A COMPANION TO MAGICAL REALISM

STEPHEN M. HART and WEN-CHIN OUYANG

Colección Támesis

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A COMPANION TO MAGICAL REALISM

This new *Companion to Magical Realism* provides an assessment of the world-wide impact of a movement which was incubated in Germany, flourished in Latin America and then spread to the rest of the world. It provides a set of up-to-date assessments of the work of writers traditionally associated with magical realism such as Gabriel García Márquez (in particular his recently published memoirs), Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Juan Rulfo, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel and Salman Rushdie, as well as bringing into the fold new authors such as W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney, José Saramago, Dorit Rabinyan, Ovid, María Luisa Bombal, Ibrahim al-Kawnī, Mayra Montero, Nakagami Kenji, José Eustasio Rivera and Elias Khoury, discussed for the first time in the context of magical realism. Written in a jargon-free style, and with all quotations translated into English, this book offers a refreshing new interdisciplinary slant on magical realism as an international literary phenomenon emerging from the trauma of colonial dispossession. The companion also has a Guide to Further Reading.

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A COMPANION TO

MAGICAL REALISM

Edited by

Stephen M. Hart
and
Wen-chin Ouyang

TAMESIS

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization of Magical Realism: New Politics of Aesthetics

Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang

Magical Realism: Style and Substance

Stephen M. Hart

From a term used in 1925 by a German art critic, Franz Roh, to indicate the demise of Expressionism,[1] magical realism grew to become an important feature of the Boom literature of the 1960s in Latin America (particularly in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* of 1967) until it became, by the 1990s, in the words of Homi Bhabha 'the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world'.[2] Unpacking that history is a complex one and beyond the scope of this introductory essay, but a few lines may be drawn in the sand. In *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerie* (*Post-Expressionism, Magical Realism*), Franz Roh referred to how Post-Expressionism/magical realism embodies the 'calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces' (p. 20) and, thereby, represents 'in an intuitive way, *the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world*' (p. 24).[3] In this way, as Roh further suggested, Post-Expressionism 'offers us the miracle of *existence in its imperturbable duration*: the unending miracle of eternally mobile and vibrating molecules. Out of that flux, that constant appearance and disappearance of material, permanent objects somehow appear: in short, the marvel by which a variable commotion crystallizes into a clear set of constants' (Roh, p. 22).

Some of the tension between surface and innerness which is at the core of Roh's essay finds its way into the prologue Alejo Carpentier wrote for his novel,

[1] There is an English translation of Roh's 1925 essay, 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 15–31.

[2] Homi Bhabha, 'Introduction', *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1–7 (pp. 6–7).

[3] I cite from the English translation, 'Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 15–31.

The Kingdom of this World (1949), in which he described his experience of the marvellous real in Haiti in 1943: 'I was in a land where thousands of men, anxious for freedom, believed in Mackandal's lycanthropic powers to the extent that their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution.'[4] The miracle of the marvellous real, as he clarifies in his essay, 'arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favoured by the unexpected richness of reality' (p. 86). Indeed, Carpentier's use of terms such as 'alteration', 'revelation' and 'richness of reality' may be compared to Roh's sense of the 'radiation of magic' (Roh, p. 20), the 'new space' (Roh, p. 25), 'the interior figure' (p. 24), the 'vortex of depth' (p. 27) which is 'throbbing' (Roh, p. 20) within phenomenal reality. It was precisely this event – the description of Mackandal's execution – which Carpentier used as the centrepiece of his novel, but what is remarkable is that the scene is visualized as a split event. The slaves witness his escape: 'The ropes binding him dropped to the floor and the negro's body launched ('se espigó') into the air, flying above their heads before submerging in the black waves of the mass of slaves. A single cry filled the square:– *Mackandal sauvé*!'[5] But the French colonisers and their agents, the Haitian soldiers, see nothing and instead witness his execution; as the third-person narrative informs us: 'few saw that Mackandal, who had been seized by ten soldiers, was rammed into the fire, and that a flame intensified by his burning hair had extinguished his final cry' (p. 41). The expression 'few saw' must be understood to mean that the soldiers, the narrator (and now the reader) witnessed the event, but not the slaves. The statement 'few saw' introduces a note of ocular empiricism into the account, and the reader's first reaction will be to interpret the event as an example of mass delusion. The short sentence which concludes the paragagh – 'There was nothing left to see' (*The Kingdom of this World*, p. 41) – reinforces the impression that the miracle was similar to a dream which fades when we emerge from sleep.

There are, however, a number of events, linguistic and otherwise, which subvert the apparent empiricism of the text. Chapter VI describes Mackandal's metamorphoses: Mackandal is able to change into an animal or a bird or a fish or an insect (*The Kingdom of this World*, p. 33) as if such transformations were a matter of well-known fact ('everyone knew': 'todos sabían'; *The Kingdom of this World*, p. 33). Pointing in a similar direction, the final chapter of the novel describes how Ti Noel 'made use of his extraordinary powers in order to transform himself into a goose' (*The Kingdom of this World*, p. 141) and, as a result of this transformation, achieves an enlightenment which 'explains' the mystery of human creation. It is noteworthy that the most significant chapter from

[4] 'On the Marvellous Real in America', *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 75–88 (p. 87).

[5] Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Barcelona: Biblioteca de Bolsillo, 1998), p. 41. All translations are mine.

a structural point of view – the last – should focus on the magical, supernatural subtext operating within the visibly real level of the human condition. In effect, the world of the Afro-Caribbean 'subaltern' becomes the magical black archive hovering within the white, empiricist narrative of a slave rebellion.[6] The knowledge the novel imparts is apocalyptic, revelatory, magical. The archive of the novel is, indeed, not expressed in terms of a syncretistic vision for it runs counter to white history and white knowledge. The novel itself – we may conclude – like the Mackandal flight episode, hovers between the real and the marvellous. It was this vacillation between the two kingdoms – analysed so expertly by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970)[7] – that was to remain a hallmark of magical realism although the elements within the equation would not remain constant and the relationship between those elements would also change.[8]

Carpentier's *Kingdom of this World*, like Miguel Ángel Asturias's *Men of Maize* published in the same year (1949), is often characterised as an important harbinger of magical realism which in turn is typically seen as achieving its canonical incarnation in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).[9] Clearly *One Hundred Years of Solitude* expresses the same type of split-vision in evidence in Carpentier's novel but the realm of the magical is not locked up within the notion of an atavistic archive (namely, the Colombian equivalent of the Afro-Caribbean subaltern as portrayed in Carpentier's novel). It migrates depending on who the perceiver is; magical realism is born, the novel suggests, in the gap between the belief systems of two very different groups of people. What for the inhabitant of the 'First World' is magical (a woman who ascends to heaven, ghosts who return to earth, priests who can levitate, gypsies who can morph into a puddle of tar) is real and unremarkable for the inhabitant of the 'Third World'. To keep the symmetry, what for the inhabitant of the 'Third

[6] The term archive is used here to mean a cultural and linguistic set of knowledge paradigms which allow individuals or social groups or nations to assert and create identity. In the case of the Afro-Cuban archive this cultural identity is contestatory. For further discussion of this term see Michel Foucault, 'The Historical *a priori* and the Archive', in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972), pp. 126–31, and Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The term subaltern is used here in Gayatri Spivak's sense to refer to a subordinate group within a hierarchised society whose voice is rarely if at all heard; for further discussion of Subaltern Studies, see Ileana Rodríguez (ed.), *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

[7] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil 1970).

[8] For the application of Todorov's theories to magical realism, see Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony* (New York: Garland, 1985). For a discussion of Chanady's approach with particular reference to the differences between the fantastic and magical realism, see Maggie Ann Bower, *Magic(al) Realism* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 24–7.

[9] For a discussion of the differences between Carpentier's 'real maravilloso' and García Márquez's magical realism, see Stephen M. Hart, 'Magical Realism in Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad'*, *Inti*, 16–17 (1982–83), 37–52.

World' is magical (false teeth, magnets, films, trains, ice) is real and unremarkable for the inhabitant of the 'First World': 'Dazzled by so many and such marvellous inventions, the people of Macondo did not know where amazement began.'[10] García Márquez deliberately prevents the reader from taking up an outsider/insider or Us/Them attitude towards the world of the magical. By using one paradigm, and then reversing it, García Márquez makes sure that the reader is unable to escape from a sense of the world as containing a magical dimension. Macondo does not offer a place to which the reader can retreat, a world that is either just real or just magical. The realism of the real is permeated by magic just as the world of the magical is underpinned by the real.

Once García Márquez has drawn us into this self-consistent and water-tight world and we have let our defences down, then he starts to pull his political punches. He shows us how North American capitalism destroys Macondo, how the military shoot defenceless workers, how the authorities deny that any wrongdoing has been committed ('You must have been dreaming (. . .) Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened in Macondo, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town'; p. 252) – in sum, he draws out a political allegory of injustice in Latin America. While *The Kingdom of this World* is Calibanesque (namely, reminiscent of the Carib counter-culture associated with Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not only Calibanesque but also Revolutionary (in a Third-World, Marxist sense).[11] Nevertheless the work of both writers is predicated on a vision of the world as deeply fissured (*The Kingdom of this World*, indeed, revolves around a revolution which occurred in the Caribbean), characterised by a deep divide between the realm of the powerful and the world of the powerless.[12]

[10] *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Picador, 1978), p. 185. García Márquez's novel was published twelve years after the famous Bandung conference of 1955 in which the term 'Third World' gained wide currency. For further discussion of the notion of the Third World see James Manor (ed.), *Rethinking Third World Politics* (London: Longman, 1991). Some of the problems involved in even using the notion of Third World literature are addressed by Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 77–82.

[11] For a politicised reading of Caliban, see Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989). For some sense of what is intended by a more revolutionary view of fantasy, see Jacques Stephen Alexis, 'Of the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians', and Michael Dash, 'Marvellous Realism: The Way out of Négritude', both in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, at pp. 194–8, and pp. 199–201.

[12] A similar pattern can be traced in Brazilian literature. From the 'forerunner' of magical realism, Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928), as identified by Nancy Gray Díaz (quoted in Charles Perrone, 'Guimarães Rosa through the Prism of Magic Realism', in *Tropical Paths: Essays in Modern Brazilian Literature* (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 101–22 [p. 114, n. 1]), the movement blossomed in novels such as João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande sertão: veredas* (1956), Jorge Amado's *Dona Flor e Seus Dos Maridos* (1966; *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands*) and his *Tereza Batista Cansada de Guerra* (1972; *Tereza Batista Home from the*

Once the mould had been set by García Márquez in 1967 – and in effect given the final canonical flourish in 1982 when the Colombian novelist won the Nobel Prize – it led, perhaps predictably, to a number of re-vampings in the Hispanic literary world, notably Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982), Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), and Luis Sepúlveda's *The Old Man who Read Love Stories* (1993).[13] But perhaps just as significant were the reformulations of the magical-realist mode of narrative which emerged in non-Hispanic countries such as Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* (1978), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1981), Nakagami Kenji's *A Thousand Years of Pleasure* (1982), William Kennedy's *Ironweed* (1983), Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (1985), Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant du sable* (*Sand Boy*, 1985), José Saramago's *The Stone Raft* (1986), Amitrav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Kjarten Flogstad's *Portrett av eit magisk liv: Poeten Claes Gill* (*Portrait of a Magic Life: The Poet Claes Gill*, 1988), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), André Brink's *Imaginings of Sand* (1996), Addelkader Benali's *Wedding by the Sea* (1999; published in original Dutch in 1996), and Ciaran Carson's *Fishing for Amber: A Long Story* (1999).[14] Critical theorizations of magical realism during this period also began to reflect its gradually broadening parameters.[15] While early work on magical realism tended to focus on the movement in terms of a technique – the prototypes were Ángel Flores's article in 1955 and Luis Leal's in 1967 – [16] work in the 1980s tended to focus on the ways in which magical realism invoked social practice and ideology,[17] and interacted with issues

Wars). For more on these works see the discussion in Charles Perrone, 'Guimarães Rosa through the Prism of Magic Realism', and Daphne Patai, *Myth and Ideologies in Contemporary Brazilian Fiction* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1983), pp. 111–40.

[13] Isabel Allende, *La casa de los espíritus* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1982); *The House of the Spirits*, trans. Magda Bodin (New York: Knopf, 1985). Laura Esquivel, *Como agua para chocolate* (Mexico City: Planeta, 1989); *Like Water for Chocolate*, trans. Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen (New York: Doubleday, 1993). There has been an important film version of the book directed by Alfonso Arau; see Stephen M. Hart, *Companion to Latin American Film* (London: Tamesis, 2004), pp. 171–8. Luis Sepúlveda, *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1993); *The Old Man who Read Love Stories*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Arcadia, 2002).

[14] I am grateful to Eli Park Sørensen's unpublished essay, 'Scandinavian Magical Realism and Fantastic Literature' for the Norwegian reference.

[15] See, for example, Timothy Brennan's *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (New York: St Martins, 1989).

[16] Both essays are collected in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 109–24.

[17] Some examples of this approach are: Irlemar Chiampi, *El realismo maravilloso: forma e ideología de la novela hispanoamericana* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1983); Graciela Ricci della Grisa's monograph, *Realismo mágico y conciencia mítica en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Cambeiro, 1985); María Elena Angulo, *Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse* (New York: Garland, 1995).

subtending postcolonial theory; Stephen Slemon's 1988 article, 'Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse', for example, epitomises this trend.[18] The work of Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris should be highlighted as bringing a distinctly interdisciplinary impetus to the theorization of magical realism; Zamora in her comparisons of Latin American with U.S. literature, Faris in her comparative work on especially García Márquez and Salman Rushdie, and which culminated in their 'canonical' *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995).[19] Magical realism is nowadays a complex, global literary phenomenon and there is little indication that it has run out of steam, despite pronouncements that the term has 'neither the specificity nor the theoretical foundation to be (. . .) useful', which underline the gulf between the academy and the praxis of writing more than anything else.[20]

The question inevitably arises: how is it that magical realism has been so successful in migrating to various cultural shores? Why has it seemed able to offer a vehicle for the expression of the tensions within different societal frameworks? Is it really the language par excellence (Bhabha's idea) of the emergent postcolonial world? One of the reasons why it appears to have attracted the attention of a range of writers – Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende in Latin America, Salman Rushdie, Amitrav Ghosh, Ben Okri, B. Kojo Laing, M.K. Vassanji elsewhere (to give Elleke Boehmer's list)[21] – is its ability to express 'a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement' (Boehmer, p. 235). As Boehmer further suggests: 'Like the Latin American, they [postcolonial writers in English] combine the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent cultures which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption. Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both empire and

[18] Now reprinted in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 407–26. See also Román de la Campa, 'Magical Realism and World Literature: A Genre for the Times?', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 23.2 (1999), 205–19; Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (New York: St Martins, 1998); Elsa Liguanti, Francesco Casotti and Carmen Concilio (eds), *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).

[19] See Faris's 'Scheherezade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction', and Parkinson Zamora's 'Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in U.S. and Latin American Fiction', both in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, pp. 163–90, pp. 497–550. Other important works by these authors are Zamora's *Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), and Faris's *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004). An interdisciplinary approach is also evident in Jean Weisberger (ed.), *Le Réalisme magique: Roman, peinture et cinéma* (Brussels: Le Centre des Avant-gardes littéraires de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1987).

[20] The phrase appears in Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 111–12.

[21] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 235.

its aftermath' (p. 235). As Jean-Pierre Durix memorably puts it: 'Imperialistic powers deprived the colonized people not only of their territories and wealth but also of their imagination.'[22] While it is not the case that magical realism is the only or necessarily the best vehicle with which to express 'cultural displacement'– Dennis Walder's book on postcolonial writing, for example, makes scant reference to magical realism[23] – and since it would be impossible to follow through each branch of this complex flowering I have decided to focus upon two test-cases, one from India, the other from Africa, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road.*

Before passing to a discussion of these two novels it is important to draw out the implications of the 'fissured' world to which Boehmer alludes (see above). It is necessary to underline that it is precisely because Latin American cultural reality is fundamentally riven that it has been able to offer a model to the writers of other postcolonial nations. Indeed, 'mestizaje' is a misleading metaphor to use in this context.[24] Antonio Cornejo Polar has convincingly argued that 'mestizaje', despite being 'the most powerful and widespread conceptual device with which Latin America has interpreted itself', is predicated on a 'salvational ideology' which promotes a notion of a 'conciliating synthesis of the many mixtures that constitute the social and cultural Latin America corpus'.[25] In the process, Cornejo Polar argues, 'the social asymmetry of the originating contacts' is, in effect, 'obviated' (p. 117). Furthermore, Cornejo Polar argues that 'multiple intercrossings **do not** operate in a syncretistic way, but instead emphasize conflicts and alterities' ('Mestizaje, Transculturation, Heterogeneity', p. 117). Latin American literature, as an embodiment of that culture, is thus characterized by a 'copious, profound, and disturbing conflictiveness' (p. 119). Cornejo Polar therefore proposes heterogeneity as an apt metaphor to capture Latin American cultural reality and the literature which issues from that reality. In that Cornejo Polar's theory of cultural dynamics consistently refuses synthesis and fusion – it is, in effect, radically anti-metaphoric, keeping as two what others wish to see as one – it provides a helpful tool with which to analyse magical realism not only in its local Latin American configuration but also as a globalised literary phenomenon.

[22] Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 187.

[23] Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). For a helpful discussion of postcolonial theory, the reader is referred to Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997). An excellent introduction to the historical backdrop of postcolonialism is provided by Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

[24] For further discussion of this point see Amaryll Chanady, 'Identity, Politics and mestizaje', in *Contemporary Latin American Cultural Studies*, eds Stephen M. Hart and Richard Young (London: Hodder, 2003), pp. 192–02.

[25] 'Mestizaje, Transculturation, Heterogeneity', in *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, eds Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos and Abril Trigo (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), pp. 116–19 (p. 116).

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) intersects with magical realism as playfully as it traverses postcolonialism. Its magical elements are well-known – one only need recall Saleem's gargantuan nose, the 1,001 children born in India between midnight and 1 a.m. on 15 August 1947 (p. 195), the whore who claims to be 512 years old (p. 319), Saleem's aunt who keeps on seeing ghosts of the past around the house: 'So it's you again; well, why not? Nothing ever seems to go away' (p. 331), Saleem who is able to disappear at will into thin air (p. 380), and the ten thousand women who are in love with Major Shiva (p. 409).[26] Its postcolonial credentials are just as obvious (Wendy Faris calls *Midnight's Children* an 'aggressively postcolonial text' [*Ordinary Enchantments*, p. 29]). Saleem Sinai, the 'I' of the novel was born at precisely the time that India achieved its independence from Britain and thus fulfils the need in postcolonial fiction, as identified by Stephen Slemon, that it should represent 'the foreshortening of history so that the time scheme [of the story] metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath' (Slemon, p. 411). Saleem, 'mysteriously handcuffed to history' (p. 9), is also a curious mixture of the colonised and the coloniser: he is like 'an empty pickle jar in a pool of Anglepoised light' (p. 19), or 'a badly-fitting collage' (p. 25). That his identity is not unitary in any sense is suggested by the fact that his first significant memory is that of being a ghost (p. 31), itself a hallmark of the magical-realist mode in that it suggests the apparition of a colonial identity stranded in the netherland of subalternity.[27] This ghostly resonance, though simply a parlour game in the novel, is emblematic of the deliberate syntax of oblivion employed by colonialist discourse: 'We are a nation of forgetters' (p. 37).

It is important to underline in this context that when events are recalled in the text they are not so much remembered as re-cast, becoming in the process the mixed-up 'pickles of history' (p. 461). Thus when the ghost episode is recalled, the sheet Saleem wore as a child is now directly related to the sheet which heralded his birth: 'And that was also the time when I was cast as a ghost in a children's play, and found, in an older leather attaché-case on top of my grandfather's almirah, a sheet which had been chewed by moths, but whose largest hole was man-made: for which discovery I was repaid (you will recall) in roars of grandparental rage' (p. 188). The expression 'you will recall' is deceptive since we **do not** recall the events in precisely this fashion; their inner meaning or 'magic' has now been extrapolated before our eyes. Saleem's birth – the birth of India and Pakistan – was no more, the text suggests, than a phantom. This idea then begins to leak disarmingly into later parts of the text; Saleem's father starts disappearing: 'my father's morning chin began to fade' (p. 201).

Midnight's Children proclaims palimpsestism as a form of archaeological knowledge far more befitting the case of India than the lockstep of syncretistic

[26] All references are to *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 1995).

[27] For further discussion of this point, see Stephen M. Hart, 'Magical Realism in the Americas: Politicised Ghosts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of the Spirits,* and *Beloved*', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 9.2 (2003), 115–23.

logic and its favoured mode of enquiry – the syllogism. The three generations – Aadam Aziz, Dr Aziz and Saleem Sinai – repeat ideas and thoughts such that it becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish between them. This is clearly a nod in García Márquez's direction; Rushdie once referred to the Colombian's magical realism as an expression of a 'genuinely "Third-World" consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called "half-made" societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new' (quoted in Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, p. 38). The onward 'mill of history' (p. 333) is thereby viewed in *Midnight's Children* not so much as a teleological march towards a given goal but rather as a circular vortex in which layers are superimposed on other layers, and indeed stripped back, to produce a sense of time as a kaleidoscope rather than a line of succession from Genesis to Apocalypse: 'Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also' (p. 211). In some ways Rushdie takes this idea further than García Márquez. For the Colombian as much as the Indian 'cosmopolitan' the sense of time as a revolving rather than a linear experience allows for the history of colonialism – with its teleological focus – to be played with, undermined, rejected. But Rushdie also explores this palimpsestine sense of time in the context of monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam: 'On Mount Sinai, the prophet Musa or Moses heard disembodied commandments; on Mount Hira, the prophet Muhammed (also known as Mohammed, Mahomet, the Last-but-One, and Mahound) spoke to the Archangel (Gabriel, or Jibreel, as you please)' (p. 163). For some, statements such as these are blasphemous – as Rushdie discovered to his peril when a *fatwa* was decreed as a result of his words – yet they indicate how Rushdie views historical experience as repeatable, layered, palimpsestine.

Yet Rushdie is not simply playing with reality for the sake of it, as the conclusion of the wonderfully amusing intercalated fairy-tale makes quite clear: 'the newspapers – *Jang*, *Dawn*, *Pakistan Times* – announced a crushing victory for the President's Muslim League over the Mader-i-Millat's Combined Opposition Party; thus proving to me that I have been only the humblest of jugglers-with-facts; and that, in a country where 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. 326). This connection between magic and politics is pursued consistently in the chapter, 'The Shadow of the Mosque', in which the illusionism of communism is compared to conjurors' tricks: 'The problems of the magicians' ghetto were the problems of the Communist movement in India. (. . .) There were Trotskyist tendencies among card-sharpers, and even a Communism-through-the-ballot-box movement among the moderate members of the ventriloquist section' (p. 399). Taking a leaf out of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, perhaps, Rushdie employs the rhetoric of magic to ram his political point home.

A similar blend of postcolonial rhetoric, magic and politics is evident in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). In *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*, Brenda Cooper shows how Okri was able to carve

a new African vision out of a genre which sprang from Latin America,[28] and in *Ordinary Enchantments*, Wendy B. Faris points in particular to Azaro's mask – which is so mysterious that the reader cannot tell whether it causes the visions Azaro subsequently experiences or 'forms part of them' (p. 11) – as a classic hallmark of magical realism.[29] *The Famished Road*, indeed, is full of that 'irreducible magic' which 'frequently disrupts the ordinary logic of cause and effect' (*Ordinary Enchantments*, p. 11). Azaro is, indeed, as slippery a narrator as Saleem in *Midnight's Children*. What is curious, though, about Okri's text is the fact that – even while it fuses the magical with the real, and the animal with the human, the spiritual with the material, and the natural with the supernatural – it never loses its political relevance. For Azaro's story is not only about the life of a young child who has spiritual sight; it also functions as an allegory of the trauma of Nigerian nationhood. As Ato Quayson has suggested: 'the *abiku* child is also meant to stand for the fractious postcolonial history of his native Nigeria'.[30] While not a new association ('in this linking of a national history with the condition of the *abiku* Okri echoes a suggestion made by Wole Soyinka in *A Dance of Forests*, which was commissioned specifically to commemorate Independence in 1961'; Quayson, p. 227), Okri's re-working of the trope produces a powerful vision. The *abiku* child's disability (in the sense that his spiritual sight alienates him from 'normal' people on the compound), as much as the visually alarming disability of the spirits Azaro happens across in his travels or the regular customers at Madame Kyoto's restaurant ('spirits who had borrowed bits of human beings to partake of human reality', p. 161)[31] operates as a metaphor of political disempowerment. To quote Quayson:

> The presence of disabled people in postcolonial writing marks more than just the recognition of their obvious presence in the real world of postcolonial existence and the fact that in most cases national economies woefully fail to take care of them. It means much more than that. It also marks the sense of a major problematic: which is nothing less than the difficult encounter with history itself. For colonialism may be said to have been a major force of disabling the

[28] *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[29] Other critics who discuss *The Famished Road* in terms of its magical realism are: Edna Eizenberg, '*The Famished Road*: Magical Realism and the Search for Social Equity', *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 43 (1995), 25–30; and Philip Whyte, 'West African Literature at the Cross-roads: The Magical Realism of Ben Okri', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 5 (2003), 69–79.

[30] 'Looking Awry: Tropes of Disability in Postcolonial Writing', in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, eds David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 217–30 (p. 227). According to Nigerian folklore an 'abiku' is a spiritually gifted child who is destined to die young.

[31] All references are to Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Vintage, 2003).

> colonized from taking their place in the flow of history other than in a position of stigmatized underprivilege. (Quayson, p. 228)

Indeed the magical-realist sheen of the style does not in itself deaden the political points that *The Famished Road* makes. The episode in Book II, chapter 4 when Azaro is bundled into a sack and taken off by some of Madame Kyoto's customers functions not only as an example of a mishap occurring on the soul's spiritual journey but also as an allegory of the kidnapping of the subaltern by the forces of reaction within society. As Azaro cries out: 'Politicians! Politicians are taking me away!' (p. 131). The evil of this political conspiracy is underlined in the following chapter when the Party of the Rich arrives – with the collusion of the landlord of the compound – handing out free milk in exchange for votes, and, in the process, poisoning the population (as the plague of vomiting which ensues vividly suggests). That the political focalization of the text is from the vantage point of the poor is suggested by the fact that it is Azaro's father – he 'supported the Party for the Poor' (p. 151) – who discovers that the collective vomiting has been caused by the milk (p. 155). Azaro's father is a labourer who lives a life of drudgery, complaining about the heavy load he has to carry, 'his head, his back, his legs' (p. 149); as he comments: 'If you want to vote for the party that supports the poor, they give you the heaviest load. I am not much better than a donkey' (p. 96). He is the epitome of all the other workers who seem 'damned, or as if they were working out an abysmal slavery' (p. 170); Azaro sees him fall to the ground under the weight of his burdens (p. 176). The rebellion of the compound inhabitants and the subsequent repression is all the more effective by being presented through a child's eyes. The spirit world is shown, during the period of repression in which the photographer in particular is victimised, to be on the side of the oppressed: 'The dead were curiously on the side of the innocents' (p. 211). That the world of the spirit is not separate from the world of politics is made very clear in the closing stages of Okri's novel. The political struggle is echoed in the fight between the spirits: 'The Party of the Rich drew support from the spirits of the Western world' (p. 568). In *The Famished Road* Okri is able to combine in an arresting manner a vision of the supernatural with a sense of the real political problems faced by Africa today.

It was as a result of its intrinsic heterogeneity rather than its syncretism that the discourse of magical realism was able to migrate from Latin America to various cultural shores around the world. Particularly for writers in countries which had recently escaped from the clutches of colonialism, magical realism appeared to offer a literary idiom which could reflect the raw political tensions which accompanied the movement towards nationhood, this particularly so during the 1980s and early 1990s which may be seen as the highwater mark of globalised magical realism. But there have been dissenting voices. It is clear, for example, that for a number of commentators the notion that magical realism is the 'language of the postcolonial world' is a misleading one. Indeed, it is not simply post-Bhabhian critics who distance themselves from this idea. The Guatemalan Nobel Prize winner Miguel Ángel Asturias accused Gabriel García Márquez way back in the 1960s, firstly, of stealing his ideas and, secondly, of gaining success

simply as a result of the astute use of publicity.[32] Asturias's slur failed to stick on the Colombian writer but it has haunted some of the latter's 'imitators'. William Rowe, for example, has argued that Isabel Allende and Angela Carter simply adopted the rhetoric of García Márquez's magical realism – style without substance: 'In the 1980s magical realism became a genre formula, transferable to scenarios that lacked the particular historical characteristics outlined above, and was even adopted as a model by non-Latin American writers (such as Angela Carter). The Chilean novelist Isabel Allende uses in her narratives magic as an amalgam of styles of previous writers like García Márquez.'[33] Raymond L. Williams, for his part, has dismissed Allende's fiction as nothing more than facile imitations of the Colombian's novels.[34] Much the same has been said of Laura Esquivel's fiction; indeed, as Helene Price suggests in her essay in this volume, *Like Water for Chocolate* portrays Mexico in stereotypical terms which suggest that the style rather than the politics of magical realism is being employed in Esquivel's novel and Arau's film. A recent promotion of the Harry Potter series on the official Bloomsbury web-site refers to the novels as 'magical-realist'.[35] If *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* can be magical-realist, then, the argument goes, surely anything can be part of the discourse of magical realism? Is it the case, as one critic has recently argued, that: 'Writers have been distancing themselves from the term while their publishers have increasingly used the term to describe their works for marketing purposes'?[36] No wonder, then, that John King could complain in 1990 of the 'sloppy use of the term "magical-realist" by western critics eager to bracket and explain away the cultural production of the region [Latin America]'.[37]

One way of addressing this problem would be to argue that works such as *The Kingdom of this World*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Midnight's Children* and *The Famished Road* are 'authentic', magical-realist novels in Bhabha's sense (i.e. expressions of the 'postcolonial world') whereas others – such as fictional works by Angela Carter, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and J.K. Rowling – are examples of a stylistic aesthetic emptied of political content.[38] But this

[32] Quoted in José Donoso, *Historia personal del 'Boom'*, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), p. 15.

[33] William Rowe, 'Magical Realism', *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* (Chicago: Dearborn, 1997), pp. 506–7.

[34] Raymond L. Williams, *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America: Politics, Culture, and the Crisis of Truth* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. 71.

[35] See http://www.bloomsbury.com/ (consulted on 1 November 2003). For further discussion see Stephen M. Hart, 'Cultural Hybridity, Magical Realism, and the Language of Magic in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*', *Romance Quarterly*, 51.4 (2004), 304–12 (p. 305).

[36] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

[37] John King, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 5.

[38] For further discussion of this point, see Stephen M. Hart, 'Cultural Hybridity, Magical Realism, and the Language of Magic in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*', *Romance Quarterly*, 51.4 (2004), 304–12 (pp. 305–9).

manicheistic approach has its problems. What about writers such as Toni Morrison in whose work some critics have discerned magical-realist elements,[39] even if Morrison has distanced herself from the movement? How about Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* which has been seen by critics such as Wendy Faris as magical-realist (see *Ordinary Enchantments*, pp. 83–4, 117–18) but by others as simply revisiting the Gothic tradition? Is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* a magical-realist novel?[40] How about Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*? Even if the novel is magical realism, can Germany, or indeed any other Western nation, be legitimately seen as postcolonial?[41] In the sense perhaps that Angela Carter said that Yorkshire is a type of 'Third World' (see the discussion in Sarah Sceats's essay in this volume)? Is the 'Third World' even a valid term since the demise of the 'Second World' with the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989? For some critics (Chanady, Durix) the fantastic and magical realism are intimately related, while for others (Lucila-Inés Mena, Bowers) they are distinct.[42] The temptation to adopt a purist-relativist approach (namely, see all incarnations of magical realism as dependent on the cultural context which produced them, and therefore as intrinsically unique and not worth comparing) can become overwhelming.

Magical Realism and Beyond: Ideology of Fantasy

Wen-chin Ouyang

'The concept of magic realism raises many problems, both theoretical and historical', Fredric Jameson thus begins his 1986 essay 'On Magic Realism in Film'.[43] To experts and connoisseurs of contemporary fiction, art and film, the

[39] See Stelamaris Coser, *Bridging the Americas: The Literature of Paula Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), p. ix, pp. 1–2; and Stephen M. Hart, 'Magical Realism in the Americas: Politicised Ghosts in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of the Spirits*, and *Beloved*', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 9.2 (2003), 115–23 (pp. 119–23).

[40] There are different views on this novel; compare Amaryll Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony*, esp. p. 24, and Maggie Ann Bower, *Magic(al) Realism*, pp. 24–8.

[41] See Wendy Faris for a discussion of *The Tin Drum* as magical-realist; *Ordinary Enchantments*, pp. 92–3.

[42] Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony;* Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magical Realism* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Lucila-Inés Mena, 'Hacia una formulación teórica del realismo mágico', *Bulletin Hispanique*, 77.3–4 (1975), 517–24; Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism.*

[43] Originally published in *Critical Inquiry,* 12.2 (Winter 1986), 301–25, and later in *Signatures of the Visible* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 128–52. All quotations are from the latter.

spread of magical realism across continents and cultures, and more significantly across media of expression and genres, may be a welcome sign that marks the opening up of the global literary, artistic and visual landscapes to diversification held together by a common core. Magical realism, however vaguely this term may explain the composition and effect of a piece of work, has served as the common ground for discussions of many issues pertinent to cultural and identity politics termed as postcolonialism and postmodernism in the past three or four decades, from the 'native' recovering 'local' or 'indigenous' cultures and writing back at empire to creating hybridities that accommodate multiplicities, and from questioning the epistemological premises of European post-Enlightenment realism to remapping the novel and the visual arts. To theorists of culture and literature, the term and the phenomenon it denotes have proven vexingly impossible to pin down, whether in its politics or aesthetics. Magic can mean anything that defies empiricism, including religious beliefs, superstitions, myths, legends, voodoo, or simply what Todorov terms the 'uncanny' and 'marvellous' fantastic. Realism, seen from the perspective of magic, is one or any way of grasping reality outside the matrix of what is by now disdained conventional realism.

The conceptual problems, Jameson points out, 'emerge clearly when one juxtaposes the notion of "magic realism" with competing or overlapping terms: in the beginning, for instance, it was not clear how it was to be distinguished from the vaster category simply called fantastic literature: at this point, what is presumably at issue is a certain type of narrative or representation to be distinguished from "realism"' (p. 128). The terminological complexities are compounded further by the appearance of texts that carry what Jameson calls political or mystificatory value (p. 129). The tri-continental and multi-media labyrinthine genesis of magical realism only adds fuel to the already confusing fanfare of fire for theorists and critics who attempt to make sense of, articulate and contextualize the politics and aesthetics of this alternately named 'mode', 'genre' or 'style' of expression. What a critic calls the 'hollowness' of magical realism, as a meaningful theoretical term, is precisely what makes it so strangely seductive for Jameson; for it allows for numerous ways of engaging with the 'concept' to speak about contemporary narrative and representation (p. 129). Here is where attention is drawn to the critical enterprise itself. In the chapter devoted to magical realism in *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism*,[44] Alfred J. López sums up the crux of the matter in the widespread use, or misuse, of the 'hollow' term he speaks of, bringing the problem back to the originary act of naming:

> 'Magical realism'. A European term applied to a 'non-European' literature, a literature which, despite the assimilating effects of the 'Third World

[44] 'Reason, "The Native," and Desire: A Theory of "Magical Realism"', in *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

> cosmopolitan' status bestowed upon its originary authors, retain its irreducible difference, its mark or alterity, which only begs the question: What of this act of *naming*, of the boundary or mark of a text written by, say, a Latin American author, imposed upon it from without, in a futile European attempt to categorize and thus 'understand' it by this process of naming – which is already itself an act of appropriation, a bid to harness the wild, 'exotic' text within a reasonable European critical framework – to 'master' the other's difficult text? Here the act of naming emerges as the allegory of a colonial fantasy: the mastery of reading as a reading of mastery. (p. 143)

Part of his solution to this critical impasse is to reread the major magical-realist texts from the perspective of postcolonial theories, bringing 'Freudian' or 'Lacanian' desire for authority, legitimacy, alterity and agency, all familiar tropes in postcolonial studies, into a Hegelian reading of both literary and critical texts. Alejo Carpentier's famous prologue to his novel, *The Kingdom of This World*, is seen as embodying paradoxical impulses of on the one hand self-colonization and on the other the creation of a radical alterity. In forwarding Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as expressions of postcolonial desire for alterity that escapes European mastery and of 'the native's' will to self recovery, López dismisses interrogation grounded in postmodernism, such as the kind advocated by Jameson (p. 129), as insufficient in that it attempts to 'reduce to a narrative technique, to explain away as Otherness or political allegory or a naïve "nativism" the movement of a literature which . . . is not apprehended by a neocolonial desire that lies latent in Western practices of reading and classifying texts' (p. 144).

López, though by far the most theoretically sophisticated postcolonial critic of magical realism, is not the first or only critic who champions interrogation of magical realism within the framework of postcolonial theories. In this, he joins forces with postcolonial critics, such as Stephen Slemon and Jean-Pierre Durix (see above), and postmodernist critics, such as Lois Parkinson Zamora, Wendy Faris (see above) and, let us say, Fredric Jameson in attempts to find ways to speak more concretely of a phenomenon that has come to elude specificity. In fact, the trajectory of magical realism has been spiralling out of control since the 1960s. The scope of López's significant contribution to theorizing about magical realism (centred on García Márquez, Coetzee and Rushdie) cannot match that of magical realism itself, which has now become global, invading and setting up colonies in the literary and visual landscapes of, additionally, Africa, Asia and Australia. There is no stopping it. It is everywhere. It is in Arabic, Chinese, English, German, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish, Tibetan and Turkish, to name but a few languages. It is in fiction, film and the arts. The framework for inquiry derived from Latin American Studies or readings, let us say, of Anglophile Indian or African novels from the perspective of Spanish American magical realism (of the postcolonial drive), or comparative analyses of Northern and Southern American texts, or American and European works (of the postmodernist impulse), suddenly seem paradoxically illuminating and obfuscating.

The insights gained from research on Spanish American magical realism, for the importance of which one only needs to look at Zamora and Faris's pioneering volume, have served as the theoretical core for the analysis of non-Spanish American texts that combine the fantastic and the real in speaking of reality. Whether this reality is the postmodern of the so-called 'First World' or the postcolonial of the 'Third World', politics and aesthetics intersect in such a way that the text comes to be a map of conflicting ideologies and desires. Resistance to, subversion and reconfiguration of what may be termed 'modern Western epistemology', whether in the form of empiricism or empire, are uncovered, discussed and packaged as magical realism. These broad theoretical principles, under close scrutiny, are at risk of becoming a straightjacket, especially for non-Spanish American texts, potentially obscuring other equally important theoretical principles. The generalizing drive of the research on magical realism, as in any kind of research, is interestingly obfuscating in an illuminating way. In the very groundedness of these theoretical principles in the specific context of Spanish America lies their global appeal. Here, a new examination of them in a comparative framework that broadens out to include African, Asian and Australian contexts, as well as forms of expression outside the novel, such as film and the arts, may lead to reformulation of the questions behind them, and the formulation of new ones. Let us revisit, as an example, the subject of the source and effect of magic, and try to see if new questions on the politics and aesthetics of magical realism may be raised.

Two generalizations based on juxtaposition of the 'local' or 'indigenous' with the 'West' seem to have found universal sympathy. Magic is derived from the 'supernatural' elements of 'local' or 'indigenous' myths, religions or cultures that speak directly to the imposition of Christianity in addition to post-Enlightenment empiricism on the 'natives' of South America. Christianity and European empiricism, as institutions of knowledge of the empire, have become the symbols of this empire. The novel, itself a 'European' import, necessarily becomes the site of resistance on the ground of which the war of cultural recovery takes place. The process of decolonization, it may be said, entails recovery of histories derived from 'local' or 'indigenous' myths and religions that are not those of the 'West'. The 'West' in this case may be particularized as, let us say, the 'Hispano-Catholic' Europe that has its own articulation of the broader 'Western' institutions of knowledge in tension with those of the rest of Europe and its other empires, such as the British or the French. In what ways is the reformulation, or as some would say 'misuse', of 'local' or 'indigenous' myths and religions a response to Catholicism? What of the particularities of the responses to Anglican or Protestant Christianity? And, would the prior presence of Christianity in the lands that later came to be colonized by the 'West' effect different cultural politics? How do the Christians in the Middle East, for example, respond to 'Western' colonization? How does the colonial encounter problematize discourses about other monotheistic religions, such as Islam in the Middle East, Africa and India? Here, one must pause and pose another question: in what ways has the response to Christianity in non-Christian cultures coloured their resistance to 'Western' secular institutions of knowledge, such as empiricism, and vice versa?

And what of the language of this resistance, of decolonization? English, French and Spanish, to writers from South America, Africa and Asia, are the language of the colonizers and, more importantly, they simultaneously open up and limit creative vistas to a world constructed by these languages in the form of a tradition that has taken shape over the centuries. The importance of this tradition is the clearest in literature where literary texts have a way of getting entangled in dialectical dialogism with preceding texts that embody the epistemological system produced and operative in the same culture. The choice of English, French or Spanish as the language of engagement with colonization, for example, means taking on as well as becoming limited to the literary tradition of each language, including its internalization of the broader 'Western' literary canon. García Márquez, it has been pointed out many times, looks up to as well as subverts classical Greek and Spanish texts. Magic does not only come from the 'supernatural' elements of 'local' myths and religions, but also from pre-realist 'Western' texts. Borges, whether we consider him a precursor or pioneer of magical realism, derives the fantastic from the 'Western' literary tradition.[45] The choice to write in a language that does not belong to the colonizer then affords the writer options to map his texts in completely different ways. This is especially true of languages that come with a long, written literary tradition with a strong component of the fantastic, such as, let us say, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Persian. Magic in texts written in these languages may easily be the result of a concoction of materials taken from 'local' myths and religions and the literary tradition effected through strategies of intertextuality.

Intertextuality in contemporary literatures not in the languages of the most recent colonizers, whether of the magical kind or not, it may be argued, is a feature of postcolonial texts driven by an impulse to decolonize. Decolonization in this case involves a return to 'native' traditions. Intertextuality in, for example, the Arabic novel, tells a tale of the ways in which the form, imported from the 'West', founds a genealogy for itself in the Arabic literary tradition in general and 'local' tradition of storytelling in particular in order to overcome its foreignness. In the process of its decolonization it 'invents a tradition' the contours of which are delineated by the borders of the nation-state. 'The invention of tradition' Hobsbawm and Ranger speak of is a cultural artefact of the nation-state, whose newness requires for its legitimation a tradition with roots in the past.[46]

[45] The influence of *The Thousand and One Nights* on Borges is well-known. The genealogy of the *Nights* is a problematic one, and it may arguably be considered a 'Western' text in that it has taken shape (in its present form) in the 19th century during the height of the fascination with the Orient during the colonial period in Europe. More important, Borges, not knowing Arabic, could only access the text in translation (Richard Burton's in particular) and, it may be argued, translations are texts in their own right that bear only semblance of resemblance to the original. This is particularly true of the pseudo-translations of 'oriental tales' and the ensuing development of the 'Oriental Tale' in Europe.

[46] See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

This 'invented tradition' is akin to the 'immemorial past' Anderson identifies as the historical dimension in 'imaginings of community' within the framework of nationalism – the nation is inevitably 'imagined' as 'limited' and 'sovereign' with roots in an 'immemorial past' on the landscape vacated by 'religious community' and 'dynastic realm'.[47] Is the turn, or return, to pre-colonial 'local' or 'indigenous' myths and religions in Spanish American magical realism a part of imaginings of nation? Does magical realism find a precursor in and dialogues with Spanish American romance that took part in imaginings of community?[48] Is magical realism deconstructive only, or is it that and constructive as well? Should Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* be dismissed simply as 'postmodern historiography', as López does, that writes history in a fragmentary, questioning and unreliable fashion all in response to colonial single-voiced, self-assured linear grand narrative? Is it too driven by a desire for an alternative community? If this should be the case, then 'magic' here is no different from the kind of 'fantasy' Jacqueline Rose analyses as both the constructive and troubling source of the nation-state.

Locating her 'Freudian' analysis of the discourses and policies the State of Israel in the overlap, or slippage in another sense, between 'religious community' and 'nation-state', Rose looks at the role of fantasy, as a manifestation of desire, and its frustration in shaping discourse and policy. Playing on the word 'state', as both the condition of desire and its political actualization, she exposes the complex ways in which the Utopian world of a religiously imagined community, present or absent, intrude on the discourses and practices of the nation-state. Is this a possible context for the politics of apocalypse in magical realism? *States of Fantasy*, the title of her book, denotes both states of desire and polit-ical communities the imaginings of which are driven and drawn by desire. Seen in this light, desire is intriguingly political and fantasy profoundly ideological. In *The Fantastic*, a work that has been seminal in the discussions of what constitutes magic in magical realism, Todorov points to the importance of desire in structuring the relationship between the individual and the world, 'self' and 'other' in their infinite varieties, and, more importantly, narrative.[49]

The workings of desire in structuring the politics of longing for community as detailed by Todorov and Rose find a beautiful visual articulation in Wim Wenders' 1987 film, *Wings of Desire* (Der Himmel über Berlin – literally: Heaven Over Berlin). Maggie Ann Bowers locates magical realism of the film in

[47] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

[48] For romance as nationalist narrative, see Doris Sommer, 'Irresistible Romance: the Foundational Fictions of Latin America', *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 71–98.

[49] See in particular chapters 7 and 8: 'themes of the self', and 'themes of the other', in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1975).

the convergence of the worlds of the angels and humans, and in its interrogation of the nature of reality.[50] The explicit references to the destruction of Berlin towards the end of World War II and the persecution of the Jews before – in the form of film-within-film, however, points the way towards reading the film as political allegory as well. The film is as concerned with history, especially its extreme 'nationalist' misadventure during the Nazi ascendance, and with the German nation's coming to terms with this episode in its history. The film is as much about the reality on the ground as it is about the nature of reality in perception. In this, magical realism and fantasy have much in common. Who would doubt today that J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, defined as fantasy in no uncertain terms, is an allegory of post-World War I Europe and an imagining of an alternative community? Today's magical realism and fantasy seem equally haunted by imperialism and empire, nationalism and nation-state.

Magical realism has resisted being viewed as fantasy in part because of its own desire for territoriality, and in part because of its aspiration to literariness and radical politics – to be taken seriously as literature and epistéme – which may explain the concern with the distinction between 'literature' and 'popular fiction'. The lines between the two 'modes' or 'genres', however, have never really been clearly drawn. Borges is famously claimed by both, so is García Márquez now,[51] let alone writers like Rushdie.[52] There may be some benefit in eschewing the impossible-to-maintain distinction on occasion in order that the insights of both areas of inquiry may be brought together to bear on the texts we try to come to terms with. Aside from the location of the fantastic – that in magical realism it is grafted on reality and in fantasy on a never-land – the motors driving narrative and the trajectories of this narrative are, in a sense, more similar than not. The politics of fantasy, like those of magical realism, are driven by desire at one level to grapple with reality and the epistemological systems in place for knowing it, and at another level to transcend here and now and imagine an alternative world. In its flights of fantasy, it problematizes, as magical realism does, the various social and cultural institutions based in religion, ethnicity, class and gender.[53] It too subverts realism as a mode of narrative.[54] More important,

[50] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, The New Critical Idioms series (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 111–12.

[51] See Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 13 and p. 127.

[52] See, for example, Richard Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

[53] For these politically and epistemologically subversive dimensions of fantasy, see Rosemary Jackson's survey of the critical literature on the subject and her own discussion in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (New York and London: Routledge, 1981), p. 91, 93, 95, 98. The bibliography is extremely useful.

[54] See, for example, Catherine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); W. R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana, Chicago,

perhaps, is its engagement with subjectivity that has yielded significant insights into the ways in which the workings of desire, conscious or unconscious, structure literary texts. Todorov, it seems, may have some more mileage in magical realism.

In today's global economy, in which production is dictated ever more by consumption, the already fuzzy distinctions among 'genres', 'modes' and 'media', or even 'registers' (such as 'literature' and 'popular fiction') are becoming even fuzzier. The literary field finds itself under the influence of new rules of play as it opens itself up to various forms of migration. Rapid, albeit haphazard, translation has increased the volume and speed of cross-cultural exchange and literary cross-fertilization. The ease of travel from one cosmopolis to another, the spread of internet technology, the reach of Hollywood, to mention but a few features of our contemporary life, are redrawing the map of the literary field everywhere in the world. The migration of story from literature to cinema, for example, has often led to the production of a written text based on the film quite different from the original. In many instances the film version is an improvement on and more popular than the original. Under such circumstances questions of discreteness, definition, category and origin become less important than the workings of a text, be it literary or visual, and the ways in which these relate the text to the world and other texts without necessarily abandoning altogether the familiar articulated categories of knowledge. Perhaps letting the texts speak of their own politics in the multi-cultural, inter-generic and cross-media contexts will lead to some unexpected discoveries.

Familiar Grounds, Novel Trajectories: The Fantastic, the Real and Magical Realism

Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang

Intended as a celebration ten years on of Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris's landmark volume, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995), this *Companion to Magical Realism* is informed by the scope and parameters delineated by its predecessor but hopes to offer its readers something new at the same time, bringing new themes, issues and writers into the purview of magical realism. It has not been the intention of the editors to impose a Latin American straightjacket reading old or new texts that are the subject of the papers collected in this volume (as if to argue that they depart from the Latin American norm and

London: University of Illinois Press, 1976); and Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1979). For a more recent work informed by contemporary literary and cultural theories, see Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996).