical realist novel that exposes the mendacity of parochial representations about Australia as a land of multicultural harmony and postcolonial independence. As Carolyn Bliss argues, in ‘Time and timelessness in Peter Carey’s fiction’, Illywhacker exposes the “beautiful lies” of Australian history, which “are resold to a gullible public (both indigenes and tourists) eager for nationalist essentialism” (1995, p. 100). However, ironically infected by the nationalistic propaganda of the “magical margins”, Carey’s magical realist novel (which was short listed for the Booker Prize in 1985)135 was internationally received, as Karen Lamb suggests, in Peter Carey: The Genesis of Fame, as a ‘celebration rather than an interrogation of the Australian consciousness’ and as a collection of “tales from the bizarre frontier” (1992, p. 38). Despite Illywhacker’s sarcastic subversion of exotic views of Australian identity as mystical and eccentric (which well nigh parallel prevalent perceptions of Latin American cultural identity), Carey’s novel was ultimately reduced to its exoticist value.

Cynicism towards the literary genre of magical realism, even aside from its reactionary Carpentierian marketing myth of the “magical margins”, is

135 Interestingly, it lost to the New Zealand author Keri Hulme’s far less cynical magical realist novel The Bone People (1985).
understandable. Magical realist fiction, which is set in the margins and focuses on
the fantastic, as Rowe contends, arguably does superficially cater to the Western
‘desire for the exotic’ (1987, p. 192). As Hegerfeldt puts it,

in choosing focal characters who clearly stand outside the dominant rational-scientific order, the
texts do exploit Enlightenment constructions of the “Other” as non-rational and non-scientific
... which allow the rational-scientific “center” to exclude the “alien” (2002, p. 71).

In addition, some magical realist texts appear suspiciously pointless and even
derivative. According to Hegerfeldt, ‘there are examples ... where the devices
seem flat and mechanical and merely tributes to a literary convention’ and which
are particularly vulnerable to the accusation that they ‘pander to the reader’s taste
for the exotic’. (p. 64) Bainard Cowan, in ‘A necessary confusion: Magical
realism’, similarly talks about the existence of a “counterfeited” magical realism
offered in the name of exoticism’ (2002, p. 8). However, the accusation that
magical realism caters to the Western penchant for ‘cultural tourism’ (Rowe 1987,
p. 192) at the expense of marginal politics is more appropriate to and was
undoubtedly primarily influenced by the ubiquitous and iniquitous myth that
magical realism is a “marginal realism”, which has become almost synonymous
with the literary genre. Similarly, the denigration of magical realism as a racist
cliché is also primarily attributable to the racist and clichéd promotion of magical
realism as a “marginal realism.” Indeed, the myth of the “magical margins”, with
its commercial popularity, has probably inspired the influx of inferior derivative
magical realist texts that these critics lament. For while the authors of magical
realist fiction promote the idea that magical realism constitutes a “marginal
realism”, thereby arguably meriting accusations that they produce formulaic
literary commodities tailored for Western xenophiles and detrimental to marginal
identity, magical realist literature itself does not bear out their contentions. In fact,
contrary to Arenas’ cynical interpretation, its ‘dominant theme’ is to challenge
conventional perceptions rather than to indulge Western fantasies. Magical realist
fiction, as Kaplan avers, may result from the knowledge that ‘writing is based upon
false premises’, but the writing it questions is that of the ‘Yankee’ styled
hegemonic centers that he defends. Clearly, the myth that magical realism is a
“marginal realism”, for a veritable multitude of reasons, needs to be dispensed
with.
CHAPTER SIX
You Can’t Judge a Book by its Propaganda:
Reading (and Revealing the Real Nature of) Magical Realist Literature

The characterization of magical realism as a “marginal realism” is not only inherently inauthentic and ideologically dubious but also generically misrepresentative. While magical realism does appear to be endemic to the world’s fringes and to attempt to convey something of the reality of those appointed peripheries, the nature of the indubitable link between magical realism and the margins is equally indubitably not of the mimetic kind that proponents of the Carpentierian “magical margins” premise controversially envision. Magical realist texts simply do not support the spurious conclusion that they provide organic reflections of subaltern wonders. Contrary to the primary tenets of the Carpentierian argument, the supernatural events that magical realist texts convey rarely correlate to the “superstitious” beliefs of underdeveloped (or, indeed, developed) societies or the “strange” topographies, architecture or (at least in any literal way) histories of subaltern realms. In addition, the marvelous occurrences that magical realist texts represent are often narrated with a self-consciously ironic or even blatantly comical tone rather than an unselfconsciously faithfulness or guileless verisimilitude. Indeed, the entire narrative strategy of magical realist fiction, which involves the representation of the unreal, perceived precisely as such, as though it is real, is almost paradigmatically ironic. Through this arbiter of irony, magical realist texts encourage a non-literal interpretation of, rather than a verbatim approach to, the extraordinary episodes that they ostensibly depict as ordinary. In fact, magical realist novels typically invite a metaphorical reading of their realistically narrated fantastical episodes, which usually involves, perhaps not surprisingly, given the connection of magical realism with the politically marginal and offering a much more reasonable explanation for that conjunction, a marginalist political message. Indeed, the raison d’être of the magical realist narrative procedure is, rather than the re-creation of some fantastical liminal worldview, the subversion of dubious hegemonic perspectives. Its trademark depiction of the magical as real involves less the establishment of a “marginal realism” than the sabotage of the central and centrist genre of realism and less a vindication of “marginal magic” than a subversion of a central and centrist version
of the real. Magical realist texts may also attempt to revive realism in order to
defend marginal historical truth. However, magical realism is an inherently
deconstructive narrative form, which inexorably undermines the very possibility of
realism and radically underlines the essential absence of reality. Ultimately, the
Carpenterian "marginal realist" characterization of magical realism "self-
deconstructs" on a textual basis as irrevocably and effectively as it does on
ideological grounds.

Relationship Counseling:

Advice on the Rocky Marriage of Magical Realism and the Margins

Magical realism, as David Punter writes, in ‘Essential imaginings: The novels of
Angela Carter and Russel Hoban’, in both popular culture and academic parlance,
at least in its literary context, tends to carry a ‘Third-World connotation’ (1991, p.
142). The widespread affiliation of the magical realist narrative genre with the
world’s margins is not essentially mistaken. However, the prevailing inclination to
culturally limit the fiction category to the Third World, which Punter identifies and
about which he duly expresses considerable skepticism, is fundamentally
questionable. In fact, the exclusive restriction of magical realism to the Third
World demonstrates a suspiciously myopic vision and appears to be guided by
ethnocentric assumptions rather than any objective analysis of actual incidences of
the literary form.

While writers from the Third World certainly produce magical realist texts,
authors from political margins in the First World, such as the British feminist
author Angela Carter, to whom Punter refers, also compose magical realist fiction.
Carter’s Nights at the Circus (1984), which features a winged Cockney woman
named Fevvers, who exploits her supernatural charms to survive in male
dominated and mercantile nineteenth century Europe, constitutes an example.
However, according to Stephen Slemon, in ‘Magic realism as post-colonial
discourse’, an association with ‘the Third World’ constitutes ‘a condition long
thought necessary to the currency of the term’ (1995, p. 407), and ‘critics ... have
been singularly uninterested in applying the concept of magic realism to texts
written in English’ (p. 408) (at least in the imperialist hubs.) D’haen, in ‘Magic
realism and postmodernism: Decentering privileged centers’ (1995), similarly
contends that the magical realist novels of First World authors are rarely attributed
the exotic appellation of magical realism. They are, he avers, much more commonly ascribed the ostensibly more cosmopolitan designation of postmodern (p. 200). The postmodern rubric, in a curiously diametrical way to the magical realist label, as D’haen suggests, is ‘primarily’ employed ‘with reference to ... U.S. prose fiction’ (p. 193) and generally monopolized by the First World. This is despite the fact that writers outside of the West also have produced postmodern literature. The Cuban author Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s literally iconoclastic and linguistically obsessed Three Trapped Tigers (Tres tristes tigres 1965) provides an example.

Magical realist fiction, as I have argued, is an ultimately distinct narrative category, which can be identified by its incorporation of the magical into the framework of realism. Postmodernism, like magical realism, is a hotly disputed and an often seemingly all-encompassing classification, at least as it is evoked in reference to contemporary Western cultural production. However, postmodern literature, as exemplified by Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 (1967) and Italo Calvino’s If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller (1981), does not necessarily entail the representation of the fantastic nor follow the traditional trajectory of a realist narrative. It is arguably more typically characterized by arcane or unconventionally configured and superficial or metafictional plots, which contrive to destabilize the customary narrative and ontological ground of the reader and, as Breton once wrote of the objective of Surrealism, ‘to show on what shifting foundations, what caverns, [we] have built [our] trembling houses’ (1978, p. 317).

Jean-Francois Lyotard, in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, defines the postmodern as ‘that which searches for new presentations ... in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.’ (1984, p. 81) If the supernatural does happen to make a cameo appearance in the postmodern text, given the postmodern text’s disturbing break with literary precedent, it is hardly surprising, unlike the extraordinary in magical realism, which is conspicuously incongruous in that quite conservative realist setting. However, a borderline or hybrid form, which depicts the magical as real in a firmly anchored realist context but also otherwise manifests a generally unorthodox narrative style, also exists. An example is Milan Kundera’s The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (1996 (1978)), a self-reflective and self-reflexive novel set in communist Czechoslovakia, which relates a number of discrete non-fantastical and fantastical scenarios with an even passivity. While the former focus on characters’ superficial sexual encounters, the
latter feature the levitation of a circle of ecstatic and amnesiac party faithful as well as the imprisonment on an island of children of a somber and nostalgic dissident and expatriate named Tamina. Valenzuela’s *The Lizard’s Tale*, which presents the macabre extravagances of the so-called Sorcerer of Peronist Argentina in a similarly metafictional and irregular narrative, also qualifies.

As these postmodern magical realist novels demonstrate, while magical realist writing and postmodern fiction are usually distinguishable, the two ultimately converge and can occasionally generically merge because they share what I have referred to as a deconstructive nature, which evidences an analogous ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv) and the “metaréalités” they portray. In other words, both magical realist literature and postmodern literature characteristically call attention to the fictionality of realism and of the reality it represents. However, magical realist texts, including those of the postmodern variety, unlike postmodern novels, which Brian McHale, in ‘Telling postmodernist stories’, describes as ‘stories about theory’ (1988, p. 545), are not merely the literary apotheoses of poststructuralist linguistic and ontological skepticism. Indeed, magical realism’s doubts about realist discourses and their depicted worlds, as I have argued and as Slemen similarly suggests, are less the ‘cognitive legacies’ of poststructuralist philosophies than of ‘colonialist’ or otherwise politically centrist misrepresentations (1995, p. 421). Toni Morrison specifically contends: ‘black women had to deal with “post-modern” problems in the nineteenth century and earlier. These things had to be addressed by black people a long time ago. Certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of ... certain kinds of stability’ (qu. Ferguson 1991, p. 110). Consequently, José David Saldívar contends, in *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*, that the ‘deconstruction’ of realism and reality that magical realist literature enacts, unlike the comparable deconstruction that postmodern fiction carries out, ‘is not an abstract, formalist issue, but a concrete dialectical project.’ (1991a, p. 42) Magical realism, by contrast to postmodernism, undermines realism and the reality it authorizes from a politically grounded rather than an ahistorical point of view. In addition, magical realist texts, unlike postmodern novels, as we have seen, evidence not only a deconstructive but also something of a reconstructive agenda. In the words of Irvine, who invokes the ideas of the U.S. postmodern writer and critic John Barth, magical realism is simultaneously and paradoxically a ‘Literature of Exhaustion’ and a ‘Literature of
Replenishment." (1998, p. 66) Even as magical realist fiction subverts the old realist lie and its lies about reality, it concurrently and contradictorily attempts to revive realism in order to reassert truth. Writers of magical realism, as Castillo avers of Latin American authors in general, 'not only ... reveal the ways in which rhetorical concerns discursively construct reality' but, having 'recognized as one of their prime responsibilities the obligation to commit themselves to the "mad" struggle over the history of meanings', also try to 'intervene into and counter these processes of reality-construction.' (1993, p. 613) Thus, while postmodern texts typically capriciously revel in poststructuralist nihilism, for magical realist literature, deconstruction is not only a politically necessary exercise but also a fundamentally problematic one. As Patricia Tobin indicates, in 'The autumn of the signifier: The deconstructionist moment of García Márquez', to 'conceive the truth as skepticism' and to 'accept a ground that shifts beneath our stable foundations', ideas that postmodern fiction whimsically embraces, is a difficult 'challenge' for magical realism (1989, p. 215). Indeed, García Márquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude, as we have seen and as Irvine suggests, is unable to resolve the 'crisis of representation' it 'stages', 'in which the double discourse' of what Irvine describes as 'postmodernist and postcolonialist narratives' but what I prefer to call deconstructive and reconstructive impulses 'acts out its contestations and contradictions.' (1998, p. 76) That famous magical realist text, as Edwin Williamson notes, in 'Magical realism and the theme of incest in One Hundred Years of Solitude', ends with 'the Buendía's degeneration and ... Macondo's destruction' (1987, p. 46), as they sink into 'incestuous self-reference' (p. 60). In fact, Williamson suggests that the novel is ultimately 'condemned ... to magic realism' (p. 61). While I earlier implied that Mudrooroo's similarly construed confession perhaps acknowledges the pressure of public and publishing expectations, it may also refer, as Williamson's argument intimates, to the inexorable weight of the poststructuralist dilemma in which writers such as García Márquez and Mudrooroo finds themselves in the aftermath of colonialist misrepresentation and which effectively 'condemns' them to the "self-deconstructive" magical realist narrative strategy. Magical realist literature has been effectively forced, as Rosemary Jackson writes, in Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion, of a comparable phenomenon she calls the 'modern fantastic', to draw 'attention to its own practice as a linguistic system' by a 'reluctance, an inability, to present definitive versions of "truth" or "reality"' (1981, p. 37).
D'haen, in recognition of both the poststructuralist compatibility of magical realist literature and postmodern fiction but also the "political repercussions or implications" that distinguish magical realist narrative's deconstructive impetus, calls magical realism 'the cutting edge of postmodernism' (1995, p. 201). However, D'haen also argues that, whereas the deconstructive elements (not to mention the closely related political programs) of magical realist texts are rarely examined, postmodern literature, by contrast, 'primarily stands for a combination of those technically innovative qualities most highly regarded by contemporary critical movements such as poststructuralism' (p. 192).

Some critics, D'haen concedes, have begun to recognize that magical realist novels achieve 'their ... program by way of the very same techniques usually singled out as marking postmodernism' (p. 194). However,

in international critical parlance a consensus is emerging in which a hierarchical relation is established between postmodernism and magic realism, whereby the latter comes to denote a particular strain of the contemporary movement covered by the former.

Indeed, D'haen himself, who views magical realism as the politically challenging avant-garde of the apparently greater postmodern movement, complies with this idea. Rodriguez Monegal, however, almost certainly would disagree with this allegedly global academic accord, which interprets the "Third World" magical realist narrative genre as derivative of and subordinate to the more 'technically innovative' "First World" postmodern phenomenon. In 'Borges and Derrida: Apothecaries', he suggests that he was first exposed to the poststructuralist linguistic and ontological notions, which are viewed as definitive of postmodernism, in the inaugural magical realist fiction of Borges and was subsequently underwhelmed when he encountered them again in the seminal poststructuralist theoretical texts of Derrida, which supposedly originally elucidate the conceptual underpinnings of the controversial pyrotechnics of postmodern writing (1990, p. 128). Indeed, as D'haen points out, while the postmodern classification may have originally 'gained acceptance' in the U.S.A., a Latin American literary commentator, Federico de Onís, in his 1934 publication Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana ("Anthology of Spanish and Hispano-American Poetry"), actually invented the label (1995, p. 193). However, the hierarchical arrangement of postmodernism and magical realism, contrary to D'haen's characterization of it as a universal doctrine, is undoubtedly a Western innovation. The U.S. critic Lori Chamberlain is one subscriber to this identifiably Western academic pact, which recognizes the poststructuralist links between
magical realism and postmodernism but nevertheless privileges the latter, which is perceived as an overarching, purportedly universal but nevertheless clearly Western based movement. Chamberlain, in ‘Magicking the real: Paradoxes of postmodern writing’, initially playing the role of the devil’s advocate, argues that, ‘while it would be easy to chronicle the influence of ... Borges’ on U.S. postmodern novelists, such as Donald Barthelme, Barth and Robert Coover, ‘it would be wrong to imply thereby that magic realism ... was imported to the United States in translation’, as magical realism is merely a ‘part of the larger context of postmodernism’ (1986, p. 9).136 Chamberlain’s discomfort with the idea that the U.S.A. could have ‘imported’ anything other than bananas from Latin America is patent. Indeed, in a decidedly atypical academic argument, she even disputes Latin America’s globally certified leading role in magical realism. Relying on an extremely spurious definition of magical realist narrative, she contends that, ‘[f]or writers in the United States, there is an indigenous tradition for magic realism beginning at least with the gothic tales of Poe and the romances of Hawthorne’ (p. 9). She also points out that William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway inspired the Latin American pioneers of magical realist fiction (p. 10).

However, most Western critics, unlike Chamberlain, regardless of their sporadic recognition of the poststructuralist correspondences between magical realism and postmodernism and despite the presence of actual examples of magical realism within and postmodernism without their cultural boundaries, have not only jealously guarded the postmodern concept as their own but also reinforced the affiliation of magical realism with the Third World. According to D’haen, Western critics, particularly in the U.S.A., have well nigh syndicated the postmodern cognomen, while they have concurrently remained ‘most resistant to applying the term magic realism to [their] own literary products’ (1995, p. 200). D’haen argues that the First World has monopolized the postmodern label, with its allusions to cyber modernity and connections with poststructuralist linguistics, because it ‘emphasizes to an almost extravagant degree the technical side of its literary achievements’ (p. 201). By contrast, the exotic magical realist oxymoron, which the West ‘stubbornly’ and strategically preserves for the Third World,

136 As Rodriguez Monegal and Chamberlain suggest, the incipient magical realist texts of Borges often can appear to be more aligned with postmodernism than magical realism. While Borges undoubtedly pioneered the inherently deconstructive magical realist narrative strategy of representing the magical in the framework of realism, his magical realist literature typically manifests an obsession with linguistic and ontological uncertainties at the expense of historical or political concerns, which allies it with postmodernism.
inordinately underplays the ‘technical’ features and, thus, the intimately related political points of non-Western narrative feats.

In other words, the intrinsic association of magical realism with the Third World ultimately derives from and endorses the Carpentierian misconceptualization of the narrative genre as a naive realism of the “primitive” margins. Indeed, it essentially exposes the West’s propensity to treat Third World texts, in general, as anthropological artifacts rather than intellectual accomplishments, a status that it reserves for its own fiction. Chris Berry, in ‘Dead or alive: Reflections on translating non-Western literature’, comments on the prevalent ‘assumption’ by Western audiences that ‘non-Western literature is part of informing us about the other, about “them over there”’ (1995, p. 4). When Western audiences read European novels, such as ‘Patrick Suskind’s Perfume, Peter Hoeg’s Miss Smilla’s Feeling For Snow or Umberto Eco’s The Name of the Rose’, they interpret them in literary terms, for example, ‘as detective novels’, ‘and not as keys to Germanness, or Danishness, or Italianness.’ (p. 5) However, when First World audiences read Third World texts, they interpret them in anthropological terms as ‘keys’ to Third World-ness. Morrison, who may not be of the Third World per se but who is a member of the obviously black and underprivileged Afro-American community, similarly identifies a Western academic inclination to interpret her work in a circumscribed anthropological way. She claims: ‘[c]ritics generally don’t associate black people with ideas. They see marginal people: they just see another story about black folks. They regard the whole thing as sociologically interesting perhaps but very parochial.’ (qu. ed. Tate 1985, p. 121). Indeed, the supposedly Third World genre of magical realism, as we have seen, has been a particular casualty of such readings. The Indian born Rushdie, for example, alleges that readers of his magical realist Midnight’s Children tend to interpret it as a ‘guidebook ... judging the book not as a novel, but as some sort of ... reference book or encyclopaedia’ of the Indian subcontinent (1991, p. 25). However, Morrison, who has made various essentialist generalizations about Afro-American cultural identity in reference to her magical realist fiction, and Rushdie, who has described magical realism as the literary manifestation of a uniquely Third World outlook, are arguably not entirely innocent victims of the ‘sociological’ or ‘parochial’ interpretations they begrudge. Brennan similarly refers to the proclivity of Western audiences to view Third World novels, such as García Márquez’ archetypal magical realist text, One Hundred Years of Solitude, as
cultural curios, supported by, as Brennan also acknowledges, none other than García Márquez himself. García Márquez' fiction, Brennan suggests, 'is their news.' (1989, p. 67)

The idea that magical realism is a solely Third World genre, which is motivated by dubious notions about both the narrative category and the Third World, certainly needs to be dispensed with. However, magical realism does appear to be well nigh endemic to the world's margins. Magical realist fiction evolved within a postcolonial environment in Latin America and continues to emerge primarily from marginal groups. These include, perhaps most predominantly, former colonially administered regions in both the Third and the First Worlds. Okri, for example, was born in the former British colony of Nigeria, Rushdie in that of India, Hodgins in that of Canada, and Mudrooroo and Winton in that of Australia. Indeed, India, Canada and Australia appear to have experienced publishing "mini-Booms" in magical realist writing that are reminiscent of the original publishing "Boom" in magical realist fiction in the Latin American industry, which followed the release of García Márquez' phenomenally successful One Hundred Years of Solitude. From India, Rushdie's Booker Prize winning Midnight's Children was followed by Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning The God of Small Things (1997), whose narrator, Rahel, witnesses both magical visions and cover ups of caste based and sexist violence. In Canada, Hodgins' The Invention of the World (1977) was succeeded by Robert Kroetsch's What the Crow Said (1978), which portrays the supernatural meteorological and reproductive phenomena that the isolated frontier community of Big Indian experience after their local newswriter, Vera Lang, is impregnated by a swarm of bees. Indeed, Canadian critics even dedicated a 1986 conference to Canadian magical realist fiction. Two anthologies of Canadian magical realist writing, Magic Realism (1980), edited by Geoff Hancock, and Magic Realism and Canadian Literature: Essays and Stories (1986), edited by Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski, successors to earlier Latin American compendiums, such as Edwin Dale Carter's Antología del realismo mágico: Ocho cuentos hispanoamericanos (1970; "Anthology of Magical Realism: Eight Hispano-American Stories"), have also been published. Canadian critics, unlike U.S. or European academics but very much like their counterparts south of the great U.S. divide, appear to have embraced the exotic magical realist binomial (although Canada also has an equal number of literary critics, such as Linda Hutcheon, who prefer the more urbane postmodern tag.) Indeed, even Latin
American literary commentators themselves, as Camayd-Freixas ironically puts it, have grudgingly agreed to share their ‘cherished’ magical realist title, ‘benchmark of our alterity’, with their Canadian peers (1996, p. 582). However, Canadian critics, similarly to their Latin American colleagues, have been perhaps too enthusiastic and certainly rather inexact in their espousal of the classification. Hancock as well as Hinchcliffe and Jewinski, for example, like Carter before them, feature numerous stories in their anthologies that do not qualify as magical realist fiction, at least according to the definition that I have defended, and that suggest they have been distracted by the origins of the magical realist label in the European art world. Carter, in the introduction to his compendium, defines the magical realist narrative genre as both ‘the combination of reality and fantasy’\textsuperscript{137} and ‘the transformation of the real into the unreal’.\textsuperscript{138} Similarly, Hancock, in the preface to his publication, referring to the work of the Surrealist René Magritte and de Chirico (ed. 1980, p. 9), characterizes magical realist literature as both the representation of ‘abnormal events’ as ‘normal’ (p. 10) and the scrutiny of the familiar until it becomes ‘strange’. Hinchcliffe and Jewinski are hesitant to offer a definition for magical realism in the preamble to their anthology, but they include critical essays on not only magical realist writing but also magical realist painting and stories that reflect their evidently hybrid view of the magical realist category. Australia has emerged as another voluminous producer of magical realist fiction, although Australian literary critics, as the absence of Australian anthologies dedicated to the genre perhaps suggests, have not been as eager as their Canadian colleagues to adopt the magical realist label (its primitivist ideological overtones perhaps proving off-putting to our nation of erstwhile white supremacists and staunch U.S. acolytes.).\textsuperscript{139} Australian writers of magical realism, as I have suggested, include Aborigines, such as Mudrooroo, as well as Anglo-Australians, such as Carey and Winton.

However, authors who find themselves positioned outside of the hegemonic center in alternative ways, which are not defined by a postcolonial status, also practice magical realist narrative. These include cultural minorities, women and homosexuals. Morrison, for example, may be a citizen of the neo-imperialist global autocrat, the U.S.A, but she writes from a doubly marginalized position as a

\textsuperscript{137} ‘la combinación de la realidad y la fantasía’ (ed. 1970, p. xii).
\textsuperscript{138} ‘la transformación de lo real en lo irreal’.
\textsuperscript{139} Veronica Brady, in Caught in the Draught, comments that ‘[m]ore than most, Australian culture is profoundly ethnocentric and logocentric.’ (1994, p. 40)
member of the minority Afro-American community and as a woman in a patriarchal society. Carter may have resided in the traditional colonial axis, the U.K., but she wrote as a woman in that man made empire. Fellow British author Jeanette Winterson, whose magical realist novel Sexing the Cherry (1990 (1989)) relates the hyperbolic adventures of the gargantuan Dog Woman in seventeenth century London, writes from a doubly marginalized site as a woman within a resiliently sexist culture and as a lesbian within a principally heterosexual world. Virginia Woolf, British writer of the singularly precipitate and rarely acknowledged magical realist novella Orlando (1995 (1927)), whose eponymous hero seamlessly changes gender throughout her unusually prolonged life from the sixteenth century through to the twentieth, similarly wrote from a famously feminist and reputedly bisexual perspective.

Indeed, if anthologies are a measure of popularity, magical realism appears to be as widespread among women and homosexual writers as it is among Latin American and Canadian authors. Tales of Magic Realism by Women: Dreams in a Minor Key (1991), edited by Susanna Sturgis, and Things Invisible to See: Gay and Lesbian Tales of Magic Realism (1998), edited by Lawrence Schimel, appear to attest to this predominance. However, the definitions of the literary category that guide anthologies of magical realism are consistently lax. The compilations of Sturgis and Schimel, who confuse magical realism with fantasy and science fiction (ed. Sturgis 1991, p. 3 & ed. Schimel 1998, p. 3), are no exception. Consequently, such compendiums fail to provide a reliable indicator of popularity. The anthologies of Carter, Hancock and Hinchcliffe and Jewinski, for instance, arguably attest not to the prevalence of magical realism among Latin American or Canadian writers but to the prevailing pictorial inspired confusion about the narrative category, which happens to be burdened by a name that is a palimpsest. Likewise, the publications of Sturgis and Schimel ultimately demonstrate only their theoretical naivete about magical realism as well as the increasing tendency among the speculative fiction community to annex the magical realist label, which sounds, albeit with decidedly mixed fortunes, alluringly fantastical. However, the dubiously vague anthologies dedicated to Latin American, female and homosexual magical realist writing, in particular, also arguably provide a testament to the

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140 In fact, most of the fiction in their anthologies would fall under the subset of fantasy known as the uncanny. Indeed, most of the stories in the other magical realist anthologies, to which I have referred and which are characterized by a confusion of magical realist literature with magical realist
pervasiveness of dubious time worn stereotypes about Latin Americans, women and homosexuals, who have been condemned, with very little happenstance or fortune, as irrational, fantastically minded and "queer". Like Latin American authors, some women and homosexual writers, as these publications suggest, appear to have embraced this imposed identity in what they obviously believe constitutes a politically effective self-realizing or oppositional strategy. The espousal by women of the historically male decreed quality of "feminine mystique" as a feminist statement appears to be something of a current trend. Allende, Valenzuela and Morrison all have made dubious statements linking magical realist literature with a mystical female identity. Allende, for example, describes the female narrators of The House of the Spirits as 'the voice of emotion, the voice of the subjective, the voice of the most human, the voice of the soul, that is telling the underlying story, not the story everyone can see.' (qu. García Pinto 1988, pp. 30-1) Esteban Trueba, by contrast, 'speaks of life and the world, and he tells the story from an intellectual, rational point of view'. Allende, who explains her magical realist narrative technique with reference to the paranormally empowered female members of her family, with well nigh all of whom she claims to communicate telepathically (Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 20), claims that, in her famous magical realist novel, 'I express a feminine point of view about life.' (qu. García Pinto 1988, p. 31) Morrison similarly asserts that she writes not just for black people but specifically 'for black women' (qu. Russell 1988, p. 46) and suggests that the "haints" and superstitions that inspire her magical realist novels derive from not only black people, in general, but black women and their so-called wives' tales, in particular (qu. McKay 1993, p. 410). Valenzuela, in Two Foreign

art, also manifest similarities to the narrative subcategory of the uncanny, which can be defined, like magical realist painting, by its effect of defamiliarization.

141 Hancock, in the introduction to his anthology of Canadian magical realist fiction, attempts to promote a similar "magical margins" myth about Canada. He writes: 'Canada is a strange place and much of its geography has such remote corners that anything is possible.' (cd. 1980, p. 10) In an essay included in Hinchcliffe's and Lewinski's compendium, he argues: '[a]s a western Canadian ... I experienced the improbable on a daily basis. You might expect logging, fishing, mining, but you would be amazed by the magic, myth and metaphor in the midst of such everyday occurrence.' (1986, p. 30) He asserts: '[t]here was no difference between the Colombia of Gabriel García Márquez and the British Columbia of my own experience.' (p. 32)

142 In Western culture, this fashion manifests itself in the contemporary resurgence of Wicca or modern day witchcraft, for example, which presents itself as not only a quintessentially female but also a feminist religion. Commercial television also screens a number of serial programs that feature witchcraft, such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Charmed, which similarly offer themselves, in contrast to their past counterparts, Bewitched and I Dream of Jeannie, as vehicles of feminist ideology. However, the fact that the powers of witches are literally magical hardly constitutes an encouraging statement about the female capacity for genuine empowerment. Gay culture has similarly embraced its appointed identity as "queer".
*Women* (Hong Kingston & Valenzuela 1990), comparably proposes that female authors have a more natural access than men to the unconscious and are guided by this irrational force in their writing. She argues: 'we don't believe in having something to say; we believe something will be said through us.' (p. 43) However, the essentialist embrace of the sexist stereotype of the irrational female, like the analogous Latin American adoption of the Western cliché of the illogical Latino, is ultimately misguided. Truc to a strategic masculinist paradigm, it justifies male hegemony and satisfies male fantasies about the exotic female "other".

Contrary to popular perceptions, European, male and heterosexual authors have also written magical realist literature. However, these seemingly mainstream writers nevertheless likewise consistently occupy marginal positions in or against a hegemonic system. They include dissident authors from the so-called Second World, who find themselves not only on the peripheries of that self-proclaimed global axis, the capitalist First World, but also and, perhaps, more so, on the outer with authoritarian communist regimes. Kundera, for example, hails from Czechoslovakia, which was subordinated by the Soviet Union in 1968. In comparison, Günter Grass, author of the precocious magical realist novel *The Tin Drum* (1970 (1959)), whose narrator Oskar Matzerath displays a remarkable memory and an incredible glass shattering voice in his distorted history of a world distorted by Nazi atrocities, was born in Poland and lived in Germany during Hitler's rise and reign. However, the magical realist texts of Kundera and Grass are usually classified as postmodern and political novels (a characterization that such critics of postmodernism as Jameson, who famously condemns the phenomenon, in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), as little more than reactionary artifice, undoubtedly would view as a contradiction) and interpreted in terms of their poststructuralist characteristics and political content. This certainly makes cynicism about the academic application of the magical realist and postmodern denominations difficult to resist. Kundera and Grass are European heterosexual men, rather than "primitives", women or homosexuals, and thus write complex postmodern literature, rather than merely anthropologically interesting magical realist narrative artifacts. They also write in opposition to sworn enemies of the capitalist West, namely, the communist Second

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143 Ji Ji, in ‘Beyond transient applause’ (1991), argues that Taiwanese authors, similarly marginalized by the twin powers of the capitalist West and communist China, also have turned to magical realist fiction. However, Ji Ji's definition of magical realism is somewhat inexact.
World and Hitler’s Nazi Germany, rather than against any Western tyranny or oppressive Western status quo.

Despite the often questionable ideological conclusions that have been drawn from the observable alliance between magical realism and the world’s margins, an association with the subaltern nevertheless appears to be an essential characteristic of the narrative category. D’haen argues: ‘[i]t is precisely the notion of the excentric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place other than “the” or “a center”, that seems to me an essential feature of … magic realism’ (1995, p. 194). ‘There is’, as Delbaere concurs, ‘a broad critical consensus on this question’ (1992, p. 98). In addition, while magical realism is not some inexorably muddled version of what passes for ‘news’ in the margins, as Brennan suggests Western readers tend to assume, the idea that the literary genre is not only ‘speaking from the margin’, as D’haen puts it, but also speaking about that margin is not entirely false.

As I suggested earlier, magical realism, despite its representation of the fantastic, entails neither a complete repudiation of the narrative techniques nor a categorical renunciation of the mimetic claims of the realist genre. Magical realist novels, much like realist texts, are firmly anchored to an extra-textual reality, which they, according to quite traditional methods of and equally conventional asseverations of verisimilitude, attempt to represent. Magical realist texts, as Parkinson Zamora claims, in ‘Magical romance/Magical realism: Ghosts in U.S. and Latin American fiction’, utilizing the strategies of and echoing the affirmations of ‘narrative realism’, ‘aim to present a credible version of experienced reality’ (1995, p. 500). Robert Rawdon Wilson, in ‘The metamorphoses of fictional space: Magical realism’, similarly suggests that magical realist novels employ customary realist techniques, such as ‘geographical enrootedness’ (1995, p. 233). Their cultural and, particularly, historical ‘enrootedness’, as I argue shortly, are even more significant. ‘Typically’, Rawdon Wilson avers: ‘a magical realist fictional world asserts its connection to an extratextual world (...) and may even, in the manner of canonical realism, seem to create a fenestral translucency through which reality flickers’ (p. 220). In fact, magical realist literature demands a conservative realist correlation between the magical realist textual world and the extra-textual marginal reality that ‘flickers’ in its ostensibly verisimilar narrative window as an interpretive maneuver that is crucial to an appreciation of its famously incongruous narrative effect as well as its decidedly less familiar subversive ideological program.
To begin with, a realist comparison between the textual and the extra-textual is fundamentally necessary in order to facilitate recognition of the unequivocally textual or fantastical episodes that distinguish magical realist writing. As Williamson suggests, the magical realist novel is ‘predicated upon a dialectic that opposes the experiences of the world inside the fiction to that which lies outside it’ in order to foster the ‘sense of difference’ between the evidently textual or extraordinary and the apparently extra-textual or ordinary that is of patently axiomatic importance to the magical realist genre (1987, p. 47). ‘Obviously’, as Chanady puts it, ‘if the supernatural is not recognized as such, there can be no magical realism’ (1985, p. 22). A traditional realist correlative reading of the textual against the extra-textual is also essential to enable a grasp of the agenda that inspires the peculiar magical realist presentation of the ostentatiously textual or unreal as and alongside the ostensibly extra-textual or real. Ironically, as I have argued, that purpose is to undermine both the tradition of realism, which it exposes as a beguiling narrative device, rather than an ingenuous mirror reflection, and the extra-textuality of the reality it depicts, which it reveals as a textual illusion, rather than a transcendental truth. In other words, magical realist literature, in a paradoxical “self-deconstructive” strategy, evokes what Rawdon Wilson calls the ‘fenestral translucency’ of realism principally in order to challenge its purported transparency and conjures the ‘extra-textual world’ primarily in order to subvert its self-evident objectivity. Nevertheless, a conventional realist relationship of the textual world of magical realist fiction with the extra-textual marginal reality it evidently portrays remains crucial in order to additionally identify the tangible foci of its deconstructive impetus. The deconstructive charge of the magical realist narrative strategy, as I suggested in my discussions of the magical realism of Borges, Carpentier, Asturias and García Márquez, is often used to detonate quite specific official realist versions of that highly relative and malleable phenomenon called reality. However, as David Gallagher claims, in Modern Latin American Literature, magical realist fiction is not only ‘engaged in an attempt to escape authoritarian lies’ but also ‘to seek out the truth concealed by them.’ (1973, p. 89). Magical realist texts simultaneously and contrdictorily attempt to use realism to vindicate the reality of a particular situation.\footnote{Borges' magical realist literature is a notable exception.}

Western audiences demonstrate an overwhelming proclivity to interpret the fantastical features of magical realist texts in a realist manner. This is despite the
fact that First World readers, as Durix points out, are often completely 'ignorant' of the extra-textual 'reference', particularly when it comes to magical realist literature from Third World countries, and distinctly unqualified to 'judge' their 'mimetic quality' (1998, p. 57). Such ignorance may not prevent Western audiences from interpreting the magic in magical realist fiction as real. In fact, it only helps them to do so. However, it may hinder them from discerning the political agenda that lies behind its naturalistic depiction of the supernatural.

While I have argued against the intrinsic association of magical realism with marginal cultures, '[p]ropinquity is nevertheless, as Parkinson Zamora and Faris contend, 'a central structuring principle of magical realist narration' (1995, p. 1). The evident intimacy between magical realist texts and the marginal realities they portray may arguably provide fodder for the folly of Carpentierian "marginal realist" characterizations of the literary category. However, magical realist narratives, with their peculiar contiguity to marginal cultures, demand a marginally specific realist interpretation in order to expedite comprehension and, thus, prevent Carpentierian exoticist "marginal realist" speculation.

A number of other critics, aside from Parkinson Zamora and Faris, have acknowledged the imperative of the magical realist literary genre for a marginally specific realist reading. Martin, for example, in 'On "magical" and social realism in García Márquez', asserts that the paradigmatic magical realist text One Hundred Years of Solitude contains a 'variety of carefully encoded material relating to' the real world of Latin America (1987, p. 101). Its meaning is consequently more accessible '[t]o those who know Latin America' than 'to those who do not know the continent [sic]', for whom 'the novel is more abstract' (p. 102). A recognition that the covered up government massacre of striking banana plantation workers, which constitutes a pivotal episode in the novel, is a genuine occurrence in Colombian history, for instance, definitely facilitates an appreciation of the significance of the fantastical assumption of Remedios prior to and the supernatural submersion of Macondo in the aftermath of that corruption of reality. Without such insight, these incidents may very well be susceptible to an exoticist Carpentierian rendition that explains them as manifestations of the inherently marvelous nature of the Latin American environment (or the innately irrational character of the Latin American author.) Martin makes a similar point about Asturias' Men of Maize in his copiously annotated version of that magical realist classic, in which he suggests that 'a familiarity with native American texts is
essential for a full understanding of Asturias’s "indigenist" fiction (in Asturias 1993, p. 336). Asturias’ pioneering “indigenist” magical realist novel, as we have seen, draws upon local myths to make its point about the partisan nature of realism and its biased constructions of reality. Indeed, Gordon Brotherston, in ‘The Latin American novel and its indigenous sources’ (1987), engages in an exclusive provincial myth reading of such myth laden magical realist texts as Asturias’. However, considering that the “indigenist” magical realist literature of Asturias and of other writers tends to manifest a specious lack of indigenerality and authenticity, a myth reading, while not completely inappropriate, is hardly entirely valid. In addition, the sole explanation of magical realism in terms of the mythological tenets of indigenous societies can encourage a Carpentierian falsification of the narrative genre as an organic expression of the mythically minded. It also leaves magical realist fiction vulnerable to the type of damning conclusions at which Michael Valdez Moses arrives. According to Valdez Moses, in ‘Magical realism at world’s end’, magical realism, which he defines as the offspring of the coupling of ‘local or native narrative traditions’ (2001 p. 111) with ‘the European realistic novel’ (p. 110), is little more than a ‘skillfully marketed tour of a dead or dying culture’ (p. 119), opportunistically tailored for a West nostalgic ‘for the traditional worlds it has vanquished and subsumed.’ (p. 105) While such a critique is understandable, especially given the “magical margins” notions that writers of magical realist texts often spuriously promulgate, it nevertheless ignores the transgressive nature of these “indigenist” novels, which actually “self-deconstructs” such “marginal realist” propaganda. Indeed, a myth reading generally undermines the challenges to official narratives and hegemonic versions of the real, which arguably constitute the main agenda behind even the apparently “indigenist” forms of magical realist literature. It also completely ignores the fact that magical realist literature does not always attempt to represent the mythological systems of indigenous cultures. This renders a myth reading as well as Moses Valdez’ critical interpretation, which is based on such an approach, patent misreadings.

History, on the other hand, as García Márquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude* demonstrates, provides a regularly encoded and consistently crucial reference point, which needs to be acknowledged in order to understand the point behind magical realist fiction’s renowned idiosyncratic depictions of the magical as real. Even in Asturias’ *Men of Maize*, a recognition that Gaspar Ilóm, for example, as
Martin notes, is an historical figure who was murdered after he tried to prevent the sacrilegious exploitation of his land by commercial farmers (in Asturias 1993, p. 315) is essential to appreciate the significance of this text, which is, in fact, more of a challenge to an hegemonic imperial version of history than an insight into the “irrational” mind of the indigene. Jameson recognizes the imperative of the magical realist genre for a specific historical grounding. In ‘On magic realism in film’, he examines three examples of magical realist cinematography, which he identifies as ‘historical films’ ‘with holes’, which ‘presuppose extensive prior knowledge of their historical framework’ (1986, pp. 303-4). History, as John Burt Foster similarly contends, in ‘Magic realism in The White Hotel: Compensatory vision and the transformation of classic realism’, constitutes a fundamental ‘unspoken ... premise’ of magical realist fiction (1986, p. 208).145 Rebecca Ferguson, in ‘History, memory and language in Toni Morrison’s Beloved’ (1991), also stresses the significant historical groundedness of magical realist texts. Indeed, she calls Morrison’s Beloved, which is set in pre- and post-civil war or pre- and post-abolition U.S.A., an ‘historical novel’ (p. 113). Other magical realist novels, aside from García Márquez’ and Morrison’s, are also typically focused on or embedded within a very specific historical moment. Allende’s The House of the Spirits, for example, climaxes with the military coup, which was led by Augusto Pinochet and backed by the U.S.A. and which ousted the Chilean president elect Allende in 1973. Valenzuela’s The Lizard’s Tale deals with the tail end of the Peronist era in Argentina’s history. Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children is centered on the historic moment of Indian independence. Okri’s The Famished Road is set on the eve of Nigerian independence, when local political parties vie and lie for power. Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming revolves around the historical confinement of the Tasmanian Aborigines to Flinders Island under the government appointed custodianship of the Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson. Winton’s Cloudstreet evokes twentieth century Australian history in the period before and after the Second World War and portrays a country haunted by a past of racial oppression. Hodgins’ The Invention of the World looks back to the colonial history and migrant settlement of Vancouver Island and the past oppression of various groups, including First Nations peoples. Carter’s Nights at the Circus, as Carter herself explains, ‘is set at exactly the moment in European

145 Foster goes on to characterize magical realism as a ‘compensatory response to the harshness of ... history’ (p. 209). However, as I argue shortly, this is not the case. Magical realist literature
history when things began to change’ for women (qu. Katsavos 1994, p. 14), that is, at the turn of the nineteenth century, as an increasingly mercantile world started to require female labor beyond the home and the brothel. Menton, as I have suggested, in recognition of the importance of history to magical realist texts (as well as their difference from magical realist artworks), abandons the magical realist label in favor of the title of New Historical Novel (1993). I am certainly not recommending any such name change. However, the consistent historical foundation of magical realist texts certainly requires recognition because, as in the case of García Márquez’ prototype, it is commonly the key to discerning the consequence of their realistically narrated fantastical episodes. As Saldívar puts it, history is often ‘the base for the tropic stylistics’ (1991a, p. 27) of magical realist literature. Ferguson similarly argues that, in magical realist fiction, ‘what is commonly called the supernatural is also’ quite commonly ‘the manifestation of history’ (1991, p. 113). This certainly does not mean, according to the Carpentierian hypothesis, that the fantastic in magical realist texts derives from or reflects the incredible nature of history in marginal places. Rather, the link between the two often serves to illustrate how history has been distorted into fantasy in subaltern realms by the corrupt discourses of central powers. Neither is magical realism, as Valdez Moses claims, ‘historical romance’, which ‘encourage[s] … readers to indulge in a nostalgic longing for an imaginary return to a world that is past, or passing away.’ (2001, p. 106) While Valdez Moses suggests that magical realist literature fails to offer a ‘real, that is politically engaged, resistance’ to hegemonic paradigms, this is precisely what it does provide.

According to the Carpentierian account of magical realism, the narrative genre, with its trademark representation of the magical as real, as apparent acolyte Dorfman avers, is not ‘a merely literary strategy’ but a marginal ‘cultural experience’ (1991, p. 201). However, paradoxically, the only way in which magical realism reflects the ‘cultural experience’ of the margins is in its ‘literary strategy’, which manifests the skepticism regarding realism and reality that the center’s manipulations of realism and malformations of reality have aroused. The

advocates engagement with rather than escape from the injustices of history.

146 Magical realist literature, with its interest in history, does bear a resemblance to the “new historical novels” of postmodern historiographic metafiction, such as E.L. Doctorow’s Ragtime (1975) and J.M. Coetzee’s Foe (1986). However, magical realist fiction is ultimately distinguishable from these texts on the basis of its trademark representation of the fantastical (and not merely the fictional or metafictional) as factual.
marginal writers of magical realism, be they inhabitants of the Third World, citizens of postcolonial nations, members of other culturally marginal groups, women, homosexuals or residents of the Second World, contrary to the patently absurd Carpentierian premise of the “magical margins”, do not uniformly occupy some authentically enchanted realm. The experience that they genuinely share in common is their historical marginalization by Western-centric, imperialistic, Anglo-supremacist, masculinist, heterosexist or otherwise biased hegemonic representations of the real. This historical experience of the partisan nature of discourses of realism or of the constructed nature of the phenomenon of reality is also the common inspiration for their magical realism, which entails, as I have argued, less a naïve subscription to realism than a radical subversion of that genre and portrays less a magical version of reality than a disturbing vision of its absence. In other words, marginal authors from around the world produce magical realist texts not because they dwell in a world of fantasy but because they have been made acutely conscious of the delusory capacities of realism and the hallucinatory nature of reality largely as a result of the lies and projections of a hegemonic center.

A number of critics have successfully resisted the Carpentierian propaganda that accompanies the magical realist literary category and posited similar political explanations for the affinities that undeniably exist between the narrative form and the world’s margins as well as for the genre itself. Slemen, for example, recognizes that magical realist fiction consistently emerges from ‘cultures situated at the fringes’ (1995, p. 409). He concedes that the narrative style is often ‘closely linked with a perception of “living on the margins”’. However, he certainly does not accede to the common idea that magical realism is a “marginal realism”, which reflects the magic of life in the peripheries. Instead, he argues that magical realism engages in a ‘dialectical struggle’ with the “speaking mirror” of realism (p. 409) and in ‘a special “dialogue with history”’ (p. 414), by which the subaltern have been ‘tyrannized’ and from which they have been ‘paradoxically cut off’ (p. 418). According to Slemen, magical realism is interested in ‘decentering images of fixity’ (p. 415) and, in general, ‘signifies … resistance toward the imperial center and to its totalizing systems’ (p. 408).

D’Haeck similarly acknowledges that magical realist texts are almost exclusively written by those who have been ‘traditionally excluded from the “privileged centers” of culture, race, and gender’ (1995, p. 200). He also contends that
marginal authors produce magical realist literature not because they homogeneously inhabit magical lands but because they have been uniformly ostracized 'from the operative discourses of power'. Magical realism is not a "marginal realism" but 'in the first instance ... a voluntary act of breaking away from ... realism' (p. 195), which it exposes as a 'linguistic codification of a particular privileged center's worldview' (p. 197). As D'haen suggests, '[i]f we account for magic realism's function ... along these lines, this might also furnish us with a possible explanation for the pioneering role of Spanish American literature in this matter.' (p. 200) Indeed, the subversion of the hegemonic discourse of realism and its partisan constructions of reality certainly provides us with a much more satisfactory rationale for Latin America's inaugural efforts in magical realism than Carpentier's "magical margins" justification. The early magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias may manifest a kind of "marginal realist" impulse to defend autochthonous worldviews, but they also display an overwhelming deconstructive purpose to undermine the 'privileged' genre of realism and its positivist perspectives of reality. While the anti-parochial magical realist literature of Borges is often viewed as apolitical and imperialist rather than transgressive or marginalist, as Parkinson Zamora writes, '[i]ronically, for Borges in the nineteen-twenties, thirties, forties, to write universalizing tales was a specifically political act', as well as a distinctly marginal one, 'because it meant opposing the then-current Argentine mode of literary realism, costumbrismo' (1995, p. 505).

Parkinson Zamora and Faris also demystify the link between marginal writers of magical realism and their common choice of narrative genre. They argue that magical realism is a 'subversive' form of narrative that is 'particularly useful to writers in post-colonial cultures and, increasingly, to women' because its 'in-betweenness, all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures' (1995, p. 6). According to Parkinson Zamora and Faris, in magical realist novels, '[h]allucinatory scenes and events, fantastic/phantasmagoric characters' are represented alongside historical facts not in order to show that they genuinely exist but, rather, 'to indict recent political and cultural perversions.' Faris, in recognition of the shared experiences of oppression of marginal writers of magical realism and the 'anti-bureaucractic' (1995, p. 179) nature of the literary genre, characterizes magical realist texts as 'Schéherazade's children' (p. 164). Authors of magical realist fiction, like the legendary storyteller Schéherazade, exist
in the shadow of ‘totalitarian regimes’ (p. 164). Their magical realist narratives, similarly to Scheherazade’s magical tales, likewise emerge from a ‘death-charged atmosphere’ (p. 163). They issue from a milieu that has experienced the ‘proverbial death of fiction itself’, which Faris partly attributes to the ‘hermeticism of ... modern texts’ (p. 162), but which she also suggests has been caused by the ‘totalitarian discourses’ (p. 180) that buttressed those hegemonic bureaucracies. Magical realist texts, like the stories of Scheherazade, pretend to assume their King Shahriyar and affect to abide by the authorized genre of ‘European realism’ (p. 164). However, they simultaneously and surreptitiously work to ‘overcome’ the authoritarian reality of the despot by engaging in an internal ‘dismantling’ (p. 165) of his autocratic discourses. In addition, while they seem to surrender to a ‘postmodern’ (p. 164) skepticism about representation and reality, they continue to cling to the hope of ‘replenishment’ (p. 165).

While Faris dismisses the Carpentierian notion that magical realism is a “marginal realism”, she also concedes that ‘like primitivism, the lure of peripheralism (more recently called by other names like the subaltern, the liminal, the marginal) dies hard, because the idea is so appealing and so central to the center’s self-definition.’ (1995, p. 165) Similarly, Rawdon Wilson, who stresses that magical realism is ‘unmistakably a textual mode’, which ‘discloses the antagonism between two views ... of history’, nevertheless confesses that he can ‘see the allure, as with a macaw or a toucan’ of subscribing to the ‘powerful contextual accounts’ that have been given for the narrative category (1995, p. 222). However, if the true nature of magical realism is to be revealed and the literary genre is to be vindicated, the resilient and appealing myth of the “magical margins” must be killed off. In fact, while authors of magical realist fiction are certainly not entirely innocent of perpetrating such exoticist propaganda, magical realist texts themselves do not appear to be anywhere near as culpable.

*Behind the Cover Story:*

*De-sensationalizing the Sensational*

While magical realist fiction is a product of the fringes, represents the reality of the peripheries and treats the paranormal as normal, the narrative genre does not support the dubious idea that it provides some kind of an organic reflection of a genuinely charmed marginal world. Some magical realist texts may attempt to
convey the purportedly enchanted ontologies of subaltern "primitive" societies. The pioneering magical realist novels of Carpentier and Asturias, for example, allegedly depict the mythological beliefs of autochthonous Latin American communities, while Okri's latter day *The Famished Road* and Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* ostensibly relate worldviews permeated, respectively, by West African Yoruba and Australian Aboriginal legends. However, the greater proportion of contemporary magical realist publications, like those of that other magical realist literary forerunner Borges, factually portray fabulous phenomena that are unrelated to any liminal cultural belief system. As Liam Connell argues, in 'Discarding Magic Realism: Modernism, anthropology, and critical practice', ‘the fantastic events narrated in texts described as Magic Realist often do not have the status of systemic myths.’ (1998, p. 107) For example, the magical phenomena in García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, Valenzuela's *The Lizard's Tale*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Morrison's *Beloved*, Winton's *Cloudstreet*, Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* and Carter's *Nights at the Circus* does not necessarily correlate to any subaltern perspective. The trail of blood that flows from the murdered body of José Arcadio to his mother Úrsula in García Márquez' fabled Macondo, the green hair and yellow eyes of Allende's Rosa del Valle, the self-impregnated testicular growth of Valenzuela's Witchdoc, the Midnight child Saleem Sinai's 'most delicately-gifted olfactory organ in history' (Rushdie 1981, p. 38), the unearthly return of the murdered slave child Beloved, the haunting of the Cloudstreet house by an Aboriginal ghost, the supernatural mist that afflicts Hodgins' Irish village of Carrigdhoun or Fevvers' flying circus act in Carter's novel cannot be explained in terms of any marginal cultural faith structure. Indeed, even Okri's *The Famished Road*, which revolves around the Yoruba figure of the *abiku* or 'spirit-child' (1991, p. 9), and Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, which resurrects totemic Aboriginal "Dreaming" animals, feature other marvels that do not directly correlate to traditional Yoruba or Aboriginal myths. In Okri's novel, the 'fauns', 'fairies', 'sibyls' and 'sprites' that are the 'spirit companions' of the 'spirit-children' (1991, p. 4) and the grotesque *Stars Wars* like characters that inhabit Madame Koto's palm wine bar are not translated verbatim from Yoruba tenets. Similarly, in Mudrooroo's magical realist text, the foreign leopard, which the African character of Wadamawa conjures as his spirit companion, and the ice castle, which is surrounded by a moat of blood and which Fada (Robinson) and Mada (Robinson's
wife) occupy in their “Dreaming” world, are not images from any ancient Aboriginal religious complex. Neither does the extraordinary in any of these magical realist novels mimetically reflect eccentric geographical or meteorological traits, architectural feats or historical events, which are supposedly peculiar to marginal domains, according to that other argument of the two sided Carpentierian “marginal realist” explanation of magical realism.

In fact, while magical realist fiction portrays the supernatural as natural, it nevertheless also clearly indicates that its realistic representation of the patently unreal should not be interpreted literally. To begin with, the trademark magical realist matter-of-fact depiction of the exorbitantly non-factual is quite often pointedly ironic. According to James Higgins, in ‘Gabriel García Márquez: Cien años de soledad’, the ostensibly guileless and respectful treatment of the manifestly fantastical in this paradigmatic magical realist text, for example, is typically ‘counterbalanced by an ironic, irreverent tone which subverts the very legend it is propagating’ (1990, p. 144). The novel’s ingenious and detailed description of the wantonly preposterous episode of José Arcadio’s “homing” bloodline, for instance, is patently incongruous and, indeed, downright absurd and completely undermines the supposed authenticity of that extraordinary occurrence. The passage relates that immediately after José Arcadio was murdered in his bedroom, an event which was, the novel tells us with unmistakable irony, ‘the only mystery that never was cleared up in Macondo’.

[a] trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued in a straight line across the uneven footpaths, descended steps, climbed curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle in front of the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed the sitting room, staying close to the walls so as not to stain the rugs, continued on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining room table, advanced along the porch with the begonias and passed without being seen under the chair of Amaranta, who was giving an arithmetical lesson to Aureliano José, and made its way through the pantry and appeared in the kitchen, where Ursula was preparing to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread.

Williamson likewise recognizes the ironic character of García Márquez’ magical realist narrative strategy. He argues that ‘the sense of the marvellous afforded us

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148 ‘Un hilo de sangre saltó por debajo de la puerta, atravesó la sala, salió a la calle, siguió en un curso directo por los andenes desaparejos, descendió escalinatas abajo, subió pretiles, pasó de largo por la Calle de los turcos, dobló una esquina a la derecha y otra a la izquierda, volvió en ángulo recto frente a la casa de los Buendía, pasó por debajo de la puerta cerrada, atravesó la sala de visitas pegado a las paredes para no manchar los tapices, siguió por la otra sala, subió en una curva amplia la mesa del comedor, avanzó por el corredor de las begonias y pasó sin ser visto por debajo de la silla de Amaranta que daba una lección de aritmética a Aureliano José, y se metió por el granero y apareció en la cocina donde Ursula se disponía a partir treinta y seis huevos para el pan.’ (pp. 232-3)
by’ One Hundred Years of Solitude is always ‘transient, for soon enough García Márquez tips the wink at his reader, as it were, creating a complicity behind the backs of the characters who remain circumscribed by an elemental innocence which charms but is not, of course, meant to convince.’ (1987, p. 47) The collusive tongue-in-cheek attitude that Williamson describes is certainly apparent in the above passage by García Márquez. Williamson’s as well as Higgins’ characterizations of the ironic nature of García Márquez’ famous magical realist novel also apply to a host of other magical realist texts. The nonchalant depiction of the flamboyantly fantastical in Winton’s Cloudstreet, for example, is often ‘irreverent’ and clearly dependent upon a facetious ‘complicity’ between the author and the reader. For instance, when the former ‘Godfearing’ (1991, p. 26) Lester Lamb, in his Cloudstreet backyard, hears the family pet pig speak in tongues to his brain damaged son Fish, whom his wife had “miraculously” resurrected years ago after he drowned, he laconically surmises that it is a ‘blasted Pentecostal pig’ (p. 129) and ironically reflects: ‘[a]lways the miracles you don’t need.’ (p. 130) Hodgins’ The Invention of the World likewise ‘counterbalances’ its deadpan portrayal of outlandish incidents with a comical edge. For example, when Grania Flynn spies Cathleen ni Houlihan, mother of the future cult leader Kenneally, copulating in her cowshed with ‘a monstrous black bull with eyes that shone like red lanterns and a scrotum that hung like a sack of turnips’ (1994 (1977), p. 95), she promptly evicts her on the basis that ‘a decent woman couldn’t have that kind of thing going on in her shed every night of the week’ (p. 96). In addition, while Grania Flynn claims that the child Cathleen subsequently bears was begotten during that supernatural encounter, the narrator reports that Cathleen had previously copulated with ‘the entire police force of Galway’ (p. 95). Carter’s pragmatic representation of the ostentatiously incredible accomplishments of the winged Cockney woman Fevvers in Nights at the Circus is also offset by a conspiratorial ‘ironic, irreverent tone’ or, indeed, an outright burlesque and ribald attitude. In her hit aerialist stage show, Fevvers, as the initially skeptical journalist Jack Walser observes, with

her Ruben-esque form ... dawdled ... mooch[ed] ... potted along the invisible gangway between her trapezes with the portly dignity of a Trafalgar Square pigeon flapping from one proffered handful of corn to another, and then she turned head over heels three times, lazily enough to show off the crack in her bum. (1984, p. 17)

Walser is startled by Fevvers’ defiance of ‘the laws of projectiles’ and her ‘disconcerting pact with gravity’. However, he observes that she ‘went no further
than any other trapeze artist’, which leads him to ponder the paradoxical possibility that ‘in order to earn a living, might not a genuine bird-woman ... have to pretend she was an artificial one?’ In Carter’s magical realist novel, the cheeky Fevvers, whose self-consciously ironic motto reads ‘[i]s she fact or is she fiction?’ (p. 7), continually ‘tips the wink’ (or, perhaps, flashes her bum) at the reader to provoke skepticism about the personal ‘legend’ that she is ostensibly ‘propagating’. The depiction of the unreal as real in Valenzuela’s The Lizard’s Tale is also blatantly ironic and establishes a comically based collusive relationship between the author and the reader. While the narrator Witchdoc describes Estrella as his auto-impregnated ‘built-in woman’, he also reveals that she was previously decreed as a third testicle by Eulogio and diagnosed as a malignant cyst by a doctor, who ‘paid dearly for his impudence’. In Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, Saleem Sinai, the novel’s narrator, relates his supernatural experiences with a prototypal magical realist candor, but his tall tale is nevertheless clearly ‘not ... meant to convince.’ In the course of his story, Saleem reports that, following an operation on his sinuses and a move to Pakistan, he is deprived of his ‘nose-given telepathy’ (1981, p. 304), which allowed him to hold mental meetings with his fellow extraordinarily gifted midnight born peers. However, he acquires a supersensitive sense of smell, which leads him to become a ‘man-dog’ (p. 347) in Pakistan’s Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities. If the composed recital of such outrageous events was not ironic enough, Rushdie ‘tips the wink’ at the reader even more explicitly through Saleem’s self-reflexive narrative asides, which are directed at the reader. At the beginning of the novel, for example, Saleem asks his audience to ‘swallow’ (p. 9) his story, which he describes, effectively defining its magical realism, as ‘a commingling of the improbable and the mundane’. However, while he consistently swears to the truth of his exorbitant tale, he also continually draws attention to its ‘unreliable’ nature (p. 270). For example, Saleem concedes that his ‘presentation of the Emergency’, which Indira Gandhi imposed in India from 1975 to 1977 following her conviction for election malpractice, ‘in the guise of a six-hundred-and-thirty-five-day-long midnight was perhaps excessively romantic, and certainly contradicted by the available meteorological data.’ (p. 443) In Rushdie’s version of magical realism and as Saleem’s amusing

150 ‘pagó cara su osadía’ (p. 49).
confessions ensure, the irony that lies behind the representation of the ‘improbable’ as ‘mundane’ is unmistakable.

Indeed, the magical realist literary genre, as the above practitioners certainly appear to have acknowledged, relies upon a narrative procedure that is well nigh paradigmatically ironic and that is thus fundamentally dependent on what Williamson describes as a ‘humorous complicity’ (1987, p. 47) between the author and the reader. In other words, the representation of the unreal as real is an inherently paradoxical narrative strategy, which the audience must appreciate as such in order to, in the first place, identify the magical realist text’s difference and, in the second place, gain insight into its ideological significance. This is true even of those magical realist novels, such as Carpentier’s The Kingdom of This World, Asturias’ Men of Maize, Okri’s The Famished Road and Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming, which appear to sincerely represent an alternate mythologically impregnated worldview. These seemingly earnest examples of magical realist fiction also rely upon what Williamson calls an ‘ironic interplay’ between the paranormal and the normal, which the reader must “get” in order to discern the pointed idiosyncrasy of these novels as well as their underlying point. According to Williamson, the implied reader of magical realist literature, who is someone intellectually sophisticated enough to detect the innate irony ‘of its ostensible fusion of fantasy and fact’, is the factor that inexorably exposes the narrative genre as not a Carpentierian “marginal realism” but ‘a wilfully specious discourse’. He argues that although the magical realist novel presents the fantastic episode

as a true event … the fact of its being narrated in the text does not strengthen its claim to literal, historical truth. Rather the opposite, it de-mystifies the phenomenon because of the underlying assumption (...) that the reader’s world-view is at odds with that of the characters.

The presence of irony in magical realist fiction, whether it is flamboyantly apparent or more imminent, as Williamson suggests, certainly discourages a literal interpretation of its albeit literally related marvels. Indeed, in some magical realist novels, the insouciant treatment of the clearly astonishing can appear to be little more than a comical device. However, while the naturally represented supernatural features of many magical realist texts can lend themselves to a comedic reading, they also frequently suggest other non-literal possibilities for interpretation, which can be far more serious in consequence.

In magical realist literature, the extraordinary, despite its ostensibly ordinary portrayal and, indeed, as I have suggested, because of its peculiar commonplace
depiction in a conventional realist framework, constitutes a conspicuously discrepant feature and thus demands recognition. As Faris writes, 'the magic' in magical realist fiction, which 'exists symbiotically in a foreign textual culture' and yet 'refuses to be assimilated into realism', is a 'disturbing element' (1995, p. 168). Indeed, it provokes not only attention but also interpretation. According to Regina Janes, in *Gabriel García Márquez: Revolutions in Wonderland*, the ‘magical events’ that distinguish magical realist novels such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

violate our expectations that fictions will be verisimilar and disrupt our easy submersion in an alternate world. When things happen in Macondo that do not happen in other places (or books), the reader is forced to ask, what does that mean? (1981, p. 57)

The precise significance of the non-verisimilar elements is not always immediately apparent. Magical realist literature, in the words of Rawdon Wilson, presents 'a world ... in which things [call] out meaningfully to each other, but [do] not cause one another' (1995, p. 211) in 'a labyrinth of emblems' (p. 212). However, as Faris contends, the enigmatic 'magical images' of magical realist fiction, 'while projecting ... [an] initial aura of surprising craziness, tend to reveal their motivations – psychological, social, emotional, political – after some scrutiny.' (1995, p. 171)

To begin with, as Faris suggests, the realistically represented marvelous phenomena that demarcate magical realist stories can often be interpreted as the imaginary projections of fictional characters in particular 'psychological' or 'emotional' states. Rawdon Wilson similarly argues that in magical realist texts, such as García Márquez’ classic, 'human psychology' regularly lends 'the structures of its obsessions to the world' in order to create the seemingly supernatural (1995, p. 212). Gallagher likewise claims that '[m]any of the fantasies described in *Cien años de soledad* are ... the result of its characters’ distorted or declining faculties of perception. Drunkenness, blindness, madness, and old age all play a part in the creation of fantasy.' (1973, p. 151) For instance, José Arcadio Buendía's and Úrsula Iguarán Buendía's shared vision of the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, whom José Arcadio killed for an insult about his failure to consummate his incestuous marriage, appears to be an ironically literalized projection of their guilt wracked consciences. Indeed, the characters themselves acknowledge as much when José Arcadio reflects that the appearance of the
José Arcadio sees the ghost of Aguilar again years later in Macondo. However, the encounter occurs after a period of increased obsessiveness in his scientific endeavors, during which he stops eating and sleeping and threatens to be ‘dragged off by his imagination towards a state of perpetual delirium from which he would never recover.’ His vision of Aguilar in fact precipitates his actual descent into enduring madness. He is tied to a banana tree in the courtyard, ‘barking in a strange language and emitting a green froth from the mouth’ before assuming a ‘state of total innocence.’ While the novel relates that José Arcadio continues to have conversations with Aguilar under the tree, it also indicates that this intercourse is the hallucination of a mad man. The omniscient narrator reports:

Úrsula attended to him, fed him, brought him news of Aureliano. But in reality, the only person with whom he had been able to have contact for a long time was Prudencio Aguilar. ... It was Prudencio Aguilar, who cleaned him, fed him and brought him splendid news of a foreigner called Aureliano, who was a colonel in the war.

Similarly, in Morrison’s *Beloved*, the terrible specter of the murdered child that threatens to consume Sethe, the perpetrator of the infanticide, can be interpreted as a literalized projection of her tortured conscience. Although Morrison’s novel does not support an intra-textual ‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ rendering of its ghostly presence as obviously as García Márquez’ magical realist archetype does, it nevertheless, in the words of Faris, plays ‘with our rational tendencies to recuperate, to co-opt the marvelous’ as ‘a character’s hallucination’ (1995, p. 171). For example, at the end of the story, Paul D returns to find Sethe, the primary victim of the vengeful phantasm, emotionally devastated and on the cusp of a psychological breakdown. He helps her to recover, and they all go on to forget Beloved as if she had been an unpleasant dream during a troubled sleep (Morrison 1988 (1987), p. 275), which provokes the reader to ask, as Faris puts it, ‘whether she may have been just that’ (1995, p. 172). Winton’s *Cloudstreet* also offers the possibility for an internal ‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ rationalization of some of the fabulous events that it portrays as factual. For instance, when Quick Lamb sees the figures in the ‘misery pictures’ (1991, p. 212), which he cuts out of

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151 ‘*es que no podemos con el peso de la conciencia*’ (2002 (1967), p. 108)

152 ‘*se dejó arrastrar por su imaginación hacia un estado de delirio perpetuo del cual no se volvería a recuperar.*’ (p. 171)

153 ‘*ladando en lengua extraña y echando espumarajos verdes por la boca.*’ (p. 173)

154 ‘*un estado de inocencia total.*’

155 ‘*Úrsula lo atendía, le daba de comer, le llevaba noticias de Aureliano. Pero en realidad, la única persona con quien él podía tener contacto desde hacía mucho tiempo, era Prudencio Aguilar.*’
newspapers and pastes to his bedroom wall, dance and laugh, the episode follows
the death of his friend, occurs in the middle of night and provokes the fear of a
nightmare (p. 94), circumstances that suggest the strange episode may be
accounted for as precisely that. Likewise, when Quick sees his brother Fish
rowing a box across the top of the wheat' (p. 200) and beckoning to him, he has
been knocked unconscious by one of the kangaroos he is paid to cull and has been
feeling guilty for leaving his dependent mentally disabled sibling, which indicates
that the enchanted interlude may be the result of both a confused consciousness
and a disturbed conscience. Okri’s *The Famished Road* also subtly tenders
‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ motivations for the amazing visions and
extraordinary adventures of its young narrator. The spirit-child Azaro’s encounters
with the spirit world often occur during sleep, illness or after imbibing palm wine.
They are also frequently precipitated by frightening situations, such as when he
becomes lost in the bush or feels threatened by, alternatively, Madame Koto, the
blind man or political thugs. For example, when the door to Azaro’s family’s
room in the compound is marked with machete slashes and Mum explains that Dad
has earned the enmity of the Party of the Rich, Azaro gives his fear the shape of a
mythical monster. He narrates: ‘I became afraid. . . . I could see our door being
broken down at night, while we slept. I saw the great monstrous Egungun,
belching white smoke from seven ears, bursting into our room and devouring us all
with his bloodied mouth’ (1991, p. 228). While this passage is not narrated as
literal truth, the association of Azaro’s fear with the kind of grotesque visions that
are presented as literally real in other parts of the text is manifest. Other feelings
also appear to trigger ostensibly paranormal incidents in Azaro’s life. When Azaro
subsequently sees Mum despair about their future, he becomes possessed by the
‘demon of grief’ (p. 229). The brilliant spirits of love and hope then do battle with
and defeat the darker forces of sorrow and hopelessness in his body. This
fantastical episode, while narrated as a literal occurrence, in fact seems to be a
literalized representation of Azaro’s bittersweet emotional state, in which he
experiences love (of his mother) as a source of overwhelming pain (in view of her
suffering) but also of overpowering beauty. Mudrooroo’s *Master of the Ghost
Dreaming* similarly proffers discrete ‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ explanations
for some of the magical incidents that its characters experience as real. It suggests,

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... *Era Prudencio Aguilar quien lo limpiaba, le daba de comer y le llevaba noticias espléndidas de un desconocido que se llamaba Aureliano y que era coronel en la guerra.* (p. 241)
for example, that the “Master” Jangamuttuk’s initial journey into the white “Ghost Dreaming” world, from which he hopes to appropriate the health secrets of the English colonizers for his ailing people, is a trance induced hallucination, which he experiences during a special ritual. The novel describes Jangamuttuk as the ‘dreamer of the ceremony’ (1991, p. 3) and recounts that the rhythm of the clapsticks and didgeridoos ‘bounced the shaman towards possession’ (p. 4). The omniscient narrator relates:

[i]n the distance ... rose a hill fantastically shaped by the weather of this forbidding country. Such was his human reasoning, but then his special ghost knowledge entered his mind. It was a castle, a dwelling of the higher ghosts who would hold the medicine that would bring health to his people. He had to get inside, but as he looked, it receded from his vision. ... He ... sang ... a song that came from his secret initiation. His clapsticks tapped out the strong rhythm. ... the didgeridoos took up the rhythm. He let the sound lift him towards the castle walls. (pp. 12-13)

Jangamuttuk’s “Dreaming” companion Goanna then appears and helps Jangamuttuk scale the fortress walls and escape with Mada’s laudanum. However, Fada, who is surreptitiously watching the ceremony, never loses sight of Jangamuttuk and only hears him mimic ‘an awful travesty of his better half’s voice’ (p. 17) and sees him distribute Mada’s laudanum. When Fada emerges to stop the proceedings, the omniscient narrator reports: ‘Jangamuttuk, feeling himself coming out of his trance, hastily said farewell to his Dreaming companion.’ Valenzuela’s *The Lizard’s Tale*, more explicitly than Mudrooroo’s novel and, indeed, perhaps more expressly than most magical realist texts, indicates that its eccentric phenomena are the ‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ projections of its protagonist. While the Witchdoc presents Estrella as his beloved female superego and a living uterine being, the novel clearly indicates that she is a mere cyst endowed with these bizarre qualities by the Witchdoc’s egomaniacal and deranged imagination. Indeed, Valenzuela’s magical realist text, because of the conspicuous availability of a psychoanalytical reading of its occult elements, constitutes something of a borderline example of magical realism.\(^{156}\)

However, these contemporary examples of magical realist fiction, which reveal the potential for a character based psychological interpretation of their magic, cannot be dismissed as latter day deviations from some original pure form of the narrative genre. Carpentier’s and Asturias’ early magical realist texts, which display what Rodriguez Monegal refers to as a ‘double vision’,\(^{157}\) allow for a

\(^{156}\) In fact, it verges on Surrealism, which presents the marvelous as a projection of the individual unconscious, as I argue shortly, and encourages a personal ‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ interpretation.

\(^{157}\) ‘*doible visión*’ (1971, p. 639).
comparable reading of the fantastic in terms of the 'psychological' or 'emotional' states of their protagonists. In Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*, for example, as we have seen, the flight of Mackandal at his public execution is shown to occur only in the minds of the blindly faithful and desperately hopeful enslaved Afro-Haitian audience. The Europeans witness that, in fact, he dies. While the book offers Ti Noel's final metamorphoses without any second perspective and ultimate detraction, it does inform us that Ti Noel is an old man, fearful of the threat of oppression, and thus suggests that his transmutations are the product of his aging mind and frightened mindset. In "the prologue", Carpentier argues that the subjective nature of the supernatural does not invalidate its authenticity. However, his magical realist novel, like the magical realist literature of more contemporary authors, nevertheless seems to signal that the unreal, while genuine according to the characters' viewpoints, should not be literally interpreted as real.

Indeed, while Carpentier distinguishes his representation of the marvelous from that of the Surrealists partly on the basis of its greater 'psychological' or 'emotional' authenticity, his depiction of the fabulous as a projection of the human mind is remarkably reminiscent of the Surrealist characterization of the fantastic as a manifestation of the human unconscious. Perhaps the patent nature of the correspondence provided another impetus for Carpentier's eventual rejection of that dimension of his theory of the Latin American marvelous real, which relies on cognition and which I have called the "real marvelous". With his later emphasis on the "marvelous real", as Karr puts it, Carpentier focuses on the extraordinary as a manifestation of 'the external instead of the internal' and thus (although Breton also found the irrational in the 'external' or physical world) effectively distances himself from the salient 'internal' or Freudian aspects of Surrealist fantasy. Nevertheless, Carpentier's magical realist novella and magical realist texts today, which often subtly encourage 'psychological' or 'emotional' interpretations of the paranormal events they realistically portray, can exhibit a likeness to Surrealist representations, which similarly invite psychoanalytical explanations for the abnormal images they naturalistically convey.

A number of critics, in recognition of both the historical links and the thematic affinities between magical realism and Surrealism, contend that the magical realist narrative genre, as Faris avers, is a 'legacy of Surrealism' (1995, p. 171). Chanady, for example, notes the importance of 'the French Surrealists' indictment
of restrictive empirical knowledge and valorization of non-European mentalities’ to the evolution of magical realist fiction (1995, p. 141) as well as the continuing ‘surrealist filiations of [its] treatment of the imaginary’ (p. 133). However, magical realism is ultimately distinguishable from Surrealism. This is because magical realism ‘possesses an actual-world substance’ (Rawdon Wilson 1995, p. 222), which Surrealism lacks. Magical realist texts, as I have suggested, are geographically, culturally and, perhaps principally, historically anchored to an extra-textual reality. Surrealist representations, by contrast, may feature the freakish as factual, but they are usually set, similarly to fantastic literature, in geographically, culturally and historically irrelevant or often completely imaginary worlds. They also tend to be, as Gabrielle Foreman argues, in ‘Past-on stories: History and the magically real, Morrison and Allende on call’, intensely individuated (1995, p. 286). By contrast, in magical realist fiction, according to Parkinson Zamora and Faris, ‘[s]ocieties’ or, indeed, nations ‘rather than personalities tend to rise and fall’ (1995, p. 10). In addition, as Foreman also avers, the fantastical aspects of magical realism, unlike those of Surrealism, are not solely the imaginings of ‘an individual who experiences a world beyond the community’s parameters’ but are themselves likewise ‘historically constructed and connected.’ (1995, p. 286) Janes separates the magical realist literary genre from Surrealism on a comparable basis. She contends that in magical realist narratives, as opposed to Surrealist writing or art, ‘the marvelous ceases to express inner states, whether of the author or ... characters, and begins to symbolize external realities’ (1981, p. 17). While the supernatural in magical realist texts, counter to Janes’ argument, can continue to stem from and provide a symbolic expression of ‘inner states’, it also frequently and more importantly, as Janes correctly observes, branches from and affords a figurative comment on ‘external realities’.159

Carpentier, in his original hypothesis of the marvelous real and even more so in later treatises, as I have suggested, differentiates his representation of the

159 Kafka’s ‘Metamorphosis’ (1916), which is often cited as an important precursor of magical realism, is not only more akin to fantasy, because it revolves around an intangible premise, as I have suggested, but also to Surrealism, because it encourages psychoanalytical rather than political interpretation (although the story can be read as a fable of existential anguish or capitalist alienation.) Mary Kinzie, for example, in ‘Succeeding Borges, escaping Kafka: On the fiction of Steven Millhauser’, reads Kafka’s fiction in terms of Kafka’s ‘neuronic’ (1991, p. 140), ‘somnambic’, and ‘hyperochondriac’ (p. 142) personality. However, Kafka’s style, in which he relates the fantastic in a peculiar matter-of-fact way, undoubtedly influenced the early writers of magical realism. Indeed, Borges pays tribute to him in the ironic ‘Kafka and his precursors’ (1952), while García
marvelous from that of the Surrealists on the vaguely comparable basis of its links to an extra-textual reality. David Mikics, in ‘Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, history, and the Caribbean writer’ (1995), makes the mistake of confusing the two points. Mikics firstly and fairly argues that the incredible in magical realism, as opposed to that in Surrealism, typically exhibits bonds to the histories of marginal communities. However, he subsequently evokes Carpentier’s premise of the Latin American “marvelous real” and suggests that the Caribbean constitutes a Surrealist utopia in the ‘flesh’ (p. 373) and a ‘magical reality unavailable to the European artist or writer.’ He claims: ‘[n]ot the writer’s style, but the historical scene that his or her writing reveals, provides the magic.’ However, while the outlandish phenomena of both past and contemporary magical realist texts can be commonly construed in terms of marginal extra-textual factors, this certainly does not mean that they can be simplistically accounted for as mimetic reflections of purportedly innate subaltern peculiarities. As I have argued, magical realist literature discourages such a literal rendering of the paranormal, which it represents with what is only an ironic literalism. It encourages, instead, as Janes suggests, a symbolic or metaphorical reading of the fabulous, which may carry, as Faris argues, an intra-textual ‘psychological’ or ‘emotional’ significance but which also often simultaneously and more importantly conveys, as the assiduous extra-textual anchoring of magical realist texts and their supernatural events insists, an extra-textual ‘social’ or ‘political’ meaning.

*The Politics of Magic*

*Exposing the Lies of History*

Faris, in acknowledgement of the important ‘social’ and ‘political’ message behind magical realism’s idiosyncratic representation of the unreal as real and of the inherent irony of the magical realist narrative strategy, describes the magical realist literary category as a ‘renewal of the tradition that couples fantasy with political and social satire’ (1985, p. 51). She also recognizes that ‘history is the weight’ that typically ‘tethers the balloon of magic’ (1995, p. 170) in the satirical magical realist text. That is, history is not only the principal anchor that prevents magical realist fiction from floating off into the purely extra-textual and personal realm of

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Márquez explicitly acknowledges Kafka’s influence (Apuleyo Mendoza & García Márquez 2002, p. 54).
Surrealist fantasy but also the primary basis for the evidently metaphorical and satirical distention that distinguishes magical realist novels. Camayd-Freixas also notes magical realist literature’s ‘solid edifice of [historical] verisimilitude’ (1998, p. 420). He similarly suggests that the magical realist genre functions as ‘historical allegory’, which is, as the tradition exemplified by Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels (1726) and George Orwell’s Animal Farm (1945) attests, typically satirical in function. However, unlike these more customary examples of ‘historical allegory’, the equally fancifully elucidated satire of magical realism primarily entails a political comment on history itself. Indeed, magical realism often constitutes, as Gallagher puts it, something of ‘a parody of the bent for fantasy of official historians’ (1973, p. 149). Thus, while the marvelous can often seem to be a comical projection or an allegorical embodiment of a character’s state of mind, the fantastical elements of magical realist texts, in keeping with the conventions of satire, as Parkinson Zamora warns, ‘are not, however, to be taken lightly.’ (1995, p. 497) They frequently possess more serious and further reaching historical significance.

The spirit of Prudencio Aguilar in García Márquez’ magical realist prototype One Hundred Years of Solitude, for example, certainly operates as more than an allegorical expression of the guilty conscience of José Arcadio Buendía, who murdered the man. According to Parkinson Zamora, the regularly featured ghosts of magical realist fiction, in general, ‘are deeply metaphoric’ and ‘often act as ... reminders of communal crimes’ or as ‘bearers of ... historical burdens’ and generally ‘signal ... the return of the repressed.’ (1995, p. 497) The apparition of Prudencio Aguilar, whose very name advertises the need to be both circumspect and eagle-eyed in regards to the past, is certainly ‘deeply metaphorical’. Indeed, he embodies the entire message of the novel, which revolves around, as we have seen, the need to acknowledge a ‘communal crime’, the ‘repressed’ massacre of Colombian laborers of the U.F.C. by the Colombian military. The fantastical elements of other magical realist narratives likewise function in a metaphorical way to not only ironically reflect but also ironically reflect upon the injustices and lies of history.

The idea that reality can be shaped according to disparate ‘emotional’ or ‘psychological’ circumstances clearly compliments this ultimate ‘social’ or ‘political’ agenda, which is to expose the partisan distortion of historical reality. However, the exclusive intra-textual explanation of the marvelous as a character’s
hallucination can also be problematic, as it can distract from its important extra-
textual significance. Rushdie’s eminently self-conscious magical realist text
*Midnight’s Children*, in recognition of this threat, specifically counsels against the
disparaging treatment of its hyperbolic story as little more than its first person
narrator Saleem Sinai’s delusion. As Connell argues, while ‘it is perfectly
plausible to suggest a Freudian psychoanalytic reading of *Midnight’s Children*, in
particular Saleem’s acquisition of his powers at the point at which he sees his
mother naked’ (1998, p. 107), Rushdie’s novel explicitly warns against such a
preclusive reading. Saleem himself imparts the advice: ‘[d]on’t make the mistake
of dismissing what I’ve unveiled as mere delirium; or even as the insanely
exaggerated fantasies of a lonely, ugly child’ (1981, p. 200). The paranormal
ously inclined autobiography of a midnight’s child, ‘must not become ... the bizarre
creation of a rambling, diseased mind.’ Saleem goes on to assert that he is ‘not
speaking metaphorically’ and that his tale ‘is nothing less than the literal, by-the-
hairs-of-my-mother’s head truth’. However, his affirmations of verbatim
verisimilitude are evidently comical. In addition, the fabulous phenomenon of the
midnight’s children and the fanciful escapades of the central midnight’s child
Saleem, in particular, which are so intimately intertwined with the tumultuous
history of postcolonial India, manifest indubitable metaphorical resonance.
Indeed, despite his apparent promotion of a literal interpretation of the midnight’s
children, Saleem contradictorily suggests that they are a ‘mirror of the nation’ (p.
255). Saleem himself, who possesses a distinctive ‘map of India’ face (p. 231) and
a peculiar ‘connection-to-history’ (p. 422), is the most mirror-like among them.
The ‘mirror’ image, which the midnight’s children and especially Saleem provide,
is certainly not any kind of faithful reflection. It is, rather, a distorted carnival
mirror impression, which entails, in accordance with the nature of allegory, a
gently ironic and, at other times, caustically satirical political comment on the
ostensibly liberated Indian subcontinent and, in particular, its decidedly liberal
postcolonial history.

The midnight’s children, who possess extraordinary potential but who are also
fundamentally divided by the leadership dissension of the Muslim Saleem and the
Hindu Shiva (whose nametags were swapped at birth and whose differences are
thus, in the most ironically literal way, linguistically constructed and entirely
arbitrary), are born on a midnight that marked both India’s independence and its
partition into Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India. These Scheherazadian ‘one
thousand and one’ (p. 195) offspring, whose abilities, significantly, include
‘stepping into mirrors and re-emerging through any reflective surface in the land’
and ‘inflicting physical wounds’ with words (p. 198), are obviously an ironic
metonym, as Saleem himself suggests, for the ‘fabulous nature’ of the ‘collective
dream’ (p. 112) of Indian nationhood, which was originally impaired by a
bureaucratic subdivision and eventually reduced to a disintegrating illusion by the
government’s perversion of its historical realization. Saleem, who describes
himself as ‘mysteriously handcuffed to history’ (p. 9) and whose stupendous
subcontinental capers intricately follow the historical trajectory of postcolonial
India, additionally provides an allegorical representation as well as a sardonic
condemnation of the historical corruption that finally destroyed the original ideal
of independent India. Indeed, Rushdie’s novel is replete with fantastical episodes
that mirror and mock India’s postcolonial history. For example, Saleem’s
discovery that he can no longer serve as a radio receiver for the liberal meetings of
his heterogeneous magically gifted peers conspicuously coincides with his family’s
relocation from polytheistic and democratic India to monotheistic and
undemocratic Pakistan. In the ‘Land of the Pure’ (p. 307), Saleem develops an
exceptionally enhanced sense of smell, which gives him ‘the powers of sniffing-
out-the-truth’ and which ‘seemed to prefer to linger on the uglier smells’ (p. 315).
He subsequently learns that ‘[m]idnight has many children; the offspring of
Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos,
greed … I had to go into exile to learn that the children of midnight were more
varied than I – even I – had dreamed.’ (p. 291) These outlandish events in
Saleem’s life not only highlight the allegorical nature of the concept of the
midnight’s children but also are in themselves a metaphorical depiction of as well
as a trenchant remark on the repressive and corrupt nature of Pakistan’s
government. However, Saleem soon learns that ‘[n]obody, no country has a
monopoly of untruth’ (p. 236). When war breaks out between India and Pakistan
in 1965 over ‘who-should-possess-the-Perfect-Valley’ (p. 339) of Kashmir, the
Voice of Pakistan and All-India Radio fight their own battle, with truth being
perhaps the only certain casualty. Saleem reports:

on the radio, what destruction, what mayhem! In the first five days of the war Voice of Pakistan
announced the destruction of more aircraft than India had ever possessed; in eight days, All-
India Radio massacred the Pakistan Army down to, and considerably beyond, the last man. (p.
339)
Saleem, 'trying to stop being mystifying' and to 'concentrate on good hard facts' (p. 338), reflects upon 'the rash of possible explanations' (p. 339), which were posited for the instigation of the war, but he dismisses all of them. Instead, establishing his usual marvelously 'intimate connection' with history (p. 342), he claims: '[t]o simplify things ... the war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers' (p. 339). He also asserts that he needed to be punished for his 'impure' love of his sister and that 'the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing more nor less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth' (p. 338). During the war, in which 'nothing was real; nothing certain' (p. 340), almost all of the members of Saleem's extended family (except for his sister, the Muslim propagandist, Jamila Singer) are killed when '[a]ircraft, real or fictional, dropped actual or mythical bombs' (p. 341) onto their places of residence. The exorbitant megalomaniacal 'motives' (p. 339) that Saleem offers for the war and the incredible precision annihilation of his family not only parallel but also clearly parody the partisan lies that India and Pakistan present as objective history during the Kashmir conflict. Saleem himself muses that when 'the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case' (p. 236). Following the concomitant destruction of his family and of history in this war, Saleem loses his memory and comes to be known as Buddha. With his supersensitive smell still intact, he becomes a 'man-dog' (p. 347) in Pakistan's Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities and, establishing his customary central historical role, is purportedly used to precipitate the subsequent war of 1971, in which Pakistan attempts to prevent the secession of Bangladesh and in which India eventually intervenes to secure it. Following the start of the conflict, Buddha deserts into 'the historyless anonymity' (p. 360) of the Sundarbans 'dream-forest' (p. 363), in which he is pleased by chimerical houris, the beautiful virgins of the Muslim (male's) heaven, and begins 'forgetting everything' (p. 367) and 'becoming transparent'. The 'jungle of dreams' (p. 368), in which Saleem becomes lost immediately following his consecutive experiences of the distorted constructions of historical reality during war, patently provides a sardonic allegory for that historical reality, which has almost metamorphosed into a tangled and miasmic fantasyland. Back in India, Indira Gandhi, whose two toned hair symbolizes her two faced corrupt regime, imposes a State of Emergency to forestall corruption charges, during which 'there is considerable disagreement
about the number of ‘political’ prisoners taken’ (p. 434). Saleem’s son (who is actually Shiva’s) is simultaneously born with Ganesh-like elephant ears. His mythical deformity is an unmistakable metaphorical and satirical consequence of Indira’s mutilation of historical reality as well as of the extraordinary powers of perception required to discern truth in that corrupt environment. However, Saleem reports that Indira ‘damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again’ (p. 420). Saleem, in typical egocentric style, presents the State of Emergency as a plot to destroy him as well as the other midnight’s children, who are forcibly sterilized and surgically deprived of their magic and hope. Saleem, whose connection to history is also severed, begins to crumble apart ‘into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust.’ (p. 37) Indira’s paranormally proficient destruction of the midnight’s children is an ironic allegory, as Saleem himself writes, for her ‘annihilation … of … the originally-one-thousand-and-one marvellous promises of a numinous midnight’ (p. 439). The 1947 linguistically constructed ideal of Indian nationhood, like the midnight’s children, as exemplified by Saleem, has become sterile, no longer a magical possibility but a vehicle of bitter disillusionment and so thoroughly detached from historical reality that it is on the verge of completely disintegrating.

The marvels that appear in Midnight’s Children, as Rushdie attempts to impress upon the reader, should not be dismissed as the neurotic delusions of its eccentric narrator, because they possess a far more important extra-textual significance, which revolves around the real injustices of history and the historical corruption of reality. The same is true of other magical realist texts. In Mudrooroo’s Master of the Ghost Dreaming, for example, the supernatural ice castle, which the drug addicted, solitary and depressed Mada inhabits in the “Ghost Dreaming” world and which Jangamuttuk visits in his trance induced journey into the enemy’s subconscious terrain, clearly operates as more than just an image arbitrarily conjured by Jangamuttuk’s hallucinogenic state. It provides a metaphor for the “white” world and serves to satirize the historical myth of the English “home” as a veritable monument of social virtue, which provided the ideological basis for the attempted incultation to British customs of the Tasmanian Aborigines on Flinders Island, the past injustice with which this novel is concerned. Similarly, in Winton’s Cloudstreet, which is set against a backdrop of global warfare and in a house that once held a stolen generation of Aboriginal wards, Quick’s visions of
the dancing victims of global catastrophes and of his beckoning brother, a survivor of a tragedy closer to home, evidently represent more than Quick’s mindset. They signify the demands of the injustices of history for attention and answerability. Just as Quick recognizes international atrocities, white Australia sends its troops to fight against real and perceived evils overseas and, indeed, builds its patriotic identity based upon these battles. However, just as Fish asks Quick to return home with him, the novel suggests that white Australians’ primary responsibility is to an historical tragedy on its own shores, in which they are personally implicated and which they attempt to deny. According to Lester, he and Quick ‘owe … things’ or have a ‘debt’ to Fish, whom they had drowned trying to save (1991, p. 94). Cloudstreet similarly indicates that white Australia needs to remove its “head from the clouds” and to recognize and make reparations to the Aborigine, who cries for justice in the neglected library of its “clouded” past and whom white Australia damaged while allegedly trying to save. Likewise, the specter of Beloved in Morrison’s novel, which resurrects not only the murdered slave child but also the repressed historical crime of slavery in the U.S.A., is obviously more than a character’s mirage. Beloved is the embodiment of a terrible past, which demands to be remembered but which also must not be permitted to overwhelm. In Okri’s The Famished Road, the grotesquely contorted apparitions that Azaro sees in Madame Koto’s bar similarly manifestly function as more than products of the protagonist’s imagination. They provide a satirical allegory for the corrupt politicians, who have distorted the historical reality of the dream of postcolonial Nigeria. The tangible thugs of the Party of the Rich, who blame the Party of the Poor for the poisoned powdered milk they distribute during their election campaign and who confiscate the Photographer’s pictures of their violent repression of the community’s uprising, replace the intangible creatures that Azaro originally sees as the primary patrons in Madame Koto’s establishment and, indeed, become indistinguishable from them. Azaro even explicitly compares these lying politicians, who are ‘famous’ for their ‘manufacturing of reality’ (1991, p. 494), to ‘the spirits who used to come here, and who had tried to steal me away.’ (p. 273) Just as sinister beings continually threaten to drag the young spirit-child Azaro into the mythical limbo-like oblivion from which he came, corrupt politicians constantly threaten to condemn newly independent Nigeria, for which Azaro provides an apparent metonym and which the novel expressly describes as ‘an abiku nation’ (p. 494), to the realm of intangibles from which concepts of
nationhood emerge. Nigeria, as its ‘political parties waged their battles in the spirit spaces, beyond the realm of our earthly worries’, fighting and hurling ‘counter-mythologies at one another’ (p. 495), similarly to Azaro, as the spirits fight over him, struggles to find root in ‘the realms of manifestation’ (p. 496).\textsuperscript{160} The comparably grotesque supernatural phenomena of Valenzuela’s \textit{The Lizard’s Tale} are undoubtedly projections of the disturbed mind of its narrator Witchdoc. However, they also provoke further interpretation and analogously constitute a metaphorical embodiment of and a sardonic comment on the bureaucratic distortion of the facts of history in Peronist and post-Peronist Argentina. The Witchdoc, a self-proclaimed self-impregnated hemaphrodite, presents himself as a ‘fathermother neuron’,\textsuperscript{161} who has the unilateral power to create the world. While this egregious claim is evidently a hallucination inspired by his egomaniaical neurosis, it also satirically incarnates the self-serving attempts of successive Argentine governments, who create narcissistic myths, confiscate newspapers (1983, p. 232) and “disappear” any opposition (p. 295), to dictate historical reality.

The distortion in magical realist texts consistently metaphorically parallels and ironically remarks on a past that is itself marked by distortion. However, the factual depiction of the manifestly fictional, as I have suggested, also functions as a device that mimic and mocks the authority of the realist discourse, which discursively constructs and simultaneously sanctions those partisan recreations of historical reality.

History is inseparable from the realist genre. The realist premise that narrative accurately captures reality is crucial to history, which can ultimately survive, as Hancock puts it, in ‘Magic or realism: The marvellous in Canadian fiction’, ‘only in the books that have been written about it’ (1986, p. 33). However, the supposition of verisimilitude also renders history, in the words of Ashcroft, in ‘Against the tide of time: Peter Carey’s interpolation into history’,

\textit{a prominent ... instrument for ... control ... For at base, the myth of a value free, “scientific” view of the past, the myth of the beauty of order, the myth of the story of history as a simple representation of the continuity of events, authorized nothing less than the construction of world reality} (1996, pp. 194-5).

Magical realist literature radically undermines the realist ‘myth’ that underlies history and, consequently, history’s hegemonic ‘construction of world reality’.

\textsuperscript{160} The similarities to Rushdie’s magical realist novel, in which Saleem similarly provides a metonym for the Indian nation, which struggles to establish itself in the ‘realms of manifestation’, are striking.

\textsuperscript{161} ‘la neurona padremadre’ (1983, p. 75).
Magical realism, in its representation of the unreal as real, engages in an internal subversion of the mimetic claims of the realist genre and, thus, of the probity of its worldview. The ironically contaminated realist procedure of magical realist fiction encourages the reader to identify realism as a beguiling strategy of narration rather than a guileless reflection of reality and to recognize the reality it purportedly portrays as a literary construct rather than a transcendent fact. Magical realist novels demonstrate that the realist narratives of history, as Bhabha contends, 'are ideological productions without any of the inevitability that they claim.' (1984, p. 97) While they seem 'revelatory' (p. 96), the 'reality' they allegedly divulge 'is not given but produced'. Saldivar, in 'Postmodern realism', similarly suggests that magical realist literature shows that the realist text through which the past is allegedly conveyed 'functions ideologically: it offers itself as a neutral reflection of the world when it is but one way of imagining a world.' (1991b, p. 522) According to Augusto Roa Bastos, in 'Writing: A metaphor for exile', '[n]arration is not, as is commonly thought, the art of describing reality in words, but the art of making the word itself real.' (1987, p. 304) Magical realism, in its depiction of the fantastical as actual, emphasizes precisely the hallucinogenic world building powers of narrative and, indeed, of language, per se. Tzvetan Todorov, in The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, presents the 'supernatural', which 'is born of language' and 'exist[s] only in words', as a 'symbol of language' (1975, p. 82). The marvelous, Todorov suggests, is both 'consequence and ... proof' of the fundamental capacity of the word for world fabrication. It is both 'consequence and ... proof' of the poststructuralist principle that language does not mimetically reflect an extra-textual reality but enigmatically creates a chimerical reality out of the differential play of textual signs. In magical realist fiction, the fantastic analogously serves (not only as an ironic metaphor for a character's state of mind or a historical moment that is marked by distortion, as I have suggested, but also) as an unequivocal 'symbol' of the imaginary nature of the narrative world. Thus, according to Donoso, magical realism (rather than being in the nature of the margins) is 'in the nature of writing' (qu. Gazarian Gautier 1989, p. 62). Rawdon Wilson similarly argues that magical realism, in its representation of the intangible as tangible, simply highlights what narrative 'does best: imagine worldhood' (1995, p. 226). In In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory, he argues that magical realism treats its 'abnormal, experientially impossible, and empirically unverifiable events' in a 'natural way ...
as if they had always been there’ simply because ‘the possibility of their abnormality had been promised from the moment that the fictional world could be imagined’ (1990, pp. 204-5). ‘The magicalness of magic realism’, he concludes, ‘lies in the way it makes explicit (...) what must always be present. The magic is simply the foregrounding of narrative’s essential literariness.’ (p. 206) In fact, Rawdon Wilson claims that ‘[c]anonical realism might be seen as a more difficult mode of literary production simply because it must run consistently against the grain’ and engage in a ‘muscular suppression of narrative potential.’ Magical realism, by contrast, which embraces and embodies the enchanted nature of the narrative world, is ‘the most fundamental mode of storytelling’ (p. 207).\textsuperscript{162}

However, magical realism is, moreover, a subversive ‘mode of storytelling’, which aims to show that realism is a misleading ‘mode of literary production’ that entails not only the ‘muscular suppression’ of the hallucinatory character of linguistic representations but, moreover, often the autocratic repression of historical truth.

However, as magical realist literature also reveals, truth is by no means an easy thing to ascertain. Magical realist fiction sabotages, as I have suggested, not only the assumption that realism objectively represents reality but also the presumption that reality is self-evident and (at least in theory) objectively representable, which is a second premise that informs and validates history. As Saldívar puts it, in ‘Ideology and deconstruction in Macondo’, the magical realist novel constitutes a ‘satiric’ (1985, p. 31) ‘ideological expression of ... doubts about truth in historical texts and ... about conventional reality’ (p. 40). Indeed, magical realist narrative communicates not only that the reality of realism is always a fiction but also that reality, in general, is always a fabrication. Thus, the fantastic in magical realist narrative functions not only as a ‘symbol’ of the fundamental hallucinatory character of language but also as an emblem of the essential illusory nature of the real. According to Robert Scholes, in Fabulation and Metafiction, ‘[i]n life, we do not attain the real. What we reach is a notion of the real’ (1979, p. 7). Magical realist literature continually illustrates precisely that the reality we experience is merely a ‘notion’ of reality. In the magical realist text, reality is alternatively, as we have seen, a cultural construction, an individual projection or ‘the mendacious invention of politicians, generals, and oligarchs’ (Gallagher 1973, p. 89). In

\textsuperscript{162} Borges, as we have seen, put forward a similar argument regarding fantasy, a genre that similarly recognizes and epitomizes, as Todorov likewise suggests, the fantastical nature of textual representation. However, unlike the genre of fantasy, as I have suggested, magical realist literature continues to reach towards the real.
magical realist fiction, as Chanady argues, '[t]he idea of an objective and unchangeable reality that one can supposedly apprehend and represent is replaced by the emphasis on perception as the subjective creation and production of a new reality of the imagination.' (1995, p. 139) This accentuation of 'the relativity of reality' (eds Young & Hollaman, 1984, p. 4), as I have suggested, radically undermines the ontological possibility of a single true reality, which in turn further erodes the unilateral truth claims of the realist discourse of history.

The subversion of the authority of the realist genre upon which history relies is self-consciously played out in Rushdie's self-conscious magical realist novel. Saleem, who engages in a self-proclaimed 'chutnification' (1981, p. 459) of the past, presents his narrative as a faithful reconstruction of the history of the postcolonial subcontinent. However, the ostentatiously fantastical Saleem, who describes himself as 'the bomb in Bombay' (p. 463), functions moreover as a deconstructive device strategically planted in the realist narrative of Indian history to explode its lies. Indeed, much to the chagrin of Saleem's ludic audience Padma, who wants a conventionally told realist tale, Saleem continually and comically undermines the realist illusion of his historical narrative. To begin with, Saleem's representation of his supernatural escapades flagrantly spoils the mimetic illusion. Padma objects to Saleem's flights into fantasy precisely because they ruin her 'faith in [his] narrative' (p. 211). However, Saleem, who reports to the reader "behind Padma's back", as it were, confides that he manages to regain her trust by certain 'devices', which he describes as both 'naively honest' and 'wily as foxes' (p. 211) and which clearly ironically evoke the simultaneously simplistic and deceitful operations of the realist discourse. In fact, while realism, as Stan Anson puts it, in 'The postcolonial fiction', 'is formally authoritarian, denying its own fictitiousness, pretending to omniscience, manipulating information, forcing closure' (1991, p. 66), Saleem rejects or parodies all of these realist conventions. As we have seen, Saleem refuses narrative 'omniscience' and, instead, not only reveals his narrative presence but also flamboyantly emphasizes the subjective nature of his subcontinental history, which always fundamentally and farcically revolves around him. In addition, far from being 'formally authoritarian', Saleem candidly and happily admits to 'manipulating information'. He calls his history a 'creative' work (Rushdie 1981, p. 459) and confesses that he abides by the principle that 'what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe' (pp. 270-1). Indeed, far from
‘denying’ the ‘fictitiousness’ of his history, he even calls attention to and reflects on the flaws in his account. For example, he ponders, would the confession of his nurse Mary Pereira that she had swapped his and Shiva’s nametags following their simultaneous midnight births ‘have come as a shock to a true telepath?’ (p. 460) In response to his self-posed rhetorical question, he makes a parodic attempt at ‘forcing closure’ and stubbornly and comically rebuts: ‘[i]t happened that way because that’s how it happened.’ (p. 461) Similarly, in regards to his report of Shiva’s death, Saleem concedes: ‘[t]o tell the truth, I lied’. (p. 443)

As this comical Zeno-like paradox, which blurs the line between truth and lie, itself suggests, Rushdie also consistently undermines not only the translucency of realism but also the transparency of reality. Saleem frequently explicitly reflects on the difficulty of determining the real. He attributes the dilemma to his naturally multiplicitous and heterogeneous home of India, in which he is ‘beset by an infinity of alternative realities’ (p. 326), as well as to the duplicitous constructions of bureaucrats, which have cast him ‘adrift, disorientated, amid an equally infinite number of falsenesses, unrealities and lies’. However, Saleem suggests that even the aforementioned ‘infinity of alternative realities’ are actually ‘unrealities’. Like Borges’ magical realist literature and Garcia Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude, Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children repeatedly portrays reality as a chimerical linguistic construct. For example, Saleem describes the Indian nation as a ‘mass fantasy ... a collective fiction’ (p. 112), which is formed by ‘walls of words’ (p. 189). The various religions around which Indians organize their lives are also ‘mighty fantasies’ (p. 112). Money, a new god that Indians start to worship after independence and around which they begin to construct their lives, is another omnipotent illusion. Like Saleem’s father Ahmed Sinai, when he turns to the stock market, new Eastern and old Western capitalists alike ‘ride high on the abstract undulations of the money market’ (p. 202), their ‘financial coups’ helping to obscure their ‘steady divorce from reality’. Indeed, Saleem suggests that the entire world is, as Hindus envision it to be, ‘Maya’ or ‘a kind of dream’ (p. 211).

\[163\] Rushdie appears to acknowledge his debt to both writers in his characterization of some of the supernaturally gifted midnight’s children of his novel. The ‘wealthy tea-planter’s son in Shillong who had the blessing (or possibly the curse) of being incapable of forgetting anything he ever saw or heard’ (p. 199) is obviously an ode to Borges’ ‘Funes, the Memorious’. Similarly, the ‘scion of a great Lucknow family’, who ‘had completely mastered, by the age of ten, the lost arts of alchemy, with which he regenerated the fortunes of his ancient but dissipated house’, the ‘dhobi’s daughter from Madras’ who ‘could fly higher than any bird simply by closing her eyes’ and the ‘Benarsi silversmith’s son’ who ‘was given the gift of travelling in time and thus prophesying the future as
In such an environment of omnipresent ‘trickery, artifice and deceit’, Saleem asks, ‘[w]hat is truth?’

However, as I have suggested, magical realist literature is not solely about deconstructing realism and reality in order to expose the lies of history. Magical realist fiction also often attempts to reconstruct realism in order to reveal the truth about the past. As Higgins puts it, ‘despite … awareness of the limitations of literature’, writers of magical realism ‘nonetheless [endeavour] … to depict the world’ (1990, p. 146). Magical realism, as Scholes argues (referring to a well nigh identical phenomenon that he chooses to call modern fabulation), ‘accepts, even emphasizes its fallibilism, its inability to reach all the way to the real, but it continues to look toward reality.’ (1979, p. 8)

Midnight’s Children certainly contains a reconstructive plan as well as a deconstructive schedule. It is also well aware of the paradoxical nature of its dual agenda. Saleem, despite highlighting the deceptive nature of his narrative and the unreliability of his representation of reality, nevertheless contradictorily hopes that his chutnified history will ‘possess the authentic taste of truth’ (Rushdie 1981, p. 459). Indeed, Saleem insists, on the first page of his exorbitant tale, that he must ‘end up meaning – yes, meaning – something … above all things, I fear absurdity’ (p. 9). His plea for meaning, twice stressed, is twofold. Saleem begs to be interpreted as more than just a preposterous egomaniacal fictitious character. He is, as I have suggested, a metonym for the distorted dream of Indian nationhood and the falsified history of postcolonial India. Nevertheless, Saleem’s appeal for meaning is also an exhortation against the surrender to political corruption and historical perversion or poststructuralist dissolution and representational relativism of the ideal of India and the history of the subcontinent, which he figuratively embodies. Saleem’s Sundarbans jungle escapade clearly illustrates Rushdie’s opposition to a nihilistic retreat into a chimerical world of pure illusion as an amoral ‘mistake’ (p. 443), which is equivalent to a surrender to death, as the Muslim heaven resonance of the Sundarbans jungle suggests. In the ‘forest of illusions’, Saleem is bitten by a snake, which restores his family history, and he is finally evicted from this seductive but ultimately annihilative demi-Eden by a tidal wave (‘even though’, Saleem feels ‘bound to admit’, ‘there was no tidal wave recorded that month’ (p. 368).) He lands back in India, living in a Communist

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well as clarifying the past’ (p. 199) clearly pay tribute to characters in García Márquez’ One Hundred Years of Solitude.
magicians’ ghetto with ‘people whose hold on reality was absolute’ (p. 399) and who restore to Saleem his real name, teach him the truth about the war and imbue him with a ‘fever-for-revolution’ (p. 400). While Saleem is, in one way, a victim of the corruption of history when he flees to the Sundarbans jungle, he deliberately loses himself in the hallucinatory world that corruption has engendered, and the jungle episode clearly contains a criticism of his pusillanimous attempt to flee from historical responsibility. Saleem, as he himself reflects, ‘had come through amnesia and been shown the extent of its immorality’ (p. 445). The ‘lessons of the jungle’ (p. 369), which are that a retreat to unreality is tantamount to death and that a political engagement with historical reality is a moral necessity, are manifest. Saleem diligently pickles history for his ‘amnesiac nation’ in order to ‘give it shape and form — that is to say, meaning. (I have mentioned my fear of absurdity.)’ (p. 461) Like Scheherazade, to whom the one thousand and one midnight’s children pay obvious tribute, Saleem tells “his story” in a bid to avoid annihilation. He refuses to surrender his nation and its history to corruption and skepticism. He attempts to reveal the truth about the past for the sake of justice and of the future, for without ‘a firm hold on reality’ (p. 349), as he discovered in Pakistan, people are ‘willing to turn to their leaders for advice on what was real and what was not’ (p. 308) and are ‘highly susceptible to the influence of legends and gossip.’ (p. 349)

However, as Saleem’s Zeno-like paradox, ‘to tell the truth: I lied’, ironically epitomizes, the task of establishing truth from lie is well nigh impossible, when both are dependent on the intangible and hallucinogenic substance of language. Indeed, how can one determine historical truth when, as Saleem puts it, ‘the past exists only in one’s memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them’ and ‘it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred’ (p. 443)? Inversely, what is the truth in a country where ‘[r]eality’, as Saleem points out, is so obviously ‘a question of perspective’ (p. 165) and where there appears to be ‘as many versions of India as Indians’ (p. 269)? For Saleem, ‘[r]eal’ remains inexorably ‘a thing concealed just over the horizon’ (p. 79). However, Saleem’s Zeno-like paradox points to not only the difficulty in determining ‘true’ but also the rationale behind his self-consciously distorted history. Saleem, in order to tell the truth, can only lie. The most honest history lesson that he can offer in his pickle jars is the necessity for skepticism. Truth, as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ‘does not seek words’ and can only be ‘restored by
Reducing the lie to an absurdity' (1981, p. 309). Significantly, while Saleem searches for truth, in the end that he writes for his history, in which he attends crowded Indian independence day celebrations, he is overwhelmed by 'lies being spoken in the night' and is 'sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes' (p. 463). Saleem ultimately leaves not only his deconstructed pickled history but also the poststructuralist pickle of history to his elephant eared son Aadam Aziz, hoping that he will be 'a member of a second generation of magical children who would grow up far tougher than the first, not looking for their fate in prophecy or the stars, but forging it in the implacable furnaces of their wills.' (p. 447)

This final scene, in which Saleem, who is ultimately nothing more than a linguistic construct, surrenders himself to a poststructuralist apocalypse, is distinctly reminiscent of the whirlwind finale to García Márquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude, in which the last Bucedía is annihilated upon realizing that he and his world are literary inventions. García Márquez' novel, similarly to Rushdie's, as we have seen, 'narrates a crisis of representation ... and a loss of referential meaning' (Irvine 1998, p. 73). This poststructuralist crisis, as both García Márquez' and Rushdie's magical realist novels repeatedly indicate, originated from historical misrepresentations of reality. However, it is also exacerbated by the necessary subversion of the authority of realism and of the objectivity of the real, which magical realism carries out in order to challenge those corrupt constructions of the past. Paradoxically, while this deconstruction provides room for the reconstruction of oppositional narratives and truth claims, it also fundamentally undermines the authority of attempted representations of historical fact. Realism and reality may be, as Bhabha puts it, 'necessary fictions' (1984, p. 97), but they remain inevitably and, as magical realist texts such as Rushdie's and García Márquez' suggest, almost tragi-comically that: indispensable and yet unattainable.

Other magical realist texts similarly struggle to overcome the poststructuralist crisis, which was brought about by historical corruption and which is highlighted by their own deconstruction of those historical lies, as they attempt to reassert truth. Mudrooroo's Master of the Ghost Dreaming, for example, attempts to reveal that the imperialist history that valorized English 'civilization' and denigrated Aboriginal culture, as Mudrooroo himself avers, is 'myth masquerading as objective history' (1990, p. 169). Mudrooroo's magical realist novel continually
undermines the purported realism of English history and the alleged accuracy of its representations of Aboriginal reality. Fada's supposed 'anthropological' (1991, p. 60) portrait of Ludjee, for instance, for which he asks her to pose naked and with certain 'authentic' (p. 53) Aboriginal props, is actually the picture of an 'English prostitute' (p. 62), whom Fada fantasizes about while drawing Ludjee. Significantly, while Fada becomes lost in erotic dreams as he composes his fabulous portrait of Aboriginal reality, Ludjee undertakes a supernatural journey on her "Dreaming" companion, Manta Ray. Mudrooroo's magical realist novel, in contradiction to his critical texts on magical realism) also appears to reject the idea that an essential Aboriginal reality exists to be realistically depicted. Jangamuttuk's mimicry of English fashions in the ceremony he conducts to appropriate their power and the initiation of the African slave Wadawaka suggest, as Margaret Fee argues, in 'The signifying writer and the ghost reader: Mudrooroo's Master of the Ghost Dreaming and Writing from the Fringe', 'that Aboriginality is not fixed, but an active process of transformation, resistance and renewal.' (1992, p. 29). Likewise, the novel presents the English world, with its rigid hierarchical social structures, scientific beliefs and Christian worldview, as a linguistically constructed "ghost" world inexorably adrift in a world that lacks any fundamental truth. However, Master of the Ghost Dreaming also clearly attempts to reconstruct history from an Aboriginal point of view and, as Mudrooroo puts it, in 'A literature of aboriginality', to 'get at the underlying "truth"' of history (1992, p. 31). The ice castle in the "Ghost Dreaming" world forms an analogy for not only the "white home", as I have suggested, but also for what Mudrooroo calls the 'white construct' of history (1990, p. 169), which Mudrooroo, similarly to Jangamuttuk, attempts to infiltrate. Like Jangamuttuk, Mudrooroo appropriates the empowering discourse of white history in an attempt to remedy its malignant lies. However, just as Jangamuttuk finds that Mada's laudanum, which he pilfers from the ice castle, is only an opiate, Mudrooroo discovers that the realist discourse used to represent historical reality is also fundamentally delusory rather than truly empowering. Significantly, the novel ends with a striking departure from historical realism and historical fact. While the surviving Aborigines from Flinders Island were moved back to Hobart, where they died, the surviving Aborigines in Mudrooroo's novel commandeer a schooner and escape. Before the Aborigines flee, Fada's inventory of stores, which sounds suspiciously like his inventory of stories, is blown away by a gust of wind, which is itself reminiscent of the wind
that blows at the end of García Márquez’ and Rushdie’s magical realist novels. Jangamuttuk laughs and comments: ‘strong paper, eh boss?’ (1991, p. 137). Mudrooroo, too, in his portrayal of fantasy as fact, scoffs at the authoritative claims of linguistic representations. As the even more ostentatiously fabulous and metafictional nature of the following volumes in the Master of the Ghost Dreaming quartet (*The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999) and *The Promised Land* (2000)) suggest, Mudrooroo appears to resign himself, as Fee puts it, to a vision of ‘the world as a world of representations, rather than as a world of rationally-comprehensible objective facts.’ (1992, p. 20)

Okri’s *The Famished Road*, like many other magical realist texts, also exposes representations of historical reality as little more than the strategic fantasies of governing powers. Indeed, the novel, as we have seen, indicates not only that politicians’ partisan depictions of the past are, in fact, spirit world chimeras but also that the Nigerian nation and, indeed, the entire world, which are constituted by the hallucinogenic substance of language, belong to a realm of ‘illusions’ (1991, p. 6). Azaro counsels: ‘[t]he world that we see and the world that is there are two different things.’ (p. 498) However, while ‘history ... fully demonstrates how things of the world partake of the condition of the spirit-child’ (p. 487) and are always vulnerable to a withdrawal into the purely linguistic and idealistic world from which they were born, the novel certainly does not advocate a flight into a realm of fantasy. Dad and Azaro fight epic battles against historical corruption and the spirit world in order to defend and remain in historical reality. Indeed, the novel suggests that capitulation to the spirit world, which is the domain of the dead, is tantamount to surrender to annihilation. For example, when the thugs of the Party of the Rich destroy Azaro’s village in vengeance for the town’s previous angry attack on the lying ‘politicians of bad milk’ (p. 152), the photographer, who has been chased away, is not present to chronicle the incident. Azaro reflects: ‘because the photographer hadn’t been there to record what had happened that night, nothing of the events appeared in the newspapers. It was as if the events were never real.’ (pp. 182-3) The power of words to construct reality, Okri suggests, remains important. However, significantly, neither the *Famished Road* nor the two sequels to the novel, *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998), ever find a final resolution to the poststructuralist crisis. They depict only a hard fought and endless struggle to defend truth.
Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* similarly entails both a deconstructive and a reconstructive impetus and acknowledges its inevitable representational double bind. Hodgins' novel is also primarily concerned with history and the need to expose lies and find the truth about the past. The book opens with the figure of Strabo Becker, an amateur historian who is researching the history of the ironically named Revelations Colony of Truth and of the legendary tyrant Donal Kenneally, who headed that cult-like society on Vancouver Island.\(^{164}\) The novel reveals that Kenneally was a 'father of lies' (1994 (1977), p. 150), who brainwashed his "flock" to follow his commands with 'word-pictures of the civilization they were building' (p. 152) and other 'incredible acts of magic'. The Revelations Colony of Truth thus provides a perfect example of the power of the word to invent the world. It also demonstrates the importance of holding onto truth. Truth, however, is well nigh impossible to grasp. When Becker interviews Kenneally's widow Lily Hayworth, she taunts him with the fact that his understanding of historical truth is dependent upon her linguistic recreation of it. She says: 'I get a kick out of knowing I can tell you any kind of lie and you'd believe it.' (p. 341) Hayworth also suggests that truth may be fundamentally unattainable. She reflects: 'there's a pretty good chance there's no such thing as natural, or it's buried too deep to come out ... we slap on layer after layer of what we think is life but is only pretense.' (p. 341) These lessons are absorbed into Strabo's history (and Hodgins' novel), which presents heterogeneous accounts of the past constructed by various witnesses and newspaper reports rather than a unilateral narrative that offers certain facts.

Becker, as Lucia Boldrini points out, in 'The ragged edge of miracles or: A word or two on those Jack Hodgins novels', is not only an amateur historian but also a 'professional ferryman who bears souls and bodies across the waters, crossing the boundaries between different worlds' (1999, p. 88). Becker, in his role as a historian, contrary to the traditional ferryman of Greek mythology, attempts to transport the dead back to life. However, at the same time, as Becker's other job as a two-way ferryman for traffic between Vancouver and Vancouver Island indicates, he also inevitably returns them to the spirit realm. Significantly, the

\(^{164}\) While the cult and its leader are fictional, a number of similar cult-like communities did settle in Vancouver Island in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, the genuine historical injustices perpetrated against the indigenous communities of the region form a constant backdrop to the fictional events of the novel. The character of Julius Champeye, for example, dwells on the historical hanging of two Siam-a-sit men for the alleged murder of a white colonist and the biased nature of the 'official records' of that incident (1994 (1977), p. 315). The link between the fictional
novel ends with a chaotic scene in which the real dissolves into the dizzyingly unreal. At the wedding reception of the novel’s present day protagonists Maggie Kyle and Wade Powers, Maggie’s bridesmaid, Cora Manson, unwraps an overwhelming multiplicity of wedding gifts, which become increasingly fantastical and include “[h]ollow promises’, ‘[t]ruth’, ‘[d]espair’ and ‘[r]econciliation’ (p. 454). Wade’s other worldly double then arrives to transport the newly weds to the House of Revelations, Kenneally’s old mansion, where they plan to live.

Carter’s magical realist text *Nights at the Circus* is fundamentally involved, as Carter herself puts it, in the ‘demythologizing business’ (qu. Katsavos 1994, p. 11). The object of the ‘demythologizing’ agenda of this novel, in which Fevvers presents her fantastical history, complete with documentary “proof” (1984, p. 85), to a male journalist, is clearly the realist discourse of patriarchal history and its warped constructions of female identity. Fevvers is the would-be butterfly who emerges from the de(con)struction of the male constructed chrysalis of femininity. Fevvers’ feminist guardian Lizzie believes that the winged heroine will be ‘the pure child of the century’ (p. 25). However, as Fevvers’ ambiguous status as a winged woman suggests, the novel is unable to ascertain precisely what is the ‘pure’ woman. Indeed, ‘pure’ reality appears to be fundamentally unidentifiable. As Walser’s adventures living within a Siberian tribe comically demonstrate, reality is made up of a series of competing hallucinations, ‘which impinged on real reality only inadvertently’ (p. 253) and which are thus equally illegitimate. Consequently, ‘there existed no difference between fact and fiction’ (p. 260). If Fevvers, as Lizzie originally hopes, epitomizes ‘the New Age in which no women will be bound down to the ground’ (p. 25), she symbolizes only a ‘New Age’ of theoretical freedom through poststructuralist skepticism in which identity and reality, in general, cannot be ‘bound down to the ground’. At the end of the novel, Walser, now restored to his senses or, at least, his original world view, asks Fevvers, ‘why did you go to such lengths, once upon a time, to convince me you were the “only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world”?’ (p. 294) Fevvers ambiguously responds ‘I really fooled you!’ (p. 295), and the novel ends, similarly to so many other magical realist texts, with a ‘spiralling tornado’ that sweeps through the world.
Magical realism, as I have suggested, is an inherently and frequently self-consciously deconstructive literary genre, which undermines not only the credibility of realism but also the certitude of reality. Thus, magical realist fiction certainly does not support a Carpentierian "marginal realist" interpretation, which relics, by contrast, upon the idea that the narrative form involves the unproblematic revision of realism and reality. Indeed, while advocates of the Carpentierian "magical margins" theory suggest that magical realist novels vindicate the fantastical, magical realist texts often seem to manifest a distinctly ambiguous and occasionally even critical attitude toward the marvelous.

Okri's *The Famished Road*, for example, despite the author's encouragement of a Carpentierian "marginal realist" interpretation of magical realism, often undermines the validity of and even reproaches a belief in the fantastical. For example, at the beginning of the novel, when Mum consults a herbalist to locate Azaro, this recourse to magic is ineffectual. Mum goes on to find Azaro through the newspaper (1991, p. 31). Later in the narrative, when Azaro, disinclined to attend school, stays at home in the compound, he hears the women "maliciously" (p. 100) gossiping about Madame Koto. They speculate that she is a "witch who ate her babies when they were still in her womb" and blame her for all the evil in their lives. Azaro listens for a while and then decides "that being punished at school was infinitely better." (p. 101) Azaro chooses education over superstition. Valenzuela, like Okri, has represented magical realism as a "marginal realism". However, she has also contradictorily suggested that her magical realist novel *The Lizard's Tale* is "a book that is very critical of my country's fascination ... with dogma and doctrine - the pillars of Peronism" and of "this religious pagan and quite stifling side of Argentina" (qu. García Pinto 1988, p. 209), which resulted in the nation falling "into the hands of a sorceror." (qu. Price 1990, p. 99) This is certainly how the text, which satirizes and subverts the Witchdoc's purported supernatural powers, often reads. Rushdie's self-reflexive and irony laden magical realist narrative *Midnight's Children* itself suggests that the fabulously gifted midnight's children "can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nature, whose defeat was entirely desirable" (1981, p. 200). Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, as Hart avers, also appears to "undercut" (1989, p. 162), if somewhat more subtly, the alleged marvelous capabilities of its female protagonist Clara. The narrator reports that "[t]he mental powers of Clara bothered no one and produced no great disorder; they almost
always manifested themselves in matters of minor importance and within the strict privacy of the home. Following an earthquake that devastates the Trueba estate of Tres Marías, Clara herself recognizes that her ‘three-legged table and her capacity to divine the future in tea leaves were useless’. She abandons them to help the needy. In fact, the magically infiltrated domestic narrative of Clara is eventually displaced by the history of her politically involved granddaughter Alba. According to Foreman, ‘Allende’s magical realism gives way in the end to political realism.’ (1995, p. 286) The novel, like other magical realist texts, certainly attempts to ‘rescue the past’, which the Chilean military, in the aftermath of their coup, ‘changed with a stroke of the pen ... erasing incidents, ideologies, and historical figures of which the regime disapproved.’ However, it also suggests that the history it attempts to recoup, which is reliant upon Clara’s dreamy memoirs, ‘written in a child’s delicate calligraphy’, is difficult to categorically ascertain and depict. Significantly, the closing line of the novel fails to bring about a resolution to the poststructuralist dilemma and, instead, enacting a metafictional loop, returns the reader to the beginning words of the story. Allende’s novel, contrary to Foreman’s suggestion, like other magical realist texts, cannot achieve the certainty about representation and reality that distinguishes the realist discourse. However, a pursuit of historical truth nevertheless remains crucial. The ambiguous attitude that magical realist narratives, such as Allende’s, evidence towards the fantastic can be seen as a manifestation of this concern with dispelling myth and achieving justice. This imperative is undermined not only by a contentedness with lies but also by a surrender to the poststructuralist crisis, for which the fantastic provides a symbol, which has been engendered by historical corruption but which is also ironically highlighted by the magical realist text’s own equally necessary deconstructive project. As Williamson argues, noting the gradual ‘degeneration’ and eventual ‘destruction’ of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, advocates of the Carpentierian theory unaccountably ‘regard magical realism as an entirely positive, liberating feature’ (1987, p. 46).

165 ‘Los poderes mentales de Clara no molestaban a nadie y no producían mayor desorden; se manifestaban casi siempre en asuntos de poca importancia y en la estricta intimidad del hogar.’ (2001 (1982), p. 17)
166 ‘De nada le sirvieron la mesa de tres patas o la capacidad de adivinar el porvenir en las hojas del té’ (p. 178).
167 ‘recitar las cosas del pasado’ (p. 452).
168 ‘De una plumada ... cambiaron ... borrando los episodios, las ideologías y los personajes que el régimen desaprobara.’ (p. 402)
169 ‘escrito con una delicada caligrafía infantil’.
According to Williamson, García Márquez’ archetypal magical realist novel actually ‘condemns the effects of magical realism’ (p. 60), that is, the inclination to accept the unreal as real, as the ‘malaise that causes the decline of the Buendia family’ (p. 46). Indeed, even Carpentier, the progenitor of the theory that magical realism is a “marginal realism”, in his seminal magical realist novel The Kingdom of This World, seems to criticize a retreat into an imaginary world as an escape from historical responsibility. When Ti Noel transforms himself into animal form at the end of the story, he attempts to join a gaggle of geese, but they do not accept him. The narrator relates that his rejection by the geese is a punishment for his cowardice (1997 (1949), p. 138). Ti Noel subsequently returns to human form and leads yet another rebellion against tyranny. The message is clear. An engagement with history, however difficult, is a moral necessity.

Magical realism, in recognition of its responsibility to history, always offers, at the very least, as Rawdon Wilson puts it, an ‘opening toward an experiential world’ (1995, p. 220). If the magical realist text does not offer more than this highly tentative and, indeed, deliberately tainted verisimilitude, this is because it recognizes that it is comprised of and compromised as an illusory and unreliable ‘textual space that makes unlikelihood possible’. According to Gari Laguardia, in ‘Marvelous realism/marvelous criticism’, magical realism is ‘an apt description of ... avowals of literature’s autonomy on the one hand and its participation in the world on the other’ (1986, p. 317). Indeed, the ‘dual worldhood’ (Rawdon Wilson 1995, p. 226) of linguistic representation, rather than the hybrid realm of the “magical margins”, is the only composite reality that magical realist literature epitomizes.
From the Interrogated to the Interrogator: 
Magical Realism Writes Back

According to the Carpentierian “marginal realist” characterization of magical realism, writers of that narrative genre, be they from what Faris calls the ‘intriguing distance’ (1995, p. 163) of the Third World or from the less abstracted marginal regions of the First World, inhabit a veritable fantasyland that inspires their fiction. Marginal authors of magical realism have been some of the biggest advocates of the Carpentierian “magical margins” theory. They affirm its authenticity, proclaim its autochthony and harness its political potential as a strategic statement of marginal autonomy. Richard White, in *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity* 1688–1980, argues:

[a] national identity is an invention. There is no point in asking whether one version ... is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible – and necessarily false. They have all been artificially imposed upon a diverse landscape and population, and a variety of untidy social relationships, attitudes and emotions. When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve. (1982, p. viii)

To query the truth of parochial discourses, as White suggests, may be somewhat trite. The Carpentierian theory of the “magical margins” is certainly patently and inherently fraudulent. However, to question whose ‘creation’ it is and ‘whose interests’ it promotes, as White argues, is integral. The Carpentierian hypothesis of the “magical margins” is certainly neither the indigenous philosophy nor the politically wise essentialist premise that its marginal proponents believe it to be. In fact, it is an imported lie and, true only to a strategically imperialistic Western paradigm, serves only that manichean system’s sovereign mastermind, ultimately providing the hegemonic center with nothing less than justification of its authority and titillation of its exoticism.

For Durix, the literary category of magical realism, which has become synonymous with the spurious and exoticist “magical margins” notion, has itself almost lost its ‘purely generic’ ‘validity’ and been transformed into little more than a ‘commercial’ ‘publishing’ jingle (1998, p. 147). However, magical realist literature itself does not sustain the nationalistic myth that it is a “marginal realism” or the idea that it is simply a marketing strategy and, in fact, redeems itself as a perfectly legitimate and decidedly transgressive narrative genre. As Martin similarly contends, while the ‘ideologies’ that ‘underpin the concept of “magical realism”’ are ‘pernicious’ and ‘racist’ ‘optical illusions’ (1987, p. 99),
magical realist fiction itself does not promulgate these 'ideologies'. Indeed, magical realist texts inspire not a rhetoric based on exoticism but, as Alfred J. MacAdam argues, in *Modern Latin American Narratives: The Dreams of Reason*, 'a rhetoric based on satire' (1977, p. 2). Magical realist novels are ultimately about, as Martin puts it, 'the myths of history and their demystification' (1989, p. 223).
CONCLUSION

From the Strange to the Familiar:
Cracking the Case of Magical Realism

Jameson, as we have seen, comments on the lasting mystical allure of the magical realist category. However, magical realist fiction itself has proven to be even more resilient. Layers of alluring mystical misrepresentation have obscured it for decades, and yet magical realism has survived to take its place in the literary canon in the critical light of day. In that old school line up of narrative traditions, magical realist literature certainly stands out. It challenges the hegemony of stalwarts, such as realism, and attracts new attention to the significance of the underling, fantasy. Indeed, it queries the hierarchical arrangement as well as the fundamental separation of the two genres. However, it does not stop there. Magical realism even calls into question the venerable tradition of history. It also interrogates the tangible basis of language and the ontological existence of reality. Magical realism has met the fears of conservatives around the world. Things may never be the same.

The idea that magical realist writing is derivative of magical realist painting is one of the principal misconceptions that has historically kept and, indeed, often continues to keep magical realist fiction in the dark. While the magical realist label may have originally denoted an obscure style of European art, magical realist literature, which emerged from postcolonial Latin America, is a unique entity. Magical realist painting depicts the mundane as magical. Magical realist texts, by contrast, portray the unrealistic as realistic. The differences were obvious from the inception of the literary genre. As Michael Wood argues, in ‘In reality’, ‘[w]hen Angel Flores and others accommodated the idea of magical realism to narrative fiction, Roh’s chief idea was turned upside down.’ (2002, p. 10) Indeed, the attractive title, a certain element of mystery and widespread confusion regarding a definition are perhaps the only traits that the two forms of magical realism now share in common.

The other primary misunderstanding about the narrative category of magical realism, which has contributed to obscure its true nature, is that it forms a “marginal realism”. According to this idea, magical realism, like coffee or coconuts, is a native product of the “magical margins”. Writers of magical
realism, waylaid and misled by timeworn, pervasive and insidious imperialistic notions about marginal identity, nationalistic impulses or the exoticist demands of the Western dominated publishing industry, have been some of the staunchest proponents of this dubious idea. However, magical realist texts themselves, in an ironic demonstration of Roland Barthes's dictum citing the death of the author, do not support this spurious premise. Some magical realist novels, including those of two of its Latin American pioneers, Carpentier and Asturias, may attempt to represent the allegedly mythologically saturated world of marginal communities. However, similarly to the magical realist texts of their fellow magical realist narrative progenitor Borges, they also manifest a fundamental and, indeed, ultimately overwhelming skepticism about traditional realist narratives and their essentialist constructions of world reality. In other words, their portrayal of the magical as real constitutes a primary challenge to the authority of realism and its representations of reality, which has inevitable “self-deconstructive” repercussions for their own attempted reconstructions of realism and representations of reality. Contemporary magical realist literature, more like that of Carpentier and Asturias than that of Borges, continues to attempt to not only expose centrist lies but also defend marginal truths. However, like the inaugural magical realist texts of Borges, contemporary magical realist novels also recognize that, as they “undermine the credibility of narrative realism by flaunting [their own] ... incredibility” (Parkinson Zamora 1995, p. 501), they inexorably “undermine” their own realism, too. Likewise, their questioning of hegemonic perspectives of reality, which implies that reality, per se, does not exist, has inevitable “self-deconstructive” implications for their attempted reconstructions of the real.

Magical realism is an inherently and radically deconstructive narrative genre. Indeed, as Faris suggests, magical realism has “modified realism to such an extent that it is no longer what it was” (2002, p. 116). It has also arguably “modified” reality so that it is no longer the transcendent extra-textual ground it was once believed to be. However, magical realism, with its political conscience and historical consciousness, is not always comfortable with the poststructuralist crisis that it reveals.

Some critics, primarily offended by the racist supposition that magical realism is a “marginal realism”, have attacked the literary category as a complete fraud. According to Valdez Moses, for example, even “the subversive charge of magical realism is merely one of the thrills that comes as part of the packaged tour of the
lost world ... the contemporary magical mystery tour' (2001, p. 124). Valdez Moses appears to recommend social realism rather than magical realism as a narrative genre that offers a genuinely challenging transgressive politics (p. 131). The constant exoticist misinterpretation of magical realist fiction may be cause for skepticism about its subversive force. In addition, as Valdez Moses suggests, magical realist texts continue to 'depend in no small part for their literary success on the exotic appeal of the magical elements in their novels.' (p. 111) However, the enticing exoticism of magical realism has allowed the literary genre a wide audience that social realism has been unable to secure. Magical realist fiction thus possesses at least the possibility to disseminate its transgressive marginalist message about the unreliability of the centrist discourse of realism and centrist constructions of reality. According to Deborah Cohn, in 'To see or not to see: Invisibility, clairvoyance, and re-visions of history in Invisible Man and La casa de los espíritus', magical realist novels, which 'have enjoyed tremendous popularity nationally and internationally', have already begun to 'move the margins towards the center, and ... make their subjects visible.' (1996, p. 391) The subversive nature of magical realism is not yet as 'visible' as the narrative genre itself and the margins it depicts. This is a problem that I have attempted to address in my thesis. For, contrary to the dismissal by Valdez Moses of the 'subversive charge' of magical realism as exoticist entertainment, the magical realist political message to practice skepticism in regards to hegemonic constructions of world history remains more pertinent than ever.
APPENDIX A

Illustration 1: Carel Willink *Wilma* (1932).
Illustration 2: Niklaus Stöcklin *Rhine Lane* (1917).
Illustration 3: Franz Radziwill *Fatal Crash of Karl Buckstitter* (1929)
Illustration 4: Charles Sheeler *Classic Landscape* (1931).
APPENDIX B


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5

Vuelve el latinoamericano a lo suyo y empieza a entender muchas cosas. Descubre que, si el Quijote le pertenece de hecho y derecho, a través del Discurso a los cabreros aprendió palabras, en recuento de edades, que le vienen de Los trabajos y los días. Abre la gran crónica de Bernal Días del Castillo y se encuentra con el único libro de caballería real y fidedigno que se haya escrito —libro de caballería donde los hacendados de maleficios fueron teules visibles y palpables, auténticos los animales desconocidos, contempladas las ciudades ignotas, vistos los dragones en sus ríos y las montañas insólitas en sus nieves y humos. Bernal Díaz, sin sospecharlo, había superado las hazañas de Armadís de Gaula, Belianís de Grecia y Florismarte de Hircania. Había descubierto un mundo de monarcas coronados de plumas de aves verdes, de vegetaciones que se remontaban a los orígenes de la tierra, de manjares jamás probados, de bebidas sacadas del cacto y de la palma, sin darse cuenta aún que, en ese mundo, los acontecimientos que ocupan al hombre suelen cobrar un estilo propio en cuanto a la trayectoria de un mismo acontecer. Arrastra el latinoamericano una herencia de treinta siglos, pero, a pesar de una contemplación de hechos absurdos, a pesar de muchos pecados cometidos, debe reconocerse que su estilo se va afirmando a través de su historia, aunque a veces ese estilo puede engendrar verdaderos monstruos. Pero las compensaciones están presentes: puede un Melgaréjio, tirano de Bolivia, hacer beber cubos de cerveza a su caballo Holofores; del Mediterráneo caribe, en la misma época, surge un José Martí capaz de escribir uno de los mejores ensayos que, acerca de los pintores impresionistas franceses, hayan aparecido en cualquier idioma. Una América Central, poblada de analfabetos, produce un poeta —Rubén Darío— que transforma toda la poesía de expresión castellana. Hay también ahí quien, hace un siglo y medio, explicó los postulados filosóficos de

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la alienación a esclavos que llevaban tres semanas de manumisos. Hay ahí (no puede olvidarse a Simón Rodriguez) quién creó sistemas de educación inspirados en el *Emilio*, donde sólo se esperaba que los alumnos aprendieran a leer para ascender socialmente por virtud del entendimiento de los libros – que era como decir: de los códigos. Hay quien quiso desarrollar estrategias de guerra napoleónica con lanceros montados, sin monturas ni estribos, en el lomo de sus jamelgos. Hay la prometeica soledad de Bolívar en Santa Marta, las batallas libradas al arma blanca durante nueve horas en el paisaje lunar de los Andes, las torres de Tikal, los frescos rescatados a la selva de Bonampak, el vigente enigma de Tihuanacu, la majestad del acrópolis de Monte Albán, la belleza abstracta – absolutamente abstracta – del Templo de Mitla, con sus variaciones sobre temas plásticos ajenos a todo empeño figurativo. La enumeración podría ser inacabable. Por ello diré que una primera noción de los real maravilloso me vino a la mente cuando, a fines del año 1943, tuve la suerte de poder visitar el reino de Henri Christophe – las ruinas tan poéticas, de Sans-Souci; la mole, imponentemente intacta a pesar de rayos y terremotos, de la Ciudadela La Ferrièrc – y de conocer la todavía normanda Ciudad del Cabo, el *Cap Français* de la antigua Colonia, donde una casa de larguísimos balcones conduce al palacio de cantería habi­tado antaño por Paulina Bonaparte. Mi encuentros con Paulina Bonaparte, ahí, tan lejos de Córdoba, fue, para mí, como una revelación. Vi la posibilidad de establecer ciertos sincronismos posibles, americanos, recurrentes, por encima del tiempo, relacionando esto con aquello, el ayer con el presente. Vi la posibilidad de traer ciertas verdades europeas a las latitudes que son nuestras actuando a contrapelo de quienes, viajando contra la trayectoria del sol, quisieron llevar verdades nuestras a donde, hace todavía

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treinta años, no había capacidad de entendimiento ni de medida para verlas en su justa dimensión. (Paulina Bonaparte fue, para mí, lauzarillo y guía, tiento primero – a partir de la Venus de Canova – de los ensayos de indagación de los personajes que, como Billaud-Varenne, Collot d’Herbois, Víctor Hugo, habrían de animar mi “Siglo de las Luces”, visto en función de luces americanas.) Después de sentir el nada mentido sortilegio1 de las

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1 Paso aquí al texto del prólogo a la primera edición de mi novela *El reino de este mundo* (1949) que no apareció en ediciones sucesivas, aunque hoy lo considero, salvo en algunos detalles, tan vigente como entonces. El surrealismo ha dejado de constituir, para nosotros, por proceso de imitación muy activo hace todavía quince años, una presencia erróneamente manejada. Pero nos
tierras de Haití, de haber hallado advertencias mágicas en los caminos rojos de la Meseta Central, de haber oído los tambores del Petro y del Rada, me vi llevado a acercar la maravillosa realidad recién vivida a la agotante pretensión de suscitar lo maravilloso que caracterizó ciertas literaturas europeas de estos últimos treinta años. Lo maravilloso, buscado a través de los viejos clímax de la selva de Brocliana, de los caballeros de la mesa redonda, del encantador Merlin y del ciclo de Arturo. Lo maravilloso, pobremente sugerido por los oficios y deformidades de los personajes de feria - ¿no se cansarán los jóvenes poetas franceses de los fenómenos y payasos de la fête foraine, de los que ya Rimbaud se había despedido en su Alquimia del Verbo? Lo maravilloso, obtenido con trucos de prestidigitación, reuniéndose objetos que para nada suelen encontrarse: la vieja y cumbre historia del encuentro fortuito del paraguas y de la máquina de coser sobre una mesa de disección, generador de las chucherías

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de arnés, los caracoles en el taxi pluvioso, la cabeza de león en la pelvis de una viuda, de las exposiciones surrealistas. O, todavía, los maravilloso literario: el rey de la Julieta de Sade, el supermachi de Jarry, el monje de Lewis, la utilería escalofriante de la novela negra inglesa: fantasmas, sarcófagos, empapados, licantropías, manos clavadas sobre la puerta de un castillo.

Pero, a fuerza de querer suscitar lo maravilloso a todo trance, los taumaturgos se hacen burócratas. Invocando por medio de fórmulas consabidas que hacen de ciertas pinturas un monólogo baratillo de relojes amarcordados, de maniquíes de costurera, de vagos monumentos fálicos, lo maravilloso se queda en paraguas o langosta o máquina de coser, o lo que sea, sobre una mesa de disección, en el interior de un cuarto triste, en un desierto de rocas. Pobreza imaginative, decía Unamuno, es aprenderse códigos de memoria. Y hoy existen códigos de los fantástico, basados en el principio del burro devorado por un higo, propuesto por los Cantos de Maldoror como suprema inversión de la realidad, a los que debemos muchos “niños amenazados por ruiseñores”, o los “caballos devorando pájaros” de André Masson. Pero obsérvese que cuando André Masson quiso dibujar la selva de la isla de Martinica, con el increíble entrelazamiento de sus plantas y la obscena promiscuidad de ciertos frutos, la maravillosa verdad del asunto devoró al pintor,
dejándolo poco menos que impotente frente al papel en blanco. Y tuvo que ser un pintor de América, el cubano Wilfredo Lam, quien nos enseñara la magica de la vegetación tropical, la desenfrenada creación de formas de nuestra naturaleza – con todas sus metamorfosis y simbiosis –, en cuadros monumentales de una expresión única en la pintura contemporánea. Ante la desconcertante pobreza imaginativa de un Tanguy, por ejemplo, que desde hace veinticinco años pinta las mismas larvas pétreas

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bajo el mismo cielo gris, me dan ganas de repetir una frase que enorgullecía a los surrealistas de la primera hornada: *Vous qui ne voyez pas pensez a ceux qui voient.* Hay todavía demasiados “adolescentes que hallan placer en violar los cadáveres de hermosas mujeres recién muertas” (Lautréamont), sin advertir que lo maravilloso estaría en violarlas vivas. Pero es que muchos se olvidan, con disfrázar de magos a poco costo, que lo maravilloso comienza a sorlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de la inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de “estado límite”. Para empezar, la sensación de lo maravilloso presupone una fe. Los que no creen en santos no pueden curarse con milagros de santos, ni los que no son Quijotes pueden meterse, en cuerpo, alma y bienes, en el mundo de Amadís de Gaula o Tirante el Blanco. Prodigiosamente fidedignas resultan ciertas frases de Rutilio en *Los trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda*, acerca de hombres transformados en lobos, porque en tiempos de Cervantes se creía en gentes aquejadas de manía lupina. Asimismo el viaje del personaje, desde Toscana a Noruega, sobre el manto de una bruja. Marco Polo admitía que ciertas aves volaran llevando elefantes entre las garras, y Lutero vio de frente al demonio a cuya cabeza arrojó un tintero. Víctor Hugo, tan explotado por los tenedores de libros de lo maravilloso, creía en aparecidos, porque estaba seguro de haber hablado, en Guernesey, con el fantasma de Leopoldina. A Van Gogh bastaba con tener fe en el Girasol, para fijar su revelación en una tela. De ahí que lo maravilloso invocado en el descremiento

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— como lo hicieron los surrealistas durante tantos años — nunca fue sino una artimaña literaria, tan aburrida, al prolongarse, como cierta literatura onírica “arreglada”, ciertos clogios de la locura, de los que estamos muy de vuelta. No por ello va a darse la razón, desde luego, a determinados partidarios de un regreso a lo real — término que cobra, entonces, un significado gregariamente político —, que no hacen sino sustituir los trucos del prestidigitador por los lugares comunes del literato “enrolado” o el escatológico regodeo de ciertos existencialistas. Pero es indudable que hay escasa defensa para poetas y artistas que loan el sadismo sin practicarlo, admiran el supermacho por impotencia, invocan espectros sin creer que respondan a los ensemños, y fundan sociedades secretas, sectas literarias, grupos vagamente filosóficos, con santos y señas y arcanos fines — nunca alcanzados —, sin ser capaces de concebir una mística válida ni de abandonar los más mequininos hábitos para jugarse el alma sobre la temible carta de una fe.

Esto se me hizo particularmente evidente durante mi permanencia en Haití, al hallarme en contacto cotidiano con algo que podríamos llamar lo real maravilloso. Pisaba yo una tierra donde millares de hombres ansiosas de libertad creyeron en los poderes licántropicos de Mackandal, a punto de que esa fe colectiva produjera un milagro el día de su ejecución. Conocía ya la historia prodigiosa de Bouckman, el iniciado jamaiquino. Había estado en la Ciudadela La Ferrière, obra sin antecedentes arquitectónicos, únicamente anunciada por las Prisiones imaginarias del Piranesi. Había respirado la atmósfera creada por Henri Christophe, monarca de increibles empeños, mucho más sorprendente que todos los reyes crucés inventados por los surrealistas, muy afectos a tiranías imaginarias, aunque no padecidas. A cada paso hallaba lo real maravilloso.

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Pero pensaba, además, que esa presencia y vigencia de lo real maravilloso no era privilegio único de Haiti, sino patrimonio de la América entera, donde todavía no se ha terminado de establecer, por ejemplo, un recuento de cosmogonías. Lo real maravilloso se encuentra a cada paso en las vidas de hombres que inscribieron fechas en la historia del continente y dejaron apellidos aún llevados: desde los buscadores de la fuente de la eterna juventud, de la áurea ciudad de Manoa, hasta ciertos rebeldes de la primera hora o ciertos héroes modernos de nuestras guerras de independencia de tan mitológica traza como la coronela Juana de Azurduy. Siempre me ha parecido
significativo el hecho de que, en 1780, unos cuerdos españoles, salidos de Angostura, se lanzaron todavía a la busca de El Dorado, y que, en días de la Revolución Francesa — ¡vivan la Razón y el Ser Supremo! —, el compostelano Francisco Menéndez anduviera por tierra de Patagonia buscando la ciudad encantada de los Césares. Enfocando otro aspecto de la cuestión, veríamos que, así como en Europa occidental el folklore danzario, por ejemplo, ha perdido todo carácter mágico o invocatorio, rara es la danza colectiva, en América, que no encierre un hondo sentido ritual, creándose en torno a él todo un proceso iniciaco: tal los bailes de la santería cubana, o la prodigiosa versión negroide de la fiesta del Corpus, que aún puede verse en el pueblo de San Francisco de Yare, en Venezuela.

Hay un momento, en el sexto canto de Maldoror, en que el héroe, perseguido por toda la policía del mundo, escapa a “un ejército de agentes y espías” adoptando el aspecto de animales diversos y haciendo uso de su don de transportarse instantáneamente a Pekín, Madrid o San Petersburgo. Esto es “literatura maravillosa” en pleno. Pero en América, donde no se ha escrito nada semejante, existió un Mackandal dotado de

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los mismos poderes por la fe de sus contemporáneos, y que alentó, con esa magia, una de las sublevaciones más dramáticas y extrañas de la historia. Maldoror — lo confiesa el mismo Ducasse — no pasaba de ser un “poético Rocambole”. De él sólo quedó una escuela literaria de vida efímera. De Mackandal el americano, en cambio, ha quedado toda una mitología, acompañada de himnos mágicos, conservados por todo un pueblo, que aún se cantan en las ceremonias del Vaudou.2 (Hay por otra parte, una rara casualidad en el hecho de que Isidoro Ducasse, hombre que tuvo un excepcional instinto de lo fantástico-poético, hubiera nacido en América y se jactara tan enfáticamente, al final de uno de sus cantos, de ser Le Montevidéen.) Y es que, por la virginidad del paisaje, por la formación, por la ontología, por la presencia faústica del indio y del negro, por la revelación que constituyó su reciente descubrimiento, por los fecundos mestizajes que propició, América está muy lejos de haber agotado su caudal de mitologías. ¿Pero qué es la historia de América toda sino una crónica de lo real maravilloso?

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2 Véase Jacques Roumain, Le Sacrifice du Tambour Assoto (r.).
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