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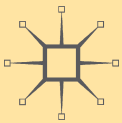

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Rosemary Ross Johnston is Director of the International Centre for Youth Futures (previously the Australian Centre for Child and Youth Culture and Wellbeing) at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

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New Casebooks

DAVID ALMOND

Edited by

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For our children
Emily-Jane, Annabel, Malcolm, Sarah and Robert
and in loving memory of
Malcolm Charles Ferguson Johnston

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Series Editor's Preface

Welcome to the latest series of New Casebooks.

Each volume now presents brand-new essays specially written for university and other students. Like the original series, the new-look New Casebooks embrace a range of recent critical approaches to the debates and issues that characterize the current discussion of literature.

Each editor has been asked to commission a sequence of original essays which will introduce the reader to the innovative critical approaches to the text or texts being discussed in the collection. The intention is to illuminate the rich interchange between critical theory and critical practice that today underpins so much writing about literature.

Editors have also been asked to supply an introduction to each volume that sets the scene for the essays that follow, together with a list of further reading which will enable readers to follow up issues raised by the essays in the collection.

The purpose of this new-look series, then, is to provide students with fresh thinking about key texts and writers while encouraging them to extend their own ideas and responses to the texts they are studying.

Martin Coyle

Notes on Contributors

Karen Coats's publications include *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature,* co-edited with Shelby A. Wolf, Patricia Enciso and Christine A. Jenkins (Routledge, 2011) and *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders,* co-edited with Anna Jackson and Roderick McGillis (Routledge, 2007). *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature* (University of Iowa Press, 2004) was selected as a Choice Outstanding Academic Title for 2004, won the Children's Literature Association Honor Award for Best Book in Literary Criticism in Children's Literature for 2004 and was translated into Korean in 2008 and Chinese in 2009.

Valerie Coghlan is President of Bookbird, Inc. and a former President of iBbY Ireland, and was recently awarded an honorary doctorate in children's literature by Trinity College, Dublin. She is now an independent researcher and commentator on children's literature. She has a particular interest in visual texts and in religion as a social and cultural signifier in children's literature.

Nolan Dalrymple is Head of English and Drama at Longridge Towers School, Northumberland, England. His doctoral thesis explored representations of north-east England in children's fiction; it was the product of the first MHRA collaborative doctoral award to be hosted jointly by Newcastle University and Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books. He has published a number of chapters and articles on regional identity and children's fiction, particularly in relation to the work of Robert Westall.

Carole Dunbar is a tutor in the English Department of St Patrick's College, Dublin and lectures on their MA course in Children's Literature. Her doctoral thesis examines the portrayal of the poor in the novels of Mrs Molesworth, Mrs Ewing, Silas Hocking and Frances Hodgson Burnett. She is a regular reviewer of books for the young and has contributed essays to various publications dealing with children's fiction, the most recent of these being a study of the influence of her native city on the work of Frances Hodgson Burnett, entitled 'A Manchester Woman' and published in August 2012 in the Children's Books History Society's newsletter.

Hannah Izod is the archivist at Seven Stories, National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle -upon -Tyne, England. Hannah has worked at Seven Stories since 2006, initially working on two successive HLF-funded projects before becoming a permanent member of staff in 2010. She is responsible for cataloguing the archive material, as well as working with colleagues across the organisation to develop routes of access into the archive material for a wide range of users.

Rosemary Johnston is Professor and Director of the International Centre for Youth Futures at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. She is the author of the Children's Literature section of *Literacy: Reading, Writing and Children's Literature* (Oxford University Press), which is about to go into its fifth edition, and of many chapters and journal articles in the fields of literature and education. She is an active researcher, has held three large government-funded research grants, is one of three international partners on a Leverhulme Project, 'Children and War 1890–1919', and leads several large literacy projects in remote, regional and urban areas.

Michael Levy is a Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA. He has published numerous articles on David Almond, and other children's literature-related topics. His next book, *An Introduction to Children's Fantasy*, co-authored with Dr. Farah Mendlesohn, will appear from Cambridge University Press in late 2014 or early 2015. He is co-editor of the peer-reviewed scholarly journal *Extrapolation*.

Perry Nodelman is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Winnipeg, Canada. He is the author of Words *About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books, The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (third edition, in collaboration with Mavis Reimer), *The Hidden Adult; Defining Children's Literature,* and about 150 journal articles and book chapters about various aspects of writing for young people. He has also written four novels for children, and seven more in collaboration with Carol Matas.

Roberta Seelinger Trites is the author of *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* (1997)*; Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000)*; Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel* (2007)*;* and with Betsy Hearne, has co-edited *A Narrative Compass: Stories That Guide Women's Lives* (2010). She has served as the editor of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* and as president of the Children's Literature Association. She is a professor of English at Illinois State University, USA, where she teaches children's and adolescent literature.

List of Abbreviations

Note: The abbreviation [*A*] is added where a citation is from the US edition.

BCM	*The Boy who Climbed into the Moon*
BD	*The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean telt by hisself*
BSP	*The Boy who Swam with Piranhas*
C	*Clay*
CS	*Counting Stars*
FE	*The Fire-Eaters*
HE	*Heaven Eyes*
JS	*Jackdaw Summer* (also published as *Raven Summer*)
KCM	*Kate, the Cat and the Moon*
KW	*Kit's Wilderness*
MBSW	*Mouse Bird Snake Wolf*
MDAB	*My Dad's a Birdman*
MNIM	*My Name is Mina*
S	*Skellig*
SD	*Slog's Dad*
SH	*Secret Heart*
TS	*The Savage*
WGWB	*Wild Girl, Wild Boy*

Acknowledgements

An early version of Chapter 9 appeared in the *New York Review of Science Fiction*.

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1

Introduction: David Almond and Mystical Realism

Rosemary Ross Johnston

Tyger tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night …
William Blake, 'The Tyger', from *Songs of Experience* (1794)

It has been both challenging and exhilarating to work with eminent researchers across the world in preparing this Palgrave Macmillan Casebook on the work of British writer David Almond. David Almond's books have somehow struck that elusive balance of appealing to both critics and readers, including and most especially young readers. In 2010 Almond won the highly prestigious biennial Hans Christian Andersen Award, which recognises the lasting contribution to children's literature of a living author. He has also won the Carnegie Medal (for *Skellig* in 1998), the Whitbread Children's Award (twice), based both on literary merit and popular appeal, and numerous other international awards and prizes. A complete list of books may be found in the Further Reading section.

David Almond is an author whose books may appear deceptively simple – they are not excessively long (some are quite short), the stories are usually told in simple language and indeed spare prose, and there is very little actual description of characters or place. (*My Name is Mina*, 2010, is more descriptive in these areas than the other books.) Yet, as the contributions to this volume attest, Almond's work attracts international discussion of highly complex issues; his prose is lyrical and likened to poetry; his use of landscape is evocative and mostly clearly recognisable, and his characters are unique and unforgettable. Somehow, this is achieved both nimbly and poignantly. For these and many other reasons discussed in this volume, Almond is an intriguing

and enigmatic writer whose work defies easy classification, and who requires and deserves robust and innovative scholarly examination.

A brief note about the use of lines from William Blake's 'The Tyger'[1] in this Introduction: Almond is such a richly layered writer and Blake such an acknowledged influence that it just seems fitting to add this beautiful coruscation of images as a sort of *thought provocateur* (*pensée provocateur*).

Brief biography and works

> I live with my family in Northumberland. We live just beyond the Roman Wall, which for centuries marked the place where civilisation ended and the waste lands began. (www.davidalmond.com/author/bio.html)

David Almond was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, in 1951, and grew up in Felling, which had been a coal-mining town. He was one of six children in a large Catholic extended family, was an altar boy at the local church, and attended primary schools in Felling and Sunderland, and later St Joseph's Roman Catholic Grammar School in Hebburn. When he was 8 his sister Barbara died, and his father died when he was 15. He studied English and American Literature at the University of East Anglia and graduated with Honours.

Almond worked variously as a hotel porter, postman and labourer, then trained to be a teacher and worked for five years in a primary school in Gateshead, across the river from Newcastle. He began to publish short stories for adults, went to live in Norfolk for 18 months, wrote literacy booklets, and took another job teaching children with learning difficulties. He published two collections for adults, *Sleepless Nights* in 1985 and *A Kind Of Heaven* in 1997, edited a fiction magazine, and as well as writing a novel that was not accepted for publication, wrote a collection of stories as a memoir of his childhood, later published as *Counting Stars* in the UK in 2000 and in the USA in 2002. This book provides a fascinating and moving commentary or metafictional meditation (even perhaps a hypertext) to his later works.

His first book for children, *Skellig*, was published in 1998, to immediate public and critical acclaim. It has been translated into over thirty languages and has been made into a radio play, a stage play, an opera and a film. Other books followed: *Kit's Wilderness* (1999), *Heaven Eyes* (2000), *Secret Heart* (2001), *The Fire Eaters* (2003), *Clay* (2005), *Jackdaw Summer* (2009), *My Name is Mina* (a prequel to *Skellig*) (2010) and *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean telt by hisself* (2011), which was published for both an adult and young adult readership and was advertised as his first book for adults. He has also collaborated with artists to produce picture books/

illustrated books/graphic stories: *Kate, the Cat and the Moon* (2004), with Stephen Lambert; *My Dad's a Birdman* (2008) and *The Boy who Climbed to the Moon* (2010), with Polly Dunbar; *The Boy who Swam with Piranhas* (2012), illustrated by Oliver Jeffers; and *The Savage* (2008), *Slog's Dad* (2010) and *Mouse Bird Snake Wolf* (2013), all with Dave McKean. As well as stage adaptations of *Skellig (Skellig he Play)* and *Heaven Eyes*, he has written *Wild Girl, Wild Boy*, *My Dad's a Birdman* and *Noah and the Fludd*.

Almond will publish three new books in 2014: *The Tightrope Walkers*, published as an adult novel in the UK and as a novel for Young Adults in the USA; *Half a Creature from the Sea*, a short-story collection; and *A Song for Ella Grey*, a Young Adult novel.

Almond is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, Professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University and Distinguished Writing Fellow at the University of Newcastle. He holds honorary doctorates from the universities of Newcastle, Sunderland and Leicester.

Almond as writer

> *And what shoulder, & what art,*
> *Could twist the sinews of thy heart?*

As the following chapters demonstrate, Almond's literary world is unusual. Consider these opening sentences from *Skellig* (1998) and *The Fire-Eaters* (2003):

> I found him in the garage on a Sunday afternoon. It was the day after we moved into Falconer Road. The winter was ending. Mum had said we'd be moving just in time for the spring. Nobody else was there. Just me. The others were inside with Doctor Death, worrying about the baby. (*S*, p. 1)

> It all starts on the day I met McNulty. I was with my Mam. We left Dad at home beside the sea. We took the bus to Newcastle. We got out below the statue of the angel then headed down towards the market by the river. She was all in red. She kept singing 'The Keel Row' and swinging my arm to the rhythm of the song. (*FE*, p. 1)

There are certain characteristics here which provide an interesting context and prelude to the essays that follow. The writing is simple – short sentences, simple words, conversational if not colloquial style, first-person narration (often with northern English idioms and cadences[2]), a family setting, and the ready sense of the beginning of an episode of events that will clearly be significant. Location is specific – immediately and very much so in *The Fire-Eaters* – it is Newcastle, England. The *Skellig* sentences convey an informality that feels loose and contemporary; *The*

Fire-Eaters has a nostalgic feel of slightly past times, and we are to find out quite soon that it is indeed a very particular time, clearly identified as 1962, the weeks of the Cuban missile crisis, and a time when the threat of a global nuclear war came perilously close.

Yet somehow, in the stories that unravel from these beginnings and the way in which they are told, the international researchers represented in this volume – some of the most respected children's literature scholars of our time – have been inspired to consider Almond's work through unusual critical lenses: that of philosophy and cognitive science; of a controversial type of theology; of religion, particularly Catholicism; of the idea of class and its relationships to home, place, identity and belonging. They have discussed his work as an ur-story with complex variations; as the expression of a radical landscape yet one that is clearly identified as northern England; and as a reflection on words and truth and the writing process. In diverse ways, these perspectives may reflect not only Almond's singular contribution to the field of children's literature, but also, as the writers note, may expand critical possibilities for that field itself.

These are big ideas, but Almond is a big writer. As the contributors all comment in various ways, his work is different – sometimes strangely different (yet, as they also note, strangely the same). How then can we – indeed, can we? – define the work of this complex and highly individual author?

Almond and the fantasy tradition

> *And when thy heart began to beat,*
> *What dread hand? & what dread feet?*

The rich stories at the roots of modern literature – the myths of Greece and Rome, legends, folk tales, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, Yggdrasil (that giant tree in Norse mythology which connects to nine worlds), Gilgamesh, the South American jaguar (the Master of Fire), and so on and so on – all bear various and varied historical relationships to fantasy. Considering fantasy in the children's literary domain, in the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* (2005) Zipes *et al*. write:

> Fantasy literature for children encompasses many kinds of works – legends, ballads, romances, myths, literary fairy tales, magic realism, animal fantasies, time-slip fantasies and science fiction.[3]

There is a long and lovely tradition of fantasy in children's literature, especially perhaps British children's literature, which is translated and celebrated across the world. Almond's work may be seen

as part of this rich, even sumptuous, body of work, which includes Carroll's Alice and the magic of Wonderland, Kingsley's Water Babies, George MacDonald's Princess, Barrie's Peter Pan and Neverland, Lewis's Narnia, Tolkien's Ring trilogy, Susan Price's ghostly Drum, Sewell's talking Black Beauty, Grahame's Willows, Milne's Pooh and Christopher Robin, Potter's parade of little animals and Mr McGregor, Nesbit's 'It', Pearce's Garden, Garner's Weirdstone, Wynne Jones's Christomanci, and more latterly Rowling's Hogwarts and Pullman's Golden Compass. The very diversity of this list poses a critical challenge: what in this context are the defining characteristics of fantasy and how far do they relate to the work of David Almond?

The *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* notes that fantasy describes 'works of fiction, written by a specific author (i.e. not traditional) and usually novel-length, which involve the supernatural or some other unreal element'.[4] J.R.R. Tolkien's well-known study *On Fairy Stories* (1938) refuses to define but places these stories in 'Faërie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being'.[5] Tolkien understood fairies as a manifestation of the supernatural – that is, of a *Secondary World* (imaginative world), rather than of a *Primary* ('real') *World*. In this same essay he also notes the importance of the 'good ending' – what he called the *eucatastrophe:*

> It is the mark of a good fairy story, of the higher and more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literature, and having a peculiar quality.[6]

Brian Attebury rephrased Tolkien's 'turn', 'catch of breath' and 'beat and lifting of the heart' as *wonder*, 'not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness'.[7] Tzvetan Todorov, writing about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature (not children's literature), identified three categories: the fantastic, the marvellous and the uncanny. In brief, his 'fantastic' is any seemingly supernatural event that breaks the natural laws of the world, and the reader has to make the decision whether this event was illusion or 'real'. The 'uncanny' refers to supernatural events that turn out to be explained rationally; the 'marvellous' is when the supernatural element is seen as 'real'. The fantastic is that moment of hesitation where the reader has to decide.

Whilst Todorov's work is controversial, it does have some pertinence here, particularly in relation to the idea of the reader's

hesitation. Maria Nikolajeva proposes that Todorov would place children's fantasy in the category of the marvellous:

> since the young reader is supposed to believe what he is told, while the essence of fantasy for Todorov lies in the hesitation of the protagonist (and the reader) [when] confronted with the supernatural, which is anything that goes beyond natural laws.[8]

It is interesting indeed that these critics describe fantasy basically in terms of the effect it has on (or provokes in) the reader – that is, of the reader response. So does Farah Mendlesohn who, tracking the way in which the fantastic enters the narrated world, identifies four categories within the fantastic: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive and the liminal,[9] and picks up this idea of 'the reader's relationship to the framework', stressing the importance of the assumptions that readers bring to the text:

> I believe that the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief.[10]

So, is Almond a fantasy writer? Some publishers in particular classify him as such and clearly there are strong grounds for this. In varying ways there is in his writing that sense of the supernatural, of wonder, the fantastic, the uncanny and the marvellous. There are, with some provisos, 'good' if not always 'happy' endings (and debating that difference is a book in itself). There is that 'intrusion' of the apparently unreal. However, there is also a strong sense of the real, and I think a reader relationship that in most cases sets up expectations not of the fantastic but of the ordinary – but of a sort of 'poetic ordinary'. Almond's novels – like Pullman's, I would argue – carry another, deeper element that does not fit easily into the idea of children's fantasy, or 'epic' or 'high' Rings-type fantasy, or the allegorical fantasy of Narnia, or the romantic fantasy of a boy who never grows up and a family whose nanny is a dog. Almond's 'secondary world' (if that is what it is) is not accessed through any magic wardrobes or doors or windows or rabbit holes, but pertains more to ordinary worlds and to ordinary people (if there are such things, which may be Almond's point, or at least one of them). His fantasy world exists alongside or within or as part of the world of the everyday.

There are numerous examples in the books, and the plays, where this everyday is infused with a sense of Tolkien's supernatural 'Faërie': in the magic of the allotment in *Wild Girl, Wild Boy*; in *Skellig the Book*

but even more dramatically in *Skellig the Play*, when Michael, Mina and Skellig join hands in the unity of their ghostly winged dance. Fantasy often has a sense of temporal distance, and part of the impact of Almond's fantasy is an unusual sense of *pastness*, of a lost past but a past that is remembered, that has been experienced, and that is now being viewed and re-created from the knowingness of subsequent events. It is past shadowed by its future. Consider again the opening lines from *The Fire-Eaters* (quoted above) for example, and the opening lines of *Clay*:

> He arrived in Felling on a bright and icy February morning. Not so long ago, but it was a different age, I was with Geordie Craggs, like I always was back then. We were swaggering along like always, laughing and joking like always. (*C*, p. 1)

Several of the contributors to this volume refer to the little book, *Counting Stars*, which is a memoir rather than a novel, but in a way it illuminates these elements of Almond's literary vision, of his construction of the fantastic, his own brand of Faërie, his sense of the marvellous, and his sense of wonder at the everyday.

Indeed, it is the delicacy of Almond's ability to discern and depict the extraordinary in the ordinary that has inspired scholars to seek more precise ways of describing his writing. Zipes *et al.*, in the definition quoted at the beginning of this section, include 'magic realism' as one of their categories or sub-types of fantasy. This possibly confuses mode with genre, but it does open provocative ways of thinking about and describing Almond's work.

Magic realism

> *In what distant deeps or skies*
> *Burnt the fire of thine eyes?*

What is real? What *is*, and what is *not*? Perhaps this is the dilemma at the very heart of being human; at the very heart of intellectual endeavour. Northrop Frye writes:

> Both literature and mathematics … drive a wedge between the antithesis of being and non-being that is so important for discursive thought. The symbol neither is nor is not the reality which it manifests. The child beginning geometry is presented with a dot and is told, first, that that is a point, and second, that it is not a point. He cannot advance until he accepts both statements at once. It is absurd that that which is no number

> can also be a number, but the result of accepting the absurdity was the discovery of zero. The same kind of hypothesis exists in literature, where Hamlet and Falstaff neither exist nor do not exist.[11]

Much has been written about Almond and magic realism, and this is the generic description commonly applied to his work. This follows on from the impressive contribution made to Almond scholarship through the work of Don Latham, in his book *David Almond: Memory and Magic* (2006)[12] and many other articles. Latham considered *Skellig* in relation to a short story by Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014), 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings', not only comparing but demonstrating the influence of this story on Almond's book. His consideration went beyond narrative. As part of his study, Latham identified the Almond text as an illustration of magic realism,[13] making the point that magic realism can play an important role in children's literature and noting that part of the liminal territory explored by the book is the transition of Michael, the narrator, and his friend Mina into adulthood.[14] These are significant ideas, although I am not sure that I agree with the last; in this particular book the transition to adulthood is not as clear-cut as Latham suggests. It is far more subtle.

The term 'magic realism' has an interesting history which, for what it reveals about its characteristics, it behoves us to explore. The concept was originally created by the German historian, art critic and photographer, Franz Roh (1890–1965), who applied it to describe the type of art, emerging after Expressionism, which portrayed scenes of imaginative fantasy through realistic documentary-style painterly techniques.[15] For Roh, magic realism related to but was different to *surrealism*, because magic realism focused on the things of this world, rather than on the 'surreal' things of imaginative or psychological worlds. The 'magic' was in the capacity of the artist to make apparent 'the wonder of matter that could crystallise into objects' so that they could 'be seen anew' (1925). In other words, Roh emphasised that the magic was in perceiving and visually representing the everyday (the 'normal') in different and special ways. It is fascinating to follow the traceries and spillovers and overlaps of international critical thought that both had preceded and then followed this idea as it grew and flourished into philosophy and literature. For example, from a literary/philosophical point of view, it could in some ways, in these early stages at least, be considered in relation to both the philosophical theory of *haecceitas* – *thisness* – proposed centuries before by the Scottish Franciscan monk Johannes Duns Scotus (*c.*1266–1308), and the idea of *inscape* as described by English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins

(1844–1889). Both relate to the concept of individualising difference, a sort of glimpse or subjective experience of final perfection or essence (of 'deep down things'[16]) as part of a unique and almost 'out-of-this-world' observation of everyday life. It also could relate in this way to Irish novelist James Joyce's (1882–1941) idea of the revelation of the *epiphany* (*quidditas*, 'whatness'): '[W]hen the parts are adjusted to a special point, we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is… .The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant.'[17]

After the 1927 translation of Roh's paper into Spanish by Fernando Vela,[18] a disciple of the Spanish phenomenologist José Ortega y Gasset, Roh's concept of magic realism was adopted, albeit with differing meanings, within the artistic expression of literature. It was a ripe moment. Phenomenology – the science of perceptions, the 'study of consciousness and its immediate objects'[19] – was a twentieth-century school of thought that emerged from the work of the German philosophers Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Husserl believed that experience was the source of all knowledge and that a sense of fundamental essence could be perceived through phenomenological reduction; Heidegger argued that Being must be unhampered by preconceptions and knowledge of the world, but can be 'unfolded'[20] through language.

I mention all these briefly as part of an international context that was ready to accept, nurture and evolve the ideas of magic realism. Its ethos and generative impulse gathered momentum with the publication of *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935) by Argentinian writer, essayist, poet and translator, Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), whose short stories were characterised by themes relating to dreams, animals, mirrors, God, philosophy and religion.[21] Another contributing idea to the burgeoning genre came from the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980), who in a famous prologue to his novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), wrote: 'What is the entire history of [Latin] America if not a chronicle of the marvellous real [*lo real maravilloso*]?'[22] For Carpentier this marvellous real was inherently Latin America and Latin American, and represented its multicultural and heady mix of the European (rational) and non-European (magical, such as voodoo). Venezuelan intellectual and writer and contemporary of Carpentier, Arturo Uslar Pietri (1906–2001), described the movement as the 'mystery of human living amongst the reality of life'.[23] Carpentier's idea of the marvellous real – a sort of marvellous realism – was to hybridise with or perhaps blend into magic realism, but it is a lovely description and one that offers an *other* and richly tilted way of thinking about