The Politics and Poetics of Latin American Magical Realism

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by

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Abstract

The phenomenon of the magical realist genre in twentieth century Latin American fiction is the subject of this thesis. Part I, comprising three chapters, considers the theoretical aspects of magical realism. Chapter One traces the genealogy of the critical writing on magical realism, and identifies a number of problems. In Chapter Two, the European and Latin American textual ancestry is established. Chapter Three, dealing with the politics and poetics of magical realism, first lays bare the attributes of both classic realism and surrealism, demonstrating magical realism's dependence on realist methodology in its depiction of 'magical' events, and clarifies its difference from other realisms. Also, in this chapter, a specific postcolonial structure of feeling is identified with magical realist fiction; the consciousness of South and Central American writers has assimilated the culture of both the former coloniser and the colonised, and this co-existence of two contradictory cultures produces the structure of feeling that lies behind magical realism. In part, literature is viewed, effectively, as the practice of the collective socio-political unconscious, and magical realism is conceived as a mode of resistance to the colonially imposed construction of identity. It can also be one of the channels through which non-hegemonic groups appropriate cultural capital. The remainder of this chapter deals with further postmodern characteristics and issues concerning postcolonialism.

Part II contains three chapters which are devoted to close textual analysis of the following narratives: *The Kingdom of This World* by Alejo Carpentier; *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and 'Innocent Eréndira' by Gabriel García Márquez; and *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende.

Dedicated with love to

the memory of my father, Bill,

and

the future of my mother, Margaret.

Contents

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Part of Chapter Six has been published as 'The Other and the Other-Worldly: The Function of Magic in Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies,* vol. 75, no. 3, July 1998. Part of Chapter Five has been adapted for an article, 'Of Wind and Astral Buttocks: Transgression and the Carnivalesque in Gabriel García Márquez's *La candida Eréndira*', *Tesserae: Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* (forthcoming).

A Note on Conventions

Quotations from the following primary sources are referenced in brackets immediately after they appear in the text. Footnotes are used in all other cases.

Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*, trans. Magda Bogin (London: Black Swan, 1985).

Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (London: André Deutsch, 1990).

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Picador, 1978).

—. *Innocent Eréndira and other stories*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London, Picador, 1981).

Introduction

In magical realist texts marvellous or magical events happen in what otherwise appears to be realistic narrative. Broadly speaking, magical realism is a recent hybrid literary form which uses the long-established methodology of realism interfused with events that, in the West, may be considered preternatural or supernatural and, in some cases, includes elements of pre-existent or ostensible fable, folk-tale, mythology and legend. Bizarre and 'magical' events are depicted, such as telekinesis, levitation or prophesying: a priest levitates after drinking hot chocolate to raise funds for the church; an inspirational slave transmogrifies into a lizard; a little girl plays the piano without touching the keys. Nevertheless, it quickly becomes evident that, thematically, the principal preoccupations of the novels revolve around colonialism, economic imperialism, political oppression and the socially constructed nature of knowledge, especially textually mediated, historical knowledge.[1] Although magic may be the most immediately conspicuous common

[1] I acknowledge Edward Said's definitions. He writes: '[a]s I shall be using the term, 'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is

attribute, analysis placing too great a concentration on this aspect promotes the misconception that they are frivolous flights of fantasy, obscuring the fact that they tend to be heavily politically and historically grounded texts.

This project, whilst focusing on literary texts, is part of a wider engagement in the field of cultural studies aiming to recognise and examine the politics of particular aesthetic configurations. The aesthetic, far from being an absolute and immutable emblem of elitism, is viewed in this study as a cultural manifestation that is interpretable as a literary and social practice of what some, following Jung, may identify as the 'collective unconscious'. Jung writes: '[w]e mean by collective unconscious, a certain disposition shaped by the forces of heredity'.[2] I am exercising a considerable degree of freedom in interpreting this term: his case is centred on archetypes and ahistorical phenomena, whereas I shall be arguing that there is a collective unconscious which appears in literature and the arts, forged out of a kind of hereditary *social* memory.

I have adopted an interdisciplinary analytical framework with a dual perspective: the social and the literary, or in other alliterative words, the politics and the poetics. Part I elaborates the theoretical aspects of magical realism. The literary perspective attempts to identify magical realism's aesthetic features, and traces the path it has followed in its evolution from, or reaction against, preceding literary genres. Following Heidegger, the interrelatedness of literature and society provides a framework within which the investigation is situated;[3] literature is viewed as an

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the implanting of settlements on distant territory'. He also observes: '[i]n our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism [...] lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices', *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 8.

[2] Carl Gustav Jung, 'Psychology and Literature', in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), p. 183; first published in 1930.

[3] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

inescapably social phenomenon, characterised by its psycho-social embeddedness, rather than its erstwhile spurious transcendence. So, it is argued here, that literary forms are historically contingent, a position involving engagement with social, political and historical analyses which is, in part, a study of the impact of the Latin American postcolonial experience on its literature. This thesis starts from the premise cherished by Fredric Jameson, amongst others, that the *political* perspective is 'the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation',[4] acknowledging that, although literature is, of course, *more* than its politics, it cannot be exempt from political considerations. Magical realism is interpreted as a *consequence*, though not merely a *symptom*, of the postcolonial condition, but I argue that this does not vitiate its potential for transformative cultural and political practice, and it is therefore also simultaneously a *critique* of postcolonialism.

Geographically, magical realism is associated predominantly with South and Central American writers with whom this mode of fiction originated, although more recently, diverse authors have written novels that have been included under the umbrella of magical realism. These include *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Anglo-Indian writer, Salman Rushdie, the Booker Prize winning *The Famished Road* (1991), by Nigerian, Ben Okri, and the *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) by the Czech, Milan Kundera. Some writers have explored certain distinctive features in parts of their work: hints are found in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987); Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1985) and Jeanette Winterson's narrative of gross exploits in *Sexing the Cherry* (1990) are reminiscent of a grotesque sort of Rabelaisian magical realism. In contrast, ecological concerns surface in marina ama omowale maxwell's *Chopstix in Mauby* (1996), as it traces the history of an African Caribbean woman in Trinidad, identifying itself on the front cover as 'a novel of

[4] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 17.

magical realism'. *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992), by Mexican, Laura Esquivel, is the best-known of a number of recent, rather nugatory, but popular novels that exploit magical realism by courting the dangers of sensationalism, preferring the magic to the realism, effectively omitting the serious stance of earlier works, with frothy and ersatz results.

The restricted geographical range of the texts in this study is deliberate, as I propose to demonstrate that the specific socio-political, postcolonial conditions prevailing in South and Central America contributed seminally to the evolution of magical realism. Writers in other continents who have a commonality of experience of postcolonial conditions in some form have tapped into magical realism, using it as an appropriate vehicle for their shared experiences, but these are secondary, rather than primary, exponents of magical realism. The chronology of the texts would tend to support this position.

Chapter One provides a genealogy of the critical writing on magical realism, as a result of which a number of problems relating to definition and usage become visible. Chapter Two considers the textual ancestry of magical realism, through both its European and Latin American family trees. Chapter Three, dealing with the politics and the poetics of magical realism, first assesses its characteristics in contradistinction to classic realism, and then surrealism, investigating magical realism's utilisation of the realist methodology in depicting bizarre and 'magical' events, the feature by which it is distinguished from genres such as the uncanny, the fable, and the fantastic. The second part of this chapter deals with my hypothesis that magical realism both embodies and enacts a hybrid, contemporary cultural phenomenon, which I argue can be described as a postcolonial structure of feeling; this is located in the texts as a result of an endeavour by writers to create a body of literature which has its own *raison d'être*, which is distinctively American and

postcolonial, and does not blindly duplicate hegemonic European styles. The consciousness of South and Central American writers, however, has ineluctably assimilated, and to some extent synthesised, a great deal of the culture of both the former coloniser and the colonised, and it is this co-existence of these two contradictory cultures which, I contend, produces the structure of feeling which lies, possibly unconsciously, behind magical realism. Literature is viewed, in part, as the practice of the collective socio-political unconscious, and magical realism specifically is conceived as a mode of resistance to the colonially imposed construction of identity. Additionally, whilst attempting to assert difference, this fiction has had the effect of satirising, criticising, opening up debates, creating spaces within which cultural identities can be forged, overcoming conspiracies of silence or misinformation, so rescuing alternative versions of history from obscurity, and fashioning new ones. It can also be one of the media through which non-hegemonic groups, such as women, Amerindian and black people can appropriate cultural capital and empower themselves through their fictions. The slippery nature of magical realism, again a feature of this structure of feeling, is discussed here, especially with regard to the difficulties of classifying the nature and status of occurrences, and the problems of locating boundaries between types of events. The third section of this chapter seeks to situate magical realism, in part owing to its de-doxifying metafictiveness, within the broad church of postmodernism, and finally, some of the issues surrounding postcolonial identity are considered.

Part I, then, theorises the relationship between one particular kind of postcolonial identity — Latin American — and one particular cultural mode — magical realist fiction. The politics and the poetics of magical realism are assessed in a single chapter because their interconnected nature constantly reveals itself in the examination of structures of feeling, postmodernism and identity. This serves to demonstrate the coalescence which magical realism achieves so well: it presents

neither empty, apolitical, literary experimentalism, nor axe-grinding politics, but instead produces a poetics which is in itself inherently political, and a politics which is inherently poetic.

Close textual analysis begins in Part II, which is devoted to texts I have designated as paradigmatic magical realist fictions. Chapter Four examines *El reino de este mundo* (1949; *The Kingdom of This World,* 1957), by the Cuban, Alejo Carpentier; Chapter Five looks at *Cien años de soledad* (1967; *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* 1970) and 'La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada' (1972; 'Innocent Eréndira' 1978), both by the Colombian, Gabriel García Márquez; and Chapter Six explores *La casa de los espíritus* (1982; *The House of the Spirits,* 1985) by the Chilean, Isabel Allende.

The Kingdom of This World, set in Saint Domingue (now Haiti), presents the reader with the perspective of one slave, and takes us through the period of slavery during the colonisation by the French, leading up to the postcolonial reign of Henri Christophe, the first black king of Haiti, a time that was followed by a republican regime in which the mulattos were in the ascendant. By far the most famous of these novels, *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* tells the story of the Buendía family's predestined rise and fall, and comprises a distinctive, pan-historic synthesis that can be read on different levels as a history of Colombia, a history of Latin America and a history of the world. 'Innocent Eréndira', a lesser-known story, tells of the life of an unfortunate young prostitute and her plight at the hands of various people before she makes her triumphant escape. *The House of the Spirits* ranges over a number of decades this century, telling the story of several generations of women in one family, and ends by closing in upon the recent history of a country, which we may assume is Chile, and the death of the President, Salvador Allende, in 1973. Each chapter in Part II opens with contextualising material providing brief biographical

and bibliographical information on the author and his/her socio-historical location, bearing in mind that the writers have local interests as well as American ones. It may be argued the biographical information is redundant since I am maintaining magical realism stems from a combination of both powerful societal influences and earlier writing, a notion which is incompatible with that of the romanticised individual genius who transcends his/her place in society, believing in the self as origin, to produce the *Meisterwerk.* My justification for adding these mini-biographies is that they show how these individuals relate to their societies, since all have been closely involved in national politics and, importantly, they give an indication as to how the authors were positioned to see an overview of Latin American development. I have no interest here in ontogenetic analysis or for situating individual writers as points of cohesion and unity. I have visited one or two of their expository texts for the reason that they are often unwittingly revealing, frequently indicating the lack of congruence between what a writer *says* in essays, interviews and journalism, and *does* in his or her fiction.

Regarding the texts selected for analysis, there are a number of other novels that could have served equally well: the Guatemalan, Miguel Angel Asturias's *Hombres de maíz* (1949; *Men of Maize,* 1988) or Peruvian, Mario Vargas Llosa's *La casa verde* (1966; *The Green House,* 1969), or his compatriot, Miguel Gutiérrez's *La violencia del tiempo* (1991), for example. The selection of texts is based on the following factors: the inclusion of Carpentier is essential as he is a founding father figure; it is important to acknowledge the stature and popularity of García Márquez and the seminal nature of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* but the incorporation of one of his less celebrated stories provides a fresh path and a stimulating source of analysis, hence the choice of 'Innocent Eréndira'; I wanted to retain a gender balance in the hope of seeing whether women writers use magical realism differently from men; additionally, it is important to include a more recent fiction, so Isabel

Allende's novel is examined; and finally, I have selected works that are widely available and have been translated into English.

This introduction is an appropriate place to concede the existence of the viper's nest in which magical realism can find itself on both political and artistic levels. It is undoubtedly a problematical term, despite the fact that there does seem to be a widespread popular understanding of it amongst non-specialist readers. This is because, like so many terms, it has become a shibboleth for educated Westerners. It is my contention that, in an academic sense, magical realism is not entirely masterable: by its very nature it resists definition and containment but, of course, ironically this is partly what defines it. Chapter One shows the fluidity of its critical boundaries, and this tendency to refuse to stay within the parameters of any given specific definition continually frustrates academics' efforts to systematise it. Nonetheless, this study does aspire to establish a rationale for magical realism, so lifting it out of the 'theoretical vacuum' in which it has been said to exist, but without reducing it too neatly to soundbites or formulae.[5] Another problem is the danger that the designation 'magical realism', as a form of shorthand for a subsection of literature, is used as an opportunity for gross generalisation, for providing a locus for ludicrous, exoticist comments about cultures which are not one's own, and for heaping together disparate works of literature in an attempt to force them to fit a predetermined European aesthetic configuration, so they can be shuffled by sleight of hand into the (Western) canon. This could be construed as an insidious form of neo-colonialism in which it would be easy to be unconsciously complicitous. Aijaz Ahmad has alerted us to the dangers inherent in the terminology and methodologies associated with postcolonial theory, and since I am locating magical realism within the parameters of postcolonialism, I am acutely aware of the

[5] See Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 108.

pitfalls awaiting a Western critic who uses assimilationist critical practices by relating everything back to the centre.[6] There is little profit in magical realist writers trying to claim difference if they are then resituated as victims of Western methodological practices; to nullify the oppositionality of magical realism, some may argue, we only need to position it, to relate it to the West; others would say we only need to *name* it. The prevailing Western prejudice implies that if *they* are not like *us*, they must be our inverted image. Postcolonial criticism cannot escape from its conceptualisation of people and places according to their former colonial relationships, as if that is all that is needed to define them. Ahmad believes it is unacceptable to use the postcolonial as the central principle structuring other people's lives. One of the ways in which we can try to mitigate this solipsism is by constantly reminding ourselves of our interpellation, and the inevitability of our *being-in-the-world.* Another danger in any kind of theorising is that generalisation can be extended too far, producing a potentially hazardous, reductionistic and homogenising effect. This research does not pretend all 7,686 square miles of Central and South American countries are alike, or that all previously colonised countries have the same experiences, as I hope will become evident. However, it is frequently acknowledged that there is a shared experience, as Michael Wood, for example, in his discussion of the 'Boom' in Latin American writing in the sixties and seventies says:

> There have been pan-continental literary movements before, but not many, and there is a clear sense of new allegiances here: not to individual countries but to Latin America, to the Spanish language, to modern literature, to certain views of the relationship between fiction and the world.[7]

Chapter Three tackles these issues concerning the methodological problems of postcolonial theory. It must be remembered, however, it is not so long ago the literatures of Latin America, Africa, and Asia were disregarded in the West, and

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[6] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: classes, nations, literatures* (London & New York: Verso, 1992).

[7] Michael Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 2.

banished to the margins in a world where Eurocentric chauvinism ruled to an even greater degree. For the reason that critics are never free from the paraphernalia of their cultures or from the bondage of history, European socio-literary analysts should heed Chinua Achebe's plea for a little humility and a little less solipsism.[8] Although I may attempt to disidentify myself with European thought, I cannot reasonably free myself from it any more than Columbus could in the late fifteenth century when he descended upon the Caribbean. García Márquez recognises this saying: '[w]e are all hostage to our own prejudices',[9] not that this is an excuse for throwing up our critical hands in despair.

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[8] Chinua Achebe, 'Colonialist Criticism', in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft *et al* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

[9] Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza and Gabriel García Márquez, *The Fragrance of Guava*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1983), p. 109.

PART I

1

The Critical Literature

That magical realism is easily imitated, on a superficial level at least, is illustrated in the following wonderfully sardonic extracts as they mischievously tread a fine line between humorous, affectionate parody and cruel stereotyping. The first is from Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984):

> A quota system is to be introduced on fiction set in South America. The intention is to curb the spread of package-tour baroque and heavy irony. Ah, the propinquity of cheap life and expensive principles, of religion and banditry, of surprising honour and random cruelty. Ah, the daiquiri bird which incubates its eggs on the wing; ah, the fredonna tree whose roots grow at the tips of its branches, and whose fibres assist the hunchback to impregnate by telepathy the haughty wife of the hacienda owner; ah, the opera house now overgrown by jungle.[1]

'The Statue', a short story by Daniel Menaker, provides this fragment:

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[1] Quoted in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995), intro., p. 1.

> One particularly oppressive day in January, not so many years ago, just after the galleon had made its silent way through the town, the dwarfs and gibbons dangling from the ropes with unusual listlessness, four-year old Concepción Iguana, the granddaughter of the ancient widow, María Iguana, a child who was said to possess second sight because she was born with exquisitely nacreous mandolin picks in place of fingernails, stood in the middle of the highway and vomited ten red toads, which was taken by those who gathered around her as possibly a bad omen.[2]

These parodies work, as indeed all parody does, by condensing a number of obvious characteristics, and through the exaggeration and combination of these features, ridiculous stereotypes emerge. Magical realist fiction is extremely easily parodied as it lends itself to excess and hyperbole. Looking at the first extract, it can be seen that it refers specifically to its subject: literature set in South America. The phrase 'package-tour baroque' suggests this fiction has been cheapened by being made easily available in a consumer-oriented way which has reduced it to a formula, so it is less exciting, less dangerous and less authentic. This extract contains the names of exotic-sounding biological specimens; it introduces elements of the bizarre and the fantastical; the jungle encroaching over the opera house presents high art juxtaposed with wild nature: cultivation and the absence of cultivation exist together. A world upside-down, or a world in which the laws of nature and science are transgressed, is insinuated by the trees which have roots at the ends of their branches; superhuman sensory experiences are suggested by telepathy; euphoric rapture is evident in the anaphoric exclamations of 'ah'. The second extract hints at the weight and tangibility of colonial history with the mention of the galleon; the fantastical, along with the grotesque, appear with the vomited red toads and, again, the special mental powers are signalled with the child's 'second sight'; in addition, a world beyond human control is suggested by omens.

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[2] Quoted in John S. Brushwood, 'Two Views of the Boom: North and South', *Latin American Literary Review*, Jan.-Jun. 1987, vol. 15, no. 29 (pp. 13-31), pp. 13-14. The story was published in *Atlantic*, Dec. 1979 (pp. 84-86).

Even in these decontextualised fragments, it is obvious they are suffused with magical realism, but it is perplexing to observe that a phenomenon which can be identified so easily, and which is so well-known that it has been parodied, should be so difficult to theorise. Compiling a litany of condemnatory remarks about magical realism's theorisation is easily done, as the following demonstrate. Hispanicist, Gerald Martin, claims: '[a]ttempts to define Magical Realism, whether inside or outside Latin America, have produced more heat than light';[3] Floyd Merrell has written that various definitions of magical realism 'represent sincere attempts to conceptualize a phenomenon whose complexity and apparent irregularity seem to defy concrete description';[4] the postcolonial specialist, Stephen Slemon, argues magical realism has never 'successfully differentiated between itself and neighboring genres such as fabulation, metafiction, the baroque, the fantastic, the uncanny, or the marvelous';[5] Wood claims it is 'full of muddle'[6]; Richard A. Young says it is a 'discredited term.[7] Additionally, Merrell writes:

> On confronting the numerous contradictory definitions of magical realism, one could infer that almost all modern literature of the Western World might be included within the boundaries of this term...[8]

However, Regina Janes argues that despite the damage it causes 'and the imperialism it promotes', it is impossible for Anglo-American critics to dispense with magical realism.[9] Perhaps this is because of what Fredric Jameson identifies, in a frequently quoted phrase, when he says it 'retains a strange seductiveness'.[10]

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[3] Gerald Martin, *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 377, n. 3.
[4] Floyd Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference: An Inquiry into the Underlying Nature of Magical Realism', *Chasqui*, vol. 4, 1975 (pp. 5-17), p. 6.
[5] Stephen Slemon, 'Magical Realism as Post-colonial Discourse', in *Magical Realism*, eds. Zamora and Faris, p. 407.
[6] Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 3.
[7] Richard A. Young, *El reino de este mundo: A Critical Guide* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1983), p. 47.
[8] Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference', p. 5.
[9] Regina Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading* (Boston, Mass: Twayne, 1991), p. 103.
[10] Fredric Jameson, ' On Magic Realism in Film', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, Winter 1986 (pp. 301-325), p. 302.

In this chapter, during the course of reviewing the critical literature on magical realism, I will try to focus upon a number of the concerns raised above, establishing exactly why debate over a literary term has provoked such remonstrance and even censure, and identify a number of reasons why magical realism appears to defy definition. I will also examine, towards the end of the chapter, the ideological objections that have inflamed critics' and writers' sensibilities, and finally, offer some thought as to what gives rise to magical realism's seductive allure.

As a literary term, magical realism has been widely used, often in relation to any texts which deviate slightly from the classic realist style and, consequently, it has been attacked for its ambiguity. Many critics would like to see it jettisoned completely or replaced by a more precise term, and one which is less fraught with contradiction. However, as this chapter demonstrates, one of the reasons why it is inherently so problematic is that it is used with reference to texts and societies which themselves embody contradictions. Additionally, the business of formulating a definition is in itself highly problematic and, obviously, not all critics share the same one. There is, of course, wide disagreement over a whole range of terminology used in literary and cultural studies today as, for example, the discussion on postmodernism in Chapter Three shows. I will not be providing an aphoristic, sound-bite definition of magical realism, for reasons which will be explained fully, but for the moment it must suffice to say that because of its very nature it resists definition, and that to define it is to attempt a delimitation of a mode of writing which seeks to transgress limits, to destabilise fixity, and to blur boundaries. There is also a sense in which the definition of a phenomenon results in a diminution of some of its mystique, not that the critic should hide behind such a vague defence. Observing a specimen through a microscope is not always the methodology which produces enlightenment; it may more advantageous to look at it in its natural context, in all its complexity and elusivity, frustrating and lacking in

certitude though that may be. However, at the end of Chapter Three I do draw together the threads of the discussion on the politics and poetics of magical realism, identifying a number of characteristic *tendencies* found in these fictions.

Given that magical realism came to be associated with South and Central American cultures, it may be surprising that the appellation 'Magic Realism' was coined in 1925 by the German art critic, Franz Roh (1890-1965), in promoting post-expressionism as an exciting new departure in painting.[11] 'Magic Realism' he used specifically in relation to a group of contemporary German painters whose work he considered to be awe-inspiring, owing to the way it revealed a mysterious side of reality to the viewer. In the work of artists such as Georg Schrimpf, George Grosz, and Otto Dix, Roh claims: 'our real world re-emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of the new day'.[12] Roh emphasises the act of perception, arguing 'we look on it with new eyes', suggesting a type of defamiliarisation is in operation. He says this new art has been disparaged 'for its rough drawing and "penetrating" execution', and claims it is not so much the objectivity itself which is significant, but rather 'that radiation of magic, that spirituality, that lugubrious quality throbbing in the best works of the new mode, along with their coldness and apparent sobriety'.[13] Although 'Magic Realism' appears in the title, the phrase is not to be found in the body of the paper itself; an author's note indicates the title was an afterthought.[14] Roh's coinage of the term is not particularly useful, especially since he appears to

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[11] Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925); later he also published: 'Ruckblick auf den Magischen Realismus', *Das Kunstwerk*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1952 (pp. 7-9); 'Realismo mágico: Problemas de la pintura europea mas reciente', trans. Fernando Vela, *Revista de Occidente*, vol. 16, April-June 1927 (pp. 274-301); this last article is translated as 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', trans. Wendy Faris, in *Magical Realism*, eds. Zamora and Faris, and is the one referred to here.

[12] Roh, 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', p. 17.

[13] Roh, 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', p. 20.

[14] Roh writes: 'I attribute no special value to the title "magical realism". Since the work had to have a name that meant something, and the word "Post-Expressionism" only indicates ancestry and chronological relationship, I added the first title quite a long time after having written this work', 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', pp. 15-16.

use 'New Objectivity' and 'Post-Expressionism' synonymously with magic realism. In 1943, an exhibition entitled 'American Realists and Magic Realists' was shown at the New York Museum of Modern Art, but it is true to say, in relation to the visual arts, 'post-expressionism' gradually eclipsed magical realism.

In South America the term magical realism gained some popularity in the 1930s, but mostly, according to Enrique Anderson Imbert, in connection with European writers such as Franz Kafka and G. K. Chesterton.[15] Massimo Bontempelli and others connected with the Franco-Italian journal, *900* (*Novecento*), also promoted magical realism in an article in 1927, although it then fell into abeyance. Irene Guenther suggests the migration of the term from Europe to Latin America may have been facilitated by the numbers fleeing the Third Reich. She says at least 100,000 exiles who left Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria settled in Central and South America.[16] The Venezuelan writer, Arturo Uslar Pietri, who knew Bontempelli, was amongst the first South Americans to consider magical realism specifically in relation to Latin American writers, and although he does not mention Roh, his use of the term is similar, and he applied it to some Venezuelan short stories.[17] He said magical realism was the 'discovery of mystery immanent in reality'.[18] By this point, magical realism had made the transition from the world of art criticism to that of literary criticism, a move that would have been far less probable had it been associated with a rigid definition at its inception.

According to Roberto González Echevarría, the views so far under discussion represent what may be termed a phenomenological view of magical realism; this has

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[15] Enrique Anderson Imbert, *El realismo mágico y otros ensayos* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1976), p. 12.
[16] Irene Guenther, 'Magic Realism, New Objectivity', in *Magical Realism,* eds. Zamora and Faris, p. 61.
[17] Arturo Uslar Pietri, *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* (Caracas, Madrid: EDIME, 1959).
[18] Quoted in Leonard S. Klein (ed.), *Latin American Literature in the Twentieth Century: A Guide* (Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 1988), p. 267.

largely, though not entirely, been superseded by an ontological view.[19] The transition into literary criticism is certainly associated with this shift in meaning. Alejo Carpentier marks this change, although to some extent, he could be said to straddle the two. Some, such as Seymour Menton, have sought to remain true to the original phenomenological conception of magical realism as formulated by Roh.

Although he does not use the words 'magical realism' or 'realismo mágico' in the preface to his novel, *The Kingdom of This World,* Carpentier introduces the notion of *'lo real maravilloso'*, or, as it is translated, 'marvellous reality'.[20] He first condemns the European proponents of surrealism for their 'timeworn formulae', which he describes as 'the marvellous born of disbelief', arguing surrealism was never any more than a 'literary ruse'. Writing of the history of America as a 'chronicle of the marvellous in the real', the marvellous he says,

> ...becomes unequivocally marvellous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (a miracle), a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed or singularly favourable illumination of the previously unremarked riches of reality, an amplification of the measures and categories of reality, perceived with peculiar intensity due to an exaltation of the spirit which elevates it into a kind of "limit state". First of all, the sense of the marvellous presupposes a faith.[21]

The word 'miracle' here suggests an event out of the ordinary, but nonetheless extant and possible *with faith,* however rare or unlikely. On his visit to Haiti, the island on which *The Kingdom of This World* is set, he alleges he found himself in 'daily contact with something which might be called the marvellous in the real'. He claims the people of Haiti believed in powers of lycanthropy, for example, 'to the point where this collective faith produced a miracle'. Carpentier does not refer to the fantasies or fabrication of the author, but to the objects and events that make Central and South American reality different from European reality. This is why his

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[19] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home,* p. 113.
[20] Or more usually, 'marvellous American reality'.
[21] Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World,* preface.

approach may be termed 'ontological': the essence of the world is significant, not merely its defamiliarised representation. In the preface, he argues his novel presents:

> ...a sequence of extraordinary happenings which took place on the island of Santo Domingo [...] allowing the marvellous to flow freely from a reality precise in all its details. Because it must be stressed that the ensuing story is based on the most rigorous documentation...

This firm assertion of fidelity to history, and moreover, to verifiable history, is common to most writers of magical realism, as we shall see later.

Returning to the discussion of Carpentier's place in the phenomenological-ontological deliberations, then, it can be seen that he does not relinquish altogether the earlier, perception-based notion stemming from Roh's work. Klein argues he

> ...conceived "marvelous American reality" as a moment of awareness akin to poetic epiphany and based on a faith in the miraculous that allowed the writer to convey to his readers through the characters a vision of the fantastic features of reality...[22]

showing that Carpentier's stance sounds, in certain respects, like a phenomenological one, since phenomenological studies are based on the direct experience of one's own consciousness, and the reference to 'epiphany' brings to mind Heidegger's view of the poem as a revelation of Being.[23] It is the privileged *experiential* aspect which Carpentier emphasises; these experiences are beyond normal ego-consciousness. He has not completely moved over to the ontological view, as he maintains the importance of perception, since the marvellous, he argues, is 'perceived with peculiar intensity'. Carpentier does not distinguish between the various concepts: the fantastic, the marvellous, or the magical; he never mentions the supernatural as, significantly, he does not distinguish it from the natural world. Over the years, *lo real maravilloso* and magical realism have largely become synonymous and will be treated as such in this thesis.

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[22] Klein, *Latin American Literature in the Twentieth Century*, p. 271.
[23] Heidegger, *Being and Time.*

Writing in 1955, Angel Flores applies magical realism to a wide range of South American writers, including the Argentinian, Jorge Luis Borges and the Guatemalan, Miguel Angel Asturias. Without acknowledging any other critical source, Flores writes of Borges and Eduardo Mallea:

> I shall endeavour to suggest the general trend in which these and other brilliant contemporary Latin American novelists and short story writers are located. This trend I term "magical realism".[24]

Flores appears to be unaware of any critic ever having used the term 'magic(al) realism' before. The novelty in this kind of writing, he claims, consists of 'the amalgamation of realism and fantasy'.[25] He identifies 1935 as a significant turning point for Latin American writers, amongst whom Borges, who published his collection, *Historia universal de la infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*), in this year, was a 'pathfinder and moving spirit'. Flores lists a multitude of writers influenced by these developments, acknowledging their awareness of Kafka and Henry James. They all had 'the same preoccupation with style and also the same transformation of the common and everyday into the awesome and the unreal'.[26] Flores argues magical realism is a 're-discovery', rather than an invention, because he claims its roots lie in the nineteenth century, with writers such as Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, E. T. A. Hoffmann, the Grimm brothers, August Strindberg, Edgar Alan Poe and Herman Melville. He examines the treatment of time in certain narratives, concluding: '[t]ime exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality'.[27] He does not distinguish magical realism from other writing, tending to conflate it with the fantastic; he uses terms such as 'unreal' and 'fantasy' as if they are completely unproblematic, neither does he mention Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*. Although other critics have resisted this, Flores links magical realism with oneiric literature since, in one of his frequent references

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[24] Angel Flores, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', *Hispania*, vol. 38, May 1955 (pp. 187-92), p. 188. Reprinted in *Magical Realism*, eds. Zamora and Faris.
[25] Flores, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', p. 189.
[26] Flores, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', p. 190.
[27] Flores, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', p. 191.

to Kafka, he notes the way he 'mastered [...] the difficult art of mingling his drab reality with the phantasmal world of his nightmares'.[28] At the end of his essay, Flores says writers such as Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortázar and Juan Carlos Onetti 'may well mark the inception of a genuinely Latin American fiction' and he was accurate in this prediction. Whilst he claims, 'in the field of fiction Latin America is unable to boast of any titans', clearly the following 'Boom' years of the sixties produced many widely read and translated novels, some of which are famed for their magical realism. With hindsight, it appears Flores is using the term 'magical realism' where others would now refer to a time of confidence and innovation in fiction writing known as the Latin American 'New Narrative' of the forties and fifties.

Luis Leal replies to Flores's paper, disagreeing with his claim that Kafka and Borges wrote the influential founding texts.[29] He says magical realism is a movement with a certain attitude towards reality: '[i]n magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts'. The reason for Leal's objection to Kafka's inclusion is that the attitude of the characters in *The Metamorphosis* is *not* magical: they 'find the situation intolerable and they don't accept it'. He writes:

> In magical realism key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality (as the realists did) or to wound it (as the Surrealists did) but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things.[30]

Leal is the first critic who clearly differentiates the fantastic, with its 'imagined worlds', from magical realism: '[i]n fantastic literature the supernatural invades a world ruled by reason', he writes. However,

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[28] Flores, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', p. 189.
[29] Luis Leal, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature', trans. Wendy B. Faris, in *Magical Realism*, eds. Zamora and Faris; first published as 'El realismo mágico en la literatura hispanoamericana', *Cuadernos americanos*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1967 (pp. 230-35).
[30] Leal, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature', p. 123.

> In order to seize reality's mysteries the magical realist writer heightens his senses until he reaches an extreme state that allows him to intuit the imperceptible subtleties of the external world.[31]

Interestingly, Leal uses quotations from both Carpentier and Roh to support his description of magical realism which, as we shall see shortly, suggests the two positions are not as oppositionally located as it may at first appear.

Floyd Merrell, whilst not attempting to provide a concrete definition of magical realism, does consider its epistemological implications, recognising 'conflicts of "reality" characterize magical realism'. He identifies some of these as: real/unreal; ideal/real; Western/Indian; civilized/primitive; and old order/new order. As a consequence of the plurality of views which characterises postmodern society and art, we have in the twentieth century, a relativistic conception of physical reality. So, Merrell argues the depiction of conflicting world views is one of the key features of magical realism, claiming: 'magico-realist fiction stems, on a thematic level, from the conflict between two pictures of the world'.[32] However, he maintains the magical realist presents an 'organicist' view of reality, a world of 'becoming', one which strives 'to synthesize the stubborn dualisms created by human culture'.[33] He takes issue with critics who say magical realism is esoteric; certainly some of it is so, but this is true of twentieth century fiction as a whole. Other texts, such as those by Isabel Allende and Gabriel García Márquez are easily accessible, a fact confirmed by their enormous popularity. These novels, argues Merrell, 'have demonstrated by their cross-cultural popularity that there must be some deep-seated (unconscious) communication between author and reader which is attributable to the magico-realist process'. The writer, he says, 'takes on the attributes of prophet' and tries to 'tap the subconscious of the "race" '.[34] This assertion is taken up later in the examination of postcolonial structures of feeling.

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[31] Leal, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature', p. 123.
[32] Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference', p. 11.
[33] Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference', p. 13.
[34] Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference', p. 6.

Seymour Menton's *Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-81,* traces the development of magical realism placing emphasis on pictorial art rather than literature. In a return to Roh's ideas he also claims magical realism provided an alternative outlet to the existential anguish caused by the Cold War and the threat of atomic holocaust, and draws links with the ideas of Jung:

> Consciously or unconsciously, the practitioners of this tendency have been in tune with Carl Jung's ideas about the modern human being's need to rediscover the elements of magic that little by little have been lost through the centuries.[35]

On the thorny subject of definition, however, Menton says magical realism does not incorporate the fantastic, thereby, effectively excluding the supernatural:

> The oxymoronic combination of realism and magic captures the artists' and the authors' efforts to portray the strange, the uncanny, the eerie, and the dream-like — but not the fantastic — aspects of everyday reality.[36]

In a later article, Menton states explicitly: '[m]agic realism, involved as it is with the improbable rather than the impossible, never deals with the supernatural'. He says:

> ...according to the Magic Realism *Weltanschauung,* the world and reality have a dream-like quality about them which is captured by the presentation of improbable juxtapositions in a style that is highly objective, precise, and deceptively simple. The Magic Realist painting or short story or novel is predominantly realistic and deals with the objects of our daily life, but contains an unexpected or improbable element that creates a strange effect leaving the viewer or reader somewhat bewildered or amazed.[37]

In Menton's view, there is a dichotomy between Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* and magical realism. In looking at different definitions of magic, he finds the type found in the writing of Carpentier and Asturias involves Indian and African cultures, where the emphasis is on techniques, such as incantation, designed to assure human control of supernatural agencies or the forces of nature. Magic realists, claims Menton, are more like 'modern-day magicians', who make reality appear to be

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[35] Seymour Menton, *Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-81* (London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1983), p. 10.
[36] Menton, *Magic Realism Rediscovered,* p. 13.
[37] Seymour Menton, 'Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realist', *Hispanic Review,* vol. 50, 1982 (pp. 411-26), p. 412.

magic by using sleight of hand. However, Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe, in his comprehensive study of magic, claims that the magic associated with sleight of hand and certain devices to create illusion and entertain, originates in 'shamanistic skills at planting objects on a patient's body and then removing them as symbols and persuasions that the disease is being removed', giving the impression there is no clear division between ancient shamanistic magic and stage-magic, as the latter, whilst it is purely used for entertainment, derives from the former.[38]

One of the most interesting features of this paper is Menton's identification of oxymoron as an important device in Borges's short stories: '[o]ne of the most incontrovertible indications of Borges's identification with Magic Realism is his constant use of oxymoron'.[39] Other critics have noted this extensive use of oxymoron, but without explicitly linking it to magic realism. According to Menton:

> The juxtaposition of self-contradictory words or phrases, oxymoron, is not only Borges' favourite stylistic device, it is one of the most basic structures of many of his stories.[40]

Oxymoron, antitheses, paradoxes — each of these implies the possibility of a duality or multiple perspectives and contradictions. Yet, the view derived from Roh, to which Menton adheres, is that 'Borges stresses the same extreme objectivity and ultraprecision employed by the Magic Realists to invest reality with a touch of magic'.[41] Menton also says the Magic Realist world-view includes the idea that 'absolute truth or reality is impossible for mortal man to grasp', which raises the question as to why a high degree of clarity and objectivity is considered appropriate.[42] Although he excludes the supernatural, he does not argue for the incorporation of particular themes or structures.

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[38] Daniel Laurence O'Keefe, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 8.
[39] Menton, 'Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realist', p. 415.
[40] Menton, 'Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realist', p. 422.
[41] Menton, 'Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realist', p. 414.
[42] Menton, 'Jorge Luis Borges, Magic Realist', p. 416.

So, Menton identifies the centrality of contradiction in magical realist writing, a feature which Amaryll B. Chanady investigates, and to which she attributes great importance in her definition in *Magical Realism and the Fantastic.*[43] She tackles, very specifically, and with a high degree of clarity, the definitions of, and the distinctions between, magical realism and the fantastic, which she categorises as 'modes' rather than genres. For a text to be included in the category of magical realism, she argues, it must satisfy three conditions: firstly, it must present 'two conflicting, but autonomously coherent, perspectives, one based on an "enlightened" and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality'; secondly, the antinomy existing between the natural and the supernatural events must be resolved in the descriptions of events and situations; thirdly, authorial reticence is crucial for magical realism to be sustained, so there is no comment from narrator or author on the rationality or irrationality of the events.[44] If there were any authorial judgement on the text, the result would be the hierarchical structuring of the perspectives, rather than the necessary equilibrium. Authorial reticence pacifies the otherwise possibly sceptical reader into an acceptance of the reality of the preternatural components of a text.

Chanady's contribution is significant as it faces squarely the contradictions inherent in magical realism. She is very specific in delineating the ways in which magical realism is different from the fantastic, arguing the representation of reality is familiar to us in the fantastic; it is not completely removed as in the world of the marvellous. In the genres of the marvellous, of which the fairy tale is one example, she claims we do not question the possibility of what happens, as the world depicted is so completely different from our own and is unidimensional. The fantastic, as with

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[43] Amaryll B. Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York & London: Garland, 1985).
[44] Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic,* pp. 21-2.

magical realism, is bidimensional: a world is presented with laws the same as our own, and into this is introduced a level of reality that is unfamiliar and contradicts reasoned expectations. The supernatural in the fantastic is viewed as problematical, and herein lies the principal difference between the fantastic and magical realism: '[i]n contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader, and this is the fundamental difference between the two modes'.[45] In the fantastic text the antinomy is unresolved; in the magical realist text it is resolved. The other major distinction is the lack of serious attention given to history in the fantastic. One disadvantage of Chanady's formulation is her restriction of the 'marvellous' to unidimensional genres such as the fairy tale, rendering it useless in discussions of magical realism. Another is that readers from differing cultures may not have the same view on what is natural and what is supernatural.

William Spindler finds fault with existing definitions and proposes new ones with the aim of unifying the phenomenologically and ontologically based camps.[46] He posits three types of magical realism corresponding to three meanings of magic: 'Metaphysical, 'Anthropological,' and 'Ontological Magical Realism'. There is some overlap of these categories, and an author may have works belonging to different ones. 'Metaphysical Magic Realism', based on Roh's ideas, is common in painting in which unsettling perspectives produce a magical effect. Magic here refers to conjuring, tricks and optical illusion. In literature, a sense of unreality is induced through *verfremdungseffekt* so a familiar scene is described as if new or unknown. An atmosphere of *umheimlichkeit* pervades the work but no explicit supernatural events are depicted; rather, there is a disturbing, impersonal presence. Also, according to Spindler, preternatural but not supernatural events are included, in which alien, disconcerting features provide the effect of mystery, producing a

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[45] Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, p. 24.
[46] William Spindler, 'Magic Realism: A Typology', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, Jan. 1993 (pp. 75-85).

suggestion of allegory or metaphor. Examples given of specific texts include Borges's short stories, 'El Sur' and 'Funes del memorioso',[47] Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (1985). Spindler's 'Anthropological Magic Realism' involves a narrator who usually has 'two voices': firstly, a rational voice (the realist component) and secondly, the voice of a believer in magic (the magical component). Using Chanady's terminology, he discusses the way antinomy is resolved by the author's references to the myths and cultural background of a social or ethnic group, such as Mayan culture in the writing of Asturias. Magic is used here in the anthropological sense of a process used to control events by use of the occult. This definition is most closely associated with Latin America and, Spindler claims, is broadly synonymous with *lo real maravilloso,* but is a wider and more useful category. This type of magical realism, according to Spindler, is part of a general trend for thematic and formal preoccupations with the strange, uncanny, grotesque, violence, deformity and exaggeration. It also draws on popular culture and collective myths which, he believes, can help to create new national identities. Texts included in this category are Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955) and García Márquez's *La mala hora* (1962; *In Evil Hour*, 1979). Finally, 'Ontological Magic Realism' resolves antinomy without appeal to any specific cultural position. The supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if there were no contradiction with the known laws of science, and there is no explanation as to its existence; there is also no reference made to any mythical imagination. The narrator, who is not anxious about convincing the reader, enjoys total liberation. Magic here refers to inexplicable, monstrous, or fantastic events that contradict the laws of the rational world. The narrator, who is not disturbed or sceptical about the supernatural occurrences, as would be the case with fantastic literature, accepts events as normal and does not explain them. Spindler points out this is precisely the opposite of the

[47] In Jorge Luis Borges, *Prosa completa* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980).

technique of *Verfremdung* used in 'Metaphysical Magic Realism': '[i]nstead of having only a subjective reality, therefore, the unreal has an objective, ontological presence in the text'.[48] Examples of this type of text include Kafka's *The Trial*, Carpentier's 'Viaje a la semilla',[49] and Julio Cortázar's 'Axolotl'.[50] Spindler's paper attempts to resolve the dichotomy which has developed in the analysis of the term. Clearly, however, the first two types of magical realism identified correspond closely to the old versions of Roh and Carpentier respectively. In theory, Spindler's argument is neat and cleverly constructed; in practice, it proves difficult to use his categorisations, since they depend upon the reader's ability to classify the status of events in the novels. Yet, events are frequently difficult to ascertain, as we shall see in Chapter Three, a fact borne out by the lack of any utilisation of Spindler's formulation by other critics subsequently. Ironically, it is *because* of the specificity of Spindler's definitions that they do not succeed.

In his discussion of Latin American cinematic magic realism, Fredric Jameson observes that the films he analyses are all historical;[51] he says, whilst history is engaged, it is 'history with holes, perforated history', with 'gaps in information' which make intellectual demands on the viewer.[52] He also notes the films presuppose a knowledge of their historical frameworks. Jameson, then, identifies two important characteristics of magical realism, namely its historical specificity and its highly visual quality. Writing of the way the films 'enjoin a visual spell, an enthrallment to the image',[53] he advances a 'very provisional hypothesis' that 'the possibility of magic realism as a formal mode is constitutively dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present'. Jameson's

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[48] Spindler, 'Magic Realism: A Typology', p. 82.
[49] Alejo Carpentier, *Guerra del tiempo: tres relatos y una novela* (Mexico: Compañía General de Ediciones, 1966).
[50] In Julio Cortázar, *Ceremonias* (Buenos Aires, 1968).
[51] Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film'. Jameson isolates three elements: history, colour and narrative.
[52] Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', p. 303, 304.
[53] Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', p. 303.

'disjunction' is akin to terms appearing in various other guises, but he also considers 'magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features'. Importantly, as we see in Chapter Three's discussion of historicity, he says magic realism involves the 'articulated superimposition of whole layers of the past within the present'.[54]

Finally, the most recent substantial publication on magical realism is a collection of papers edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community,* which comprises both historical debate and recent analysis, covering texts from diverse cultures, including North Africa, Japan, Germany, the Caribbean, Latin and North America. Faris, in 'Scheherazade's Children', argues 'magical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed' and identifies five primary characteristics.[55] Firstly, the text contains an 'irreducible element' of magic, frequently involving a 'disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect,' so making 'the real as we know it [...] seem amazing or even ridiculous'. She writes that 'magic also serves the cause of satire and political commentary'.[56] Secondly, '[d]escriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world — this is the realism in magical realism, distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory'.[57] Thirdly, Faris identifies a hesitation on the part of the reader 'between two contradictory understandings of events', the level of hesitation may depend on the reader's cultural background. Fourthly, the reader may 'experience the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds'. Fifthly, these novels 'question received ideas about time, space and identity'.[58] She suggests some features of magical

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[54] Jameson, 'On Magic Realism in Film', p. 311.
[55] Wendy B. Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction', in *Magical Realism,* eds. Zamora and Faris, p. 163.
[56] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 168.
[57] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 169.
[58] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', pp. 171-3.

realism situate it within postmodernism. These will be examined in Chapter Three. Despite the range of views concerning the constitutive ingredients of magical realism, it is possible to see a significant thread emerging. Faris refers to the matter-of-fact narrative style in which all kinds of 'wonders' are described; this brings to mind Chanady's point about the significance of authorial reticence to magical realism which could equally be articulated in terms of the even-handedness of the narrator. Tzvetan Todorov describes the ambiguity found in the fantastic as 'hesitation', although this is not a feature of the text, but a response of the reader. Todorov's view of genres can be summarised diagramatically as follows:

Uncanny | Fantastic-Uncanny | Fantastic-Marvellous | Marvellous[59]

The pure fantastic is represented only by the central line between fantastic-uncanny and fantastic-marvellous. At the end of a fantastic work the reader will be able to place it within one of the two central categories. During the reading process a balance is struck between natural and supernatural explanations, but this must be resolved in the end and, according to Todorov, in its resolution the text can no longer be fantastic. The 'hesitation' is between the two explanations: natural and supernatural, which in the fantastic are incompatible. Chanady introduces the term 'antinomy', also utilised by Spindler, to describe what may in some senses be seen as analogous to Todorov's 'hesitation' or ambiguity, Flores's 'one great ambiguity or confusion',[60] Merrell's 'two distinct pictures of the world',[61] and Menton's oxymoron. 'Disjunction' is Jameson's favoured term, although he is, when using this word, applying it to the 'raw material' of the referent — real life, rather than the texts. Antinomy is defined by Chanady as 'the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text'.[62] It is, she says, this 'antinomy of the text that produces the ambiguity of the fictional world and thus the disorientation of the

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[59] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).
[60] Flores, 'Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction', p. 191.
[61] Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference', p. 9.
[62] Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, p. 12.

reader'.[63] The attitude of the narrator is crucial: in the fantastic, the narrator is surprised by the intrusion of disruptive supernatural events, whereas in magical realism, the supernatural is generally not presented as problematic. Consequently, the reader of magical realism is not encouraged to look for rational solutions, but to accept the state of affairs. Antinomy is resolved on the level of fiction: 'the reader, who recognizes the two conflicting logical codes on the semantic level, suspends his judgement of what is rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world'.[64] This similarity in the definitions and discussion analysed in this review of critical literature provides the substance of my arguments in this study.

As we saw in the opening of this chapter, there are ideological difficulties with magical realism. One of these results from the ontological perspective of Carpentier's approach, through which he claims American reality is different from European reality, and as a consequence has been charged with perpetuating dangerous European myths about the misnamed *nuevo mundo* as a place of wonders. Spindler claims Carpentier's stance is a 'reflexion of the European myth' which leads him to require 'constant reference to European experience as a measure for comparison',[65] so people who hold this view can be accused of patronising exoticism. Emil Volek notes wryly, 'Carpentier no dejó de confesar que esta visión "maravillosa" de América le fue revelada durante su largo exilio en Europa', throwing suspicion on Carpentier's actual influences, which he always said were American.[66] He claimed to despise surrealism and other Western art movements but perhaps was influenced more by these than he cared to admit to himself. Western readers, on the other hand, blinkered by secularism and rationalism, who do not accept the reality of magic, can easily fall prey to accusations of solipsism,

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[63] Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, p. 14.
[64] Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, pp. 25-6.
[65] Spindler, 'Magic Realism: A Typology', p. 76.
[66] Emil Volek, in a review of *El realismo mágico en el cuento hispanoamericano*, ed. Angel Flores, *INTI*, no. 31, Spring 1990 (pp. 191-2) p. 191.

eurocentrism or occidentalism, of privileging logos over eros. According to this double bind, which is an intensified version of the one bedevilling postcolonial theory and criticism in general, there is no way in which a critic or reader can use the term magical realism in a completely ideologically correct way.

Examining the undoubted allure of magical realism is not easily done. Perhaps, had he lived, Roland Barthes would have had something to say on the pleasure of the magical realist text. The allure does not derive entirely from exoticism, but to an extent, it does. In dealing with cultures that are largely unfamiliar to us, and of which we have no first-hand knowledge, a tendency emerges to view 'them' as 'Other', a process often involving either demonisation or exoticisation. Whilst demonisation is a consequence of fear, exoticisation is a result of an attempt to be fearless, accommodating and pluralistic, but in the final analysis it is as damaging as any kind of demonising racism, and possibly worse, because it is simultaneously deceiving and self-deceiving. In response to this, some may protest that as it is the Latin Americans who are using magical realism (or at least *some* Latin American writers and *some* critics), it cannot be classified as exoticism, as it exists in the minds and culture of the postcolonial peoples themselves. Of course, this is extremely thorny ground, as some have sought to show postcolonial peoples have, owing to the very fact of their former colonisation, been acculturated or socialised into a mindset whereby they perceive themselves as exotic. The Martiniquan writer, René Ménil, outlines his ideas on this phenomenon in the Caribbean; he claims the alienation from oneself which colonisation brings is responsible:

> I perceive myself as a foreigner, as being exotic. Why? Because 'I' is consciousness, 'the other' becomes the self. I am 'exotic-to-myself' because my view of myself is the view of the white person having become mine after three centuries of colonial conditioning.[67]

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[67] René Ménil, 'Concerning Colonial Exoticism', in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson (London & New York: Verso, 1996), p. 177.

Paradoxically, this view does not necessarily ring true for the whole of South America, since Vargas Llosa argues 'we are the conquistadores'.[68] However, there can be both naïve and politically sophisticated exoticism; writers can, and indeed do, reappropriate the discourse of exoticism and exploit it for their own ends.

In conclusion, this chapter shows that magical realism proves to be a beguiling but slippery concept, one which resists all but the most general definition because attempts to pin it down too specifically tend to fail. Even in its first artistic usage, Roh, in his elegant but vague prose, failed to define 'Magic Realism' clearly. The breadth of both words comprising this term, 'magic(al)' and 'realism', has been instrumental in effecting a wide range of interpretations. Nevertheless, irreducibility and what Bakhtin might call 'semantic openendedness' can be strengths;[69] there would be no need to produce art if all its significance could be summed up without the loss of any of its aspects, or as Coleridge said: 'the infallible test of a blameless style [is] its untranslatableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning',[70] a phenomenon Cleanth Brooks recognised when he referred to the 'heresy of paraphrase'.[71] If magical realism was simple to analyse, the conclusion could be drawn that the texts were formulaic and offered no novelty and lost their status as art; if it was simple to identify it would offer the reader no new challenge. Finally, if it was simple the texts would more easily be censored and silenced, and censorship is still a live issue in Latin America. Spain banned novels in its colonies, Vargas Llosa explains, so the first copies of *Don Quixote* were smuggled into the

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[68] Mario Vargas Llosa, 'Novels Disguised as History: The Chronicles of the Birth of Peru', in *A Writer's Reality* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), p. 35.

[69] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 7.

[70] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), Chapter 22.

[71] Cleanth Brooks *The Well-Wrought Urn: studies in the structure of poetry* (London: Dobson, 1960).

continent in barrels of wine; we should be grateful, he says, to the Spanish Inquisition for alerting everyone to the 'inevitable subversive nature of fiction'.[72]

As always, intrinsic problems perennially present themselves when attempting to define a genre, especially that colloquially known as a chicken-and-egg dilemma: on the one hand the definition can be formulated and then the texts found which fit this category, or on the other, the texts themselves can be selected and their common features identified. The two methods sound mutually exclusive, but it is likely a more symbiotic relationship exists between the two. With magical realism, the developments in Latin American and other writing and art have caused the definition to be in a state of flux for a number of decades. The term has been redefined repeatedly in a response to new writing which cannot be accommodated within other genres. Too wide a definition renders it useless and ubiquitous; a classification has to have reasonable boundaries, but not overly rigid ones. If excessively narrow parameters are determined it may be so specialised, and thus incorporate so few texts, as to be inconsequential. There is also the long-standing problem in determining how far genres are a matter of the thematic aspects of art, or whether the analysis of structural and formal aspects carry greater significance.

The unrestrained use of 'magical realism' in different contexts has resulted in confusion; what is certain is that it is not acceptable for it to be used to describe any literature that deviates from the classic realist mode of the nineteenth century. Magical realism has been used with reference to other art forms: painting, and more recently, as we have seen in Jameson's paper, cinema. Magic Realism is still a live term in art criticism, albeit far less frequently found than in literary criticism, but it tends to be used with reference to European, especially German painters of the 1920s, as it was originally. However, there are certain art forms with which it is not

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[72] Vargas Llosa, 'Novels Disguised as History, p. 24.

associated, for example, poetry and the theatre. Theatre production would be fraught with difficulties in the attempt to produce magical realist plays because of the difficulty of staging, or appearing to stage, magical events. These could be reported rather than staged, as in ancient Greek drama, but the magical events would not be foregrounded so diminishing their impact. Whereas theatre does not lend itself particularly well to magical realism, film excels in its unique ability to edit and incorporate special effects, so depicting magical events such as levitation or transmogrification, successfully, as can be seen in many films in a variety of genres.

Finally, resisting all but the most expansive defining of magical realism is not an easy option, but it is the only option if a critic wishes to respect its aesthetic and intellectual integrity. Its fluidity and mutability are part of its fascination. Chapter Three expands on much of this discussion. Janes concludes that whilst the term is not satisfactory, she finds some consolation that 'in modern usage, the text itself has shaped the definition'.[73] This chapter demonstrates that from its inception magical realism was never well defined and as a result there has been little agreement on what it is. This prompts Guenther to say: 'Roh's artistic child of the 1920s has become a present-day historian's nightmare'.[74]

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[73] Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 106.
[74] Guenther, 'Magic Realism, New Objectivity', p. 34.

2

'Hereditary Memory': The Textual Ancestry of Magical Realism

'Hereditary memory', a phrase used several times in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is germane here, because this chapter seeks to demonstrate that magical realism can trace its lengthy literary ancestry through its heterogeneous roots in both the older European and the more recent Latin American traditions of prose. In the following analysis of the literary journey leading to the magical realist novels of Latin America, the key works of a number of European authors are examined for seeds of influence. The Spanish chronicles of conquest are considered in some detail

first, especially those of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, along with the writings of Christopher Columbus. This is followed more briefly by a discussion of François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The second part of this chapter deals with the influence of texts by Latin American writers, namely, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, Mário de Andrade, and Jorge Luis Borges. Rather than attempting a grandiose overview of Western European and Latin American writing, which is beyond the scope of this work, this chapter identifies certain significant moments in the mass of literary and cultural history, key moments, that is, in the many forking paths which lead to contemporary magical realist texts. This ancestry is certain to be contentious, but nonetheless, I think there is a case for including the following in the magical realist family tree.

a. European Seeds of Influence

Writing of a particular kind of text, Mario Vargas Llosa says:

> ...we not only dream about the time in which our fantasy and our realities seem to be incestuously confused. In them there is an extraordinary mixture of reality and fantasy, of reality and fiction in a united work. It is a literature that is totalizing, in the sense that it is a literature that embraces not only objective reality but also subjective reality in a new synthesis.[1]

Here, the subject of the discussion is not magical realism, but the texts known collectively as the Spanish chronicles of conquest. The difference between these two genres, Vargas Llosa claims, lies in the fact that 'the chronicles accomplished that synthesis out of ignorance and naïveté and that modern writers have accomplished it through sophistication'.[2] If the Spanish invaders were indeed naïve, it is a peculiar type of naïveté which depended on the unconscious masquerading of their own ideological parameters. So, in the discourse of the chronicles, 'massacres'

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[1] Vargas Llosa, 'Novels Disguised as History', pp. 37-8.
[2] Vargas Llosa, 'Novels Disguised as History', p. 38.

become nothing more than anodyne 'skirmishes'; thieving and pillage become the search for 'booty'; and countries are 'pacified' not 'invaded' or 'occupied'. The conquistadors' observations describe nothing so well as themselves and their anaesthetised, value-laden, ethnographic perspective on the world.

Cultural historian, Hayden White, differentiates the chronicle from the earlier annals and the later histories. The chronicle is distinguished from the annals by its greater comprehensiveness, its organisation of materials, its 'narrative coherency' and the existence of a central subject around which the text pivots, whether this a war, crusade, life of a man or town. It is differentiated from the history proper in that it lacks narrative closure: '[i]t does not so much conclude as simply terminate. It starts out to tell a story but breaks off *in medias res*'.[3] It lacks 'that summing up of the "meaning" of the chain of events with which it deals that we normally expect from the well-made story'.[4] Chronicles, often written in response to requests for information from royal sponsors, are documentary rather than literary. However, they can be viewed as partly historical and partly fictional, as the chroniclers, Sylvia Spitta observes, 'did not distinguish fact very clearly from fiction'.[5]

A number of writers maintain that the roots of magical realism can be located five hundred years ago with the 'discovery' or 'invention' of America.[6] According to García Márquez, the 'first work of magical literature was *The Diary of Christopher Columbus*, a book which tells of fabulous plants and mythological societies'.[7] These

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[3] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 5.
[4] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 16.
[5] Sylvia Spitta, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America* (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1995), p. 33.
[6] Columbus was referred to as the 'inventor of the Indies'. See Iris Zavala, 'Representing the Colonial Subject', in *1492-1992: Re/Discovering Colonial Writing*, eds. René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 327.
[7] Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava*, p. 52.

journals, which are analysed by Beatriz Pastor Bodmer' in *The Armature of Conquest,* were lost, and then later transcribed by Father Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566), and reveal, according to Pastor Bodmer, that Columbus was '[b]linded by his own needs and preconceptions', so he 'misrepresented the identity and nature of the new lands'. She writes: 'he was creating a fiction instead of providing accurate information about realities he was unable to perceive objectively'.[8] In the first literary representation of America by an outsider, she says:

> Columbus grants himself the exclusive right to *create* America where its inhabitants are concerned, following the parameters of his literary model, and he presents the resulting fiction as if its accuracy were undeniable.[9]

Pastor Bodmer assesses the books which were so influential in shaping the first explorers' ideas. There are four of them, and Columbus's copies, heavily annotated, still exist. Of these, the most significant appears to be a 1485 Latin version of *The Travels of Marco Polo.* She points out:

> The literary sources of Columbus's imaginary model often described lands they had never seen, combining the fantastic theories of the ancient with legends, myths, hearsay, tales culled from bestiaries, and a large dose of imagination. If they are to be classified at all, these studies of the world were no doubt far more literary than scientific.[10]

The readiness of colonisers to embrace pre-conceived images and ideas from their existing literary and cultural capital, combined with a reluctance to accept new information, is brought out very clearly in the chroniclers' accounts. Peter Hulme assesses the importance of the journal of Columbus, focusing upon colonial discourse, which he takes to mean 'an ensemble of linguistically-based practices

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[8] Beatriz Pastor Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest: Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589,* trans. Lydia Longstreth Hunt (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 25.
[9] Pastor Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest,* p. 36.
[10] Pastor Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest,* p. 37.

unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships'.[11] Of Columbus's *Journal,* he says that although its

> ...generic shape is nautical the *Journal* is also by turns a personal memoir, an ethnographic notebook, and a compendium of European fantasies about the Orient: a veritable palimpsest.[12]

Hulme also draws attention to the way in which it is 'opaque' because the text we now know as the journal of Columbus is a 'transcription of an abstract of a copy of a lost original'.[13] Moreover, the explorer, according to Carlos Fuentes, was practically and politically not in a position to be overly fond of cleaving to the truth:

> Finding a domain empty of the Asian wealth that he had hoped for, he invented and reported back to Spain the discovery of great richness in forests, pearls, and gold. Otherwise, his Patroness, Queen Isabella, might have thought that her investment (and her faith) in the highly inventive Genoese sailor had been misplaced.[14]

In his letter, Columbus ingratiates himself to them, saying:

> Their Highnesses can see that I will give them as much gold as they may need, if Their Highnesses will render me very slight assistance; presently, I will give them spices and cotton, as much as Their Highnesses shall command; and mastic, as much as they shall order shipped [...]; and aloe, as much as they shall order to be shipped; and slaves, as many as they shall order...[15]

Some of the chroniclers were motivated, according to Spitta, by a 'desire for fame and power'.[16] They were the instruments of religious and cultural power, as Spitta says, they 'reflect and echo the Crown's imperial, monolithic, and monologic "I/eye" in the New World'.[17]

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[11] Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London & New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 2.
[12] Hulme, *Colonial Encounters,* p. 18.
[13] Hulme, *Colonial Encounters,* p. 17.
[14] Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World* (London: André Deutsch, 1992) p. 8.
[15] Columbus's letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, 1493, reprinted in *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day, An Anthology,* eds. Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 15.
[16] Spitta, *Between Two Waters,* p. 31.
[17] Spitta, *Between Two Waters,* p. 32.

According to Pastor Bodmer, the literary sources provided 'an archetype of the nature and characteristics of the countries and lands to be found beyond the limits of the Western world'.[18] Columbus's letter to the monarchs of Spain reveals everything is 'marvellous' and 'beyond comparison': there are 'little birds of a thousand kinds', the palms are 'a wonder to behold', the population 'is without number' and 'there are many spices and great mines of gold and of other metals'. He informs them that so far he has 'found no human monstrosities', but adds:

> ...I have found no monsters, nor report of any, except of an island which is *Carib*, which is the second at the entrance into the Indies, which is inhabited by a people who are regarded in all the islands as very ferocious, [and] who eat human flesh.[19]

Columbus continued to hold to his fundamental misconceptions, for many years believing he had located Asia and the land of the Grand Khan. He superimposed his preconceptions on everything he encountered and had a 'particular messianism' that produced an irrationality which 'prevented him from altering his model' despite all the evidence to the contrary.[20]

Explorers' accounts of what became known as the 'wonders of the New World' reinforced the European view of the whole of South and Central America, which was, in effect, a '*social imaginary* of mythical utopias'.[21] In Merrell's investigation of the underlying nature of magical realism, he argues there was no place in the fifteenth century 'cosmological scheme' for another continent, so:

> It thus became necessary to "invent" America; that is, to alter man's world-view allowing for the integration of an additional continent. As a result, man

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[18] Pastor Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest*, p. 12.
[19] Columbus's letter, *Wild Majesty*, eds. Hulme and Whitehead, pp. 14-15.
[20] Pastor Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest*, p. 20.
[21] This phrase is used by Zavala in 'Representing the Colonial Subject', p. 326.

> was now conceived as a being living in a world which he could transform through his own efforts.[22]

It is widely known that the chronicler, **Bernal Díaz del Castillo** (c1496-c.1584), reported the settlements they encountered as seeming to be like the enchanted towns from the tale of chivalry, *Amadís*.[23] He writes:

> And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns and *cues*[24] and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.[25]

This makes Cervantes's character, Don Quixote, who mistakes the real world for the world of chivalry, seem far less absurd. Don Quixote argues with a priest who is sceptical about the existence of knights errant:

> On some occasions I have not succeeded in my purpose; on others I have, by supporting my argument with evidence so infallible that I might say I have seen Amadis of Gaul with my own eyes. He was a man tall of stature and fair of face, with a well-trimmed black beard.[26]

Both the chroniclers and Don Quixote presuppose a fictional world view to be the real one and set it up unwittingly as a paradigmatic mould into which they try to force their new experiences. This is confirmed by Raymond Leslie Williams who discusses the confused nature of fact and fiction in both the colonised and colonising countries:

> In the early sixteenth century when the Spanish conquistador Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada explored and conquered the region we now call Colombia, he was motivated by a fiction: the legend of El Dorado. Venturing up the Magdalena River with his soldiers, he found neither gold mines nor the fountain of eternal youth but a mine of emeralds, a mountain full of salt, and butterflies with blue

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[22] Merrell, 'The Ideal World in Search of its Reference', p. 7.
[23] *Amadís de Gaula* (1508) was a highly popular chivalresque novel which inspired many imitations and was parodied by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. The author is unknown.
[24] *Cues* are prayer houses or temples.
[25] Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. and intro. J. M. Cohen (London: The Folio Society, 1963), p. 185.
[26] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), pp. 478-9.

> wings. When he returned to Spain he filled the ears of the Spanish Crown with more fictions and was sent back to the New World to pursue his chimera. The experience of Jiménez de Quesada — and the Spanish Crown — was but an early example of the complex, often confounding interaction between a literary and an empirical understanding of Colombia over the centuries.[27]

Bernal Díaz took part in many expeditions, but the most significant was the conquering of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) led by Cortes, in which Moctezuma was captured and later met his death. Although Bernal Díaz tries to highlight the religious missionary zeal of Cortes and his soldiers, evidently the seeking out of booty was a prime consideration. For example, in his account of the expedition of Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba, he relates one of many 'skirmishes' with the local population: '[w]hilst we were fighting the Indians, the priest, Gonzalez took possession of the chests, the idols, and the gold, and carried them to the ship'.[28] The priest raided the *cues* or prayer houses even though the gold was of poor quality. This, as with all exploits, is related without a hint of irony.

The twentieth century reader is struck by the breathtaking presumptuousness of the conquistadores. For example, each new geographical or man-made feature appears to invite renaming. The Spanish do recognise that rivers and towns already have names given to them by the indigenous people, but nonetheless, seem to think they have the adamic power of naming. Bernal Díaz writes:

> The river was called the Tabasco river after the *Cacique*[29] of the town who was so named. But since we discovered it on this voyage, and Juan de Grijalva was the discoverer, we called it the Rio de Grijalva, and so it is marked in the charts.[30]

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[27] Raymond Leslie Williams, *The Colombian Novel, 1844-1987* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), p. 3.
[28] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 20.
[29] *Cacique* is a Carib word for a kind of chief, often with privileges and military duties.
[30] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 30.

The refrain with the biblical aura 'and so it is marked on the charts' appears many times. For Elleke Boehmer, renaming is one of the ways in which the alien is made familiar: '[s]trangeness was made comprehensible by using everyday names, dependable textual conventions, both rhetorical and syntactic'.[31]

Bernal Díaz describes the horror of the Indians on first seeing men on horseback: '[t]he Indians thought at that time that the horse and rider were one creature, for they had never seen a horse before'.[32] How he comes to know such information is never clear. At one time, he relates that he knows what Montezuma 'guessed' and what the Indian warriors 'thought', giving himself the air of an omniscient narrator.[33] Other early accounts which also use this style include those of Antonio Pigafetta, who travelled with Magellan on the first circumnavigation of the world, 1519-1522 (and who is mentioned in García Márquez's Nobel speech). Here, he records the *thoughts* of Amerindians:

> At first those people thought that the small boats were children of the ships, and that the latter gave birth to them when they were lowered into the sea from the ship, and when they were lying alongside the ship (as is the custom), they believed that the ships were nursing them.[34]

Spitta claims the chroniclers 'equated historical veracity with personal testimony', naïvely attributing objectivity to onlookers.[35] Even so, Bernal Díaz gives accounts of events even when he admits he was not present, at one point relating a number of incidents before revealing he was resting at the time owing to a throat injury he sustained.[36] Often, it is never made clear whose version is being given. The reader

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[31] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: OUP, 1995) p. 14.
[32] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 68.
[33] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, pp. 212 & 168.
[34] Antonio Pigafetta, quoted in Humberto E. Robles, 'The First Voyage around the World: from Pigafetta to García Márquez', in *Gabriel García Márquez*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York & Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1989), p. 198.
[35] Spitta, *Between Two Waters*, p. 33.
[36] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 282.

has the impression these are eyewitness accounts, but this is normally not confirmed.

Following the death of Montezuma, Bernal Díaz flees Mexico with the Spanish who are in danger of losing their lives, but he reminds the reader of the great quantities of gold left behind, and in a throwaway remark says:

> I had no desire, I assure you, but to save my life. Nevertheless I picked up four *chalchihuites*[37] from the little boxes in which they lay, and quickly stowed them in my bosom, under my armour.[38]

A degree of hypocrisy, shared by Cortes and Bernal Díaz, threads its way through the chronicle. At one point, for instance, Cortes is angry with one of his men for stealing gold, and 'reprimanded him severely, telling him that he would never pacify the country by robbing the natives of their possessions'.[39] Yet, this is exactly what the Spaniards do at every opportunity; they leave the gold only when it is politic to do so or when they cannot carry it.

Early on in the chronicles, Bernal Díaz says: 'the reader will be tired of this constant story of sacrifices, and I will mention them no more'.[40] At this point in the narrative very little information has been given about human sacrifices, and of all the incidents related in the chronicles, the reader would like to know more about them. Further on he does relate incidents which sound more convincing. However, his imagination dominates some of his ideas about sacrifice. For example, in writing of the ingratitude of the Indians, he says:

> So in return for our coming to treat them like brothers, and tell them the commands of our Lord God and the King, they were planning to kill us and eat

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[37] *Chalchihuites* are highly valued jadeite stones.
[38] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, pp. 256-7.
[39] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 53.
[40] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 93.

> our flesh, and had already prepared the pots with salt and peppers and tomatoes.[41]

The reader does not know whether he is right in his accusation but, significantly, the source of this knowledge is not given.

The chroniclers tell us the Indians considered the conquistadors to be supernatural beings at first, and referred to them as *Teules,* which they take to be synonymous with 'gods'. The Spaniards, finding this status benefits them, try to perpetuate the misconception in various ways. For example, they 'buried the dead in one of the Indians' underground houses, so that they should not see we were mortal but believe that we were indeed *Teules,* as they called us'.[42]

Returning to the technicalities of writing, there is a passing acknowledgement of the impossibility of detailing everything in the chronicle. For instance, he says at one point 'there were too many conversations for me to describe them all',[43] and on another occasion, over the accusations that Cortes was taking more gold than his permitted fifth, Bernal Díaz says: 'this is a long story and I will not pursue it'.[44] He appears to drop the story because of its length, but this does not impede him with other incidents, the relation of which can be utterly exhaustive. The suspicious reader may consider that the story is not continued because of the damage it would do to the reputation of Cortes; an even more suspicious reader might guess that Bernal Díaz is more shrewd than this and is trying to damage the reputation of his captain, by *appearing* to withhold information protectively.

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[41] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain,* p. 172.
[42] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain,* p. 131.
[43] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain,* p. 186.
[44] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain,* p. 237.

Bernal Díaz, who wrote up his chronicles at the age of seventy-six, was of the opinion that events had been misreported by Cortes's chaplain, Francisco Lopez de Gomara, and by Gonzalo de Illescas, and accuses them of ignorance and maliciousness. Bernal Díaz's chronicles are rather pedestrian and incorporate lists of men, horses, weapons and provisions that hold up the story. W. H. Prescott, in his classic of the nineteenth century, *The Conquest of Mexico*, describes him in glowing terms, artlessly revealing that issues of the problematic nature of representation had still not been addressed:

> Bernal Díaz, the untutored child of nature, is a most true and literal copyist of nature. He transfers the scenes of real life by a sort of *daguerreotype* process [...] All the picturesque scenes and romantic incidents of the campaign are reflected in his page as in a mirror.[45]

For the reader who analyses the text in the quincentenial era of Columbus's 'discovery', the most striking aspect of the chronicles is the lack of authorial attention to epistemological issues of representation. White observes: '[i]t is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult',[46] but there is scant acknowledgement from the authors that the task of creating the narrative is difficult, though at times, Bernal Díaz was apparently in a dilemma over whether to incorporate some detail or other. In the original manuscript some of the text is scratched out, as the translator reveals in the footnotes. Editors and translators seem to consider it their function to restore these parts, as if the initial, pure copy is the most truthful and valuable, precisely because it has not been tampered with or reformulated in any way. In editors' footnotes we find 'this is incorrect' and 'Bernal Díaz is inaccurate', as well as frequent use of the words 'actually' and 'probably', leading us to recognise there are errors and misunderstandings, as well as ideological viewpoints to encounter. Little attention is

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[45] W. H. Prescott, quoted in Cohen's intro. to Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, pp. 8-9.
[46] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 4.

given by the chroniclers to the inherent complexities of translation. Bernal Díaz relates some information about the people who were used as translators, but seems unaware of a whole panoply of hermeneutic difficulties which arise in these circumstances. For example, Cortes takes every opportunity to lecture on Christianity to the Indians: '[a]fter telling them that we were Christians, he explained all the relevant details of our religion, which they perfectly understood', but no information is given to show how Bernal Díaz *knows* they *perfectly understood*; the colonisers infer a great deal and constantly misread signs.[47] His tone suggests he takes for granted that the implied reader holds the same set of beliefs about the world as he does, and has no difficulty accepting the reasonable nature of the accounts. The reader would never guess from his chronicles that during the sixteenth century probably as much as ninety per cent of central Mexico's population was wiped out mainly through massacres and epidemics brought to the area by the colonists.[48]

The chronicles can be viewed as an unconscious response to the colonisers' horizon of expectations which, regarding the 'New World', was literary rather than experiential. As a result, they tended to exoticise and exaggerate its wealth and beauty. Las Casas, for instance, represents the Indies as 'a paradisiacal landscape' and refers to the first people he encountered as having 'angelical features'.[49] In Carlos Fuentes's view, America was desired and imagined:

> ...utopia persisted as one of the central strains of the culture of the Americas. We were condemned to utopia by the Old World. What a heavy load! Who could live up to this promise, this demand, this contradiction: to be utopia where utopia was demolished, burned and branded and killed by those who

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[47] Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 85.
[48] J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York & London: The Guilford Press, 1993), p. 184.
[49] Bartolomé de Las Casas, *History of the Indies*, trans. and ed. Andrée Collard (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). First published between 1556 and 1559.

> wanted utopia: the epic actors of the conquest, the awed band of soldiers who entered Tenochtitlán with Cortés in 1519 and discovered the America they had imagined and desired: a New World of enchantment and fantasy only read about, before, in the romances of chivalry. And who were then forced to destroy what they had named in their dreams as utopia.[50]

Lest we should forget, Fuentes reminds us: '[a]ren't all discoveries basically mutual? The Europeans discovered the American continent, but the indigenous people of the Americas also discovered the Europeans'.[51]

Finally, Mario Vargas Llosa, researching the 'birth of Peru' asks whether we should accept the chronicles, which depict invasion and conquest, 'that crucial, bloody moment, full of phantasmagoria',[52] as literature or as history, concluding that this genre can be useful as '[i]ts exaggerations and fantasies often reveal more about the reality of the era than its truths'.[53] García Márquez recognises this, claiming the chronicles of Magellan's Florentine navigator, Pigafetta, 'contained the seeds of our present day novels'.[54] It is evident he has been influenced by and has utilised the epistemic violence of the chronicles in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Autumn of the Patriarch.* As the early literary documents, such as *Amadís,* provided a palimpsest for the chroniclers, so, in turn, the chronicles provide a palimpsest for the magical realists. They are engaged with playfully and parodically, in a spirit of irony and appropriation, and the confidence and certainties of the imperialist chroniclers are mocked and undermined. The chroniclers' invented, imagined or preconceived 'wonders' suddenly become 'real' in magical realism.

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[50] Carlos Fuentes, 'Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America', E. Allison Peers Lecture (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1987), p. 4.
[51] Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, p. 87.
[52] Vargas Llosa, 'Novels Disguised as History', p. 34.
[53] Vargas Llosa, 'Novels Disguised as History', p. 26.
[54] Gabriel García Márquez, 'The Solitude of Latin America' (Nobel Lecture, 1982), trans. Marina Castañeda, in *Gabriel García Márquez and the Powers of Fiction,* ed. Julio Ortega (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 87.

François Rabelais (c. 1494-1553), Renaissance Man incarnate, a Franciscan and then a Benedictine monk, and later a secular priest and physician, published ***Pantagruel*** in 1532-3; ***Gargantua*** followed in 1534. These works tell of the birth and education of Gargantua, a giant, and his son, Pantagruel. Numerous characters and endless adventures, wars and travels fill the books, which are a feast of academic nonsense and brilliance. Their life-blood is provided through a deep vein of satire which runs through the tales, supplying numerous opportunities for scorn and mockery of medieval knowledge, public institutions, the religious beliefs of his contemporaries and, in the later books, the great explorers and navigators of the time. The judiciary is mocked, for example, in a short episode in Book Three, Chapters 39 and 40, in which a judge named Bridlegoose explains in a learned manner how he uses the fall of the dice to make his judgements, but confesses that his eyesight is not as good as it was, and that in the case in question he may have mistaken a four for a five, especially as he had used a small die.

Literally hundreds of examples could be used to illustrate his distinctive and exuberant style. Book One, Chapter 6, tells of the birth of Gargantua through his mother's left ear, whereupon he emerges demanding 'Drink! Drink! Drink!'.[55] He accidentally eats six pilgrims, whom he does not notice in a salad, in Book One, Chapter 38. They manage to escape but have to endure crossing a canal of Gargantua's urine. In Book Two, Chapter 27, Pantagruel farts:

> But with the fart he blew the earth trembled for twenty-seven miles round, and with the fetid air of it he engendered more than fifty-three thousand little men, misshapen dwarfs; and with a poop, which he made, he engendered as many little bowed women...[56]

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[55] François Rabelais *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 52.
[56] Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* p. 255.

This passage gives an indication of the lack of proportion evident at many points in the fiction. In an episode in Book Two, Chapter 32, in which Alcofrybas ('the author') finds himself taking shelter inside Pantagruel's mouth, he discovers that he has to walk six miles along Pantagruel's tongue to get to his mouth, after which he sees teeth like mountains and whole towns called Gullettown, Larynx and Pharnyx, which are apparently not unlike Rouen and Nantes. These hugely unrealistic tricks and rapid alterations of scale prevent the reader locating a comfortable perspective.

The characters are not finely drawn and are at times inconsistent, and some are even forgotten. The importance of Rabelais's subjects, his satire, and his outrageousness all serve to shift the emphasis from individual characters. An intrusive and, at times, rabble-rousing narrator provides some humour introducing 'The Author's Prologue' to Book One with: '[m]ost noble, boozers, and you my very esteemed and poxy friends' and, incidentally, refers to the stories as 'chronicles'. Likening the attentive reader to a dog trying to get to the marrow of the bone, he says we must 'lick out the substantial marrow — that is to say the meaning', and insists we must not forget to drink his health.

This style, which has acquired the appellation 'Rabelaisian', has attracted both admirers and detractors and has come to denote the catalogue of satirical, ridiculous and bawdy adventures of the earthy protagonists, and their celebration of a panoply of physical pleasures, disgusting tricks and violence. Some critics have, according to Elizabeth Chesney Zegura and Marcel Tetel, been 'so antagonized by his ebullient scatology that they consider him a second-rate pornographic writer';[57] some of his work was condemned by the Sorbonne as heresy. His style is described as:

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[57] Elizabeth Chesney Zegura and Marcel Tetel, *Rabelais Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1993), p. 2.

> ...a brilliant but disjointed combination of lists, enigmas, epic feats, burlesque comedy, topical satire, fantasy, folklore, philosophy, pedagogy, theology and scatology, all grafted onto the Gargantua legend.[58]

Interestingly, Zegura and Tetel note the prevalence of ambiguity, enigma and antinomies in the texts arguing they 'constitute the *substantifique moelle* or "marrow" of his fiction'. The high degree of ambiguity and plethora of contradictory impulses in his work, they argue, relate to the society of the time, reflecting 'the divided consciousness of an era in transition'.[59]

Rabelais's influence on literature is considerable. His stylistic features can be traced in many novels up to the present day, including Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus;* his presence is felt in much Latin American prose, to the point where Anthony Burgess, reviewing Mario Vargas Llosa's *The War of the End of the World* (1985), wrote of a 'Latin Freakshow', claiming the novels have to be 'bulky, baroque, full of freaks and cripples' and 'seasoned with grotesque atrocities'.[60] Such stereotyping nonetheless reveals the footprints of Rabelais. Fittingly, he is mentioned in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in a charming cameo role for the author. Gabriel, on winning a competition, 'left for Paris with two changes of clothing, a pair of shoes, and the complete works of Rabelais' (p. 325) — surely an affectionate acknowledgement of the master of the carnivalesque, although García Márquez mischievously claims this is a red herring designed to snare gullible critics.[61]

In his ground-breaking study, *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin writes:

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[58] Zegura and Tetel, *Rabelais Revisited,* p. 3.
[59] Zegura and Tetel, *Rabelais Revisited,* p. 3.
[60] Anthony Burgess quoted in *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey,* ed. John King (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), introd., p. ix.
[61] Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava,* pp. 72-3.

> Rabelais' images have a certain undestroyable nonofficial nature. No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can co-exist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.[62]

Rabelais's grotesque and subversive humorous legacy can be found in magical realism in all the texts under scrutiny in Part II. Bodily elements intrude into the narratives frequently: the flesh, the belly, sexual acts, fertility, abundance and exaggeration all feature widely.

Another literary landmark excelling in the field of satire is the great comic novel of **Miguel de Cervantes** (1547-1616), ***Don Quixote*** (1605, 1615), although in this work the jibes are directed at chivalric romances, such as *Amadis de Gaula* (1508), which were popular in sixteenth century Spain. The style of the chivalric romance became rather saturated, and the genre was regarded as superficial and is now given little critical attention, except in its role as a springboard for later forms, and its famous intertextual spoliation by Cervantes. These escapist novels had highly idealised characters: the knights were ridiculously brave, with flawless characters, and the maidens were ridiculously pure, with flawless beauty. The settings and characters were those of legend:

> ...forests, palaces, castles, tourneys, with a cast of giants, enchanters, damsels-in-distress, dwarfs, princesses, and knights whose qualities of beauty, bloodthirstiness, chivalry and so forth are invariably superlative.[63]

E. C. Riley describes Cervantes's 'love-hate relationship with the chivalresque novel',[64] and Borges recognises *Don Quixote*'s stylistic propinquity to the chivalresque, saying it is 'less an antidote for those fictions than it is a secret,

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[62] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 3.
[63] A. J. Close, *Miguel de Cervantes: Don Quixote* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 3.
[64] E. C. Riley, *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel* (London: OUP, 1962), p. 11.

nostalgic farewell'.[65] In the prologue, Cervantes declares his purpose is to discredit romance, yet he is never insulting, but jocund and playfully appreciative. Indeed, A. J. Close describes the tone of the novel as 'harmonious, mellow, and picturesque, rather than caustic'.[66] It is a highly complex and parody involving both ridicule and indulgence. Its success depends on the reader's appreciation of the incompatibility of Don Quixote's ideals with the depicted real world. The protagonist, in the face of tremendous opposition, fails to live the life of which he dreams, but his attempts to do so generate humour. The illiterate Sancho Panza, with his mixture of scepticism and gullibility, provides a constant sounding board for Don Quixote.

Devices taken from earlier romantic literature include the pretended historicity of the text. The author claims to be relating a story told by another author, Cide Hamete Benengeli. Many features in *Don Quixote* come from the chivalresque, such as the interruptions for interpolated stories which add to the suspense, the ridiculous names of the characters, and certain words and phrases, especially from *Amadís.* The issue of the relationship between language and life continuously threads through the novel, and Don Quixote is constantly confused about what is real and what is not, over fact and fiction. Like the chroniclers, his perceptions of the world are filtered through the chivalresque romances; the world of literature is more real to him than the one in which he lives. Of course, the idealised world of the chivalrous knight never existed outside literature, yet Don Quixote does not realise this and tries to live out his life as a genuine knight errant.

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[65] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Partial Magic in the *Quixote*', in *Labyrinths,* eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 229.
[66] Close, *Miguel de Cervantes: Don Quixote*, p. 9.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Cervantes in the development of the novel generally, and magical realism specifically. Michael Bell claims the deepest of García Márquez's 'literary and historical tap roots' goes down to Cervantes, and draws a number of parallels between the two writers, but the most striking is this:

> The superimposition of disparate world views as embodied in different fictional genres is the technique that Márquez in his own day shares with Cervantes in his. Their common theme, the projection of psychic obsessions on to the world, provided a sudden transformative significance for the very medium of their fiction.[67]

Certain preoccupations, namely those of subjectivity and the real world, reality and unreality, together with the epistemological questioning of the relationship between art and life, provide obvious thematic links between *Don Quixote* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Literalisation, which will be assessed in Chapter Three, is also a common phenomenon. The problems of both Don Quixote and the Buendía family stem at least in part from their fatal tendency to take things too literally. Bell analyses the way in which Cervantes and García Márquez 'play, time and again, on the fallacy of literalistic reading'.[68]

The metafictional and intertextual dimensions of *Don Quixote* left a powerful imprint in the literary landscape. The literary stratagems employed by Cervantes in order to produce a type of self-reflexivity are later exploited by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). This self-consciousness enables characters to pass comment on the story, as well as on other texts, especially in the book-burning episode. In Part II, Cervantes is able to make an attack on his 'imitator', Avellaneda; also, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza 'know' they exist in literature, and meet people who have read about them. Another famous fictional literary figure

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[67] Michael Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez: Solitude and Solidarity* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 62.
[68] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 62.

of the time makes an appearance in the interpolated story of the convict, namely Gines de Pasamonte, who has a similarity with Lazarillo de Tormes, the eponymous hero of a then well-known Spanish picaresque novella, to whom he compares himself.[69] He has written his life story, which will be superior because it is all true, and he says, 'Lazarillo de Tormes will have to look out, and so will everything in that style that has ever been written or ever will be'.[70] In a typical Cervantean witticism, Don Quixote asks if the work is finished, ' "[h]ow can it be finished," replied the other, "if my life isn't?" ',[71] a prophetic reference to the epistemological difficulties with which the realists battled centuries later.

The similarities with Rabelais are evident in various areas, but most notably in the character of Sancho Panza, whose name, aptly enough, means 'belly', and for whom the word conviviality could have been invented. Sancho, a robust, rustic character, complements Quixote's high ideals with his decidedly lowminded approach to life. He is light-hearted, nonchalant, plebeian and loveable. Where Don Quixote is abstemious, Sancho is gluttonous. His constant preoccupation with his stomach and with bodily comforts makes him a wonderfully Rabelaisian invention. On one occasion, instead of eating with his master and the goatherds, Sancho begs to be allowed to eat alone, since he does not want to be bothered with manners and does not like to eat at tables where he has to 'chew slowly, drink little, and wipe my mouth often, and where I can't sneeze and cough when I want to'.[72] An elaborate description of a lavish wedding banquet in preparation by fifty cooks provides a

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[69] *Lazarillo de Tormes* (anon.), in *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels,* trans. Michael Alpert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
[70] Cervantes, *Don Quixote,* p. 176.
[71] Cervantes, *Don Quixote,* p. 177.
[72] Cervantes, *Don Quixote,* p. 85.

wonderfully Gargantuan moment, which has all the more humour since, following an unfortunate turn of events, the pair are not able to sit down and feast.[73]

b. Latin American Precursors

The remainder of this chapter consists of a brief assessment of the contribution of three of the most significant Latin American precursors of magical realism. The Brazilian, **Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis** (1839-1908), wrote novels, short stories, plays and poetry. A curious novel, having a remarkably modern, self-referential flavour, *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1880; *Epitaph of a Small Winner*), was first serialised before being published complete in Brazil. Interestingly, Salman Rushdie describes the writing of Machado de Assis as 'clearly the product of a proto-Márquezian imagination'.[74] He is frequently described as Latin America's Sterne. *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, written 'with the pen of Mirth and the ink of Melancholy', is ostensibly a novel created and illustrated with a smattering of sketches, by a dead man.[75] As *Tristram Shandy* begins before the narrator's birth, so *Epitaph of a Small Winner* begins after the narrator's death. The first chapter is aptly and presciently titled 'The Death of the Author' and tells of the death of Brás Cubas from pneumonia at the age of sixty-four. Ironically, he died as a result of his own invention — a plaster designed to cure melancholy. The rest of the novel relates his adulterous love affair with Virgilia and, despite inherited wealth, a rather unsuccessful life. The narrator shows playfulness and a degree of contempt for the reader, directly addressing the critic with '[g]ood God, do I have to explain everything!' He shows considerable arrogance at the beginning, pointing

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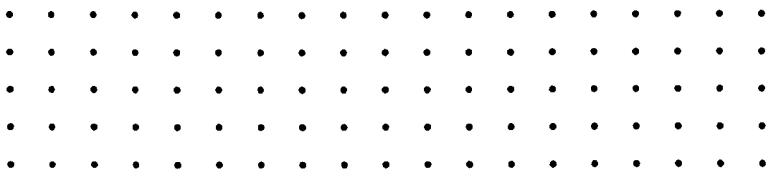
[73] Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Part II, Ch. 20.
[74] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1992), p. 300.
[75] Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, *Epitaph of a Small Winner*, trans. William L. Grossman (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 3.

out the difference between his book and the Pentateuch: 'Moses, who also related his own death, placed it not at the beginning but at the end'.[76] He claims to relate the first ever account of delirium, and does so in order that science will be grateful to him. Chapter 139 provides a good illustration of the excesses of his style:

139

HOW I DID NOT BECOME A MINISTER

OF STATE



Much like Cervantes's prologue to *Don Quixote*, the narrator carries on a dialogue with the implied reader, but is much more petulant, berating and haranguing, with instructions to '[c]ome now, uncurl your lip',[77] '[h]ave patience!'[78] and at times he thinks aloud, explaining his narrational technique, suggesting, '[y]es, I shall definitely delete this chapter'.[79] Brás Cubas at one point describes his regret at having begun to write the story:

> I am beginning to be sorry that I ever undertook to write this book. Not that it bores me; I have nothing else to do; indeed it is a welcome distraction from eternity. But the book is tedious, it smells of the tomb, it has a *rigor mortis* about it; a serious fault, and yet a relatively small one, for the great defect of this book is you, reader. You want to live fast, to get to the end, and the book ambles along slowly; you like straight, solid narrative and a smooth style, but this book and my style are like a pair of drunks: they stagger to the right and to

[76] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, p. 5.
[77] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, p. 11.
[78] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, p. 6.
[79] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, p. 163.

> the left, they start and they stop, they mutter, they roar, they guffaw, they threaten the sky, they slip and fall...[80]

This is typical of the many humorous illustrations made by the narrator using bizarre metaphors and analogies. His fascination with generic matters is revealed in one of many witty excursus:

> ...I was a handsome lad, handsome and bold, and I galloped into life in my boots and spurs, a whip in my hand and blood in my veins, riding a nervous, strong, high-spirited courser like the horse in the old ballads, which Romanticism found in the medieval castle and left in the streets of our own century. The Romanticists rode the poor beast until he was so nearly dead that he finally lay down in the gutter, where the realists found him, his flesh eaten away by sores and worms, and, out of pity, carried him away to their books.[81]

Earl E. Fitz refers to Machado de Assis as 'a grand anachronism, a highly unique and original writer who does not fit his historical time and place'.[82] He writes:

> To an extraordinary extent an intense and highly poetic use of allegory, symbolism, simile, metaphor, synecdoche, and ironic contrast comes to play an integral role in Machado's post-1880 narratives. Though perplexing to readers and critics of the time, his experimentation with such staples of modernist narrative techniques as fragmentation, ellipsis, and irony, the metaphoric advancement of plot, the manipulation of time, the use of implied readers, unreliable narrators (and narratees), and the insistence that the readers not be passive, that he or she participate actively in the fluid process of textual interpretation, all conspire to show how Machado de Assis was a writer ahead of his time...'[83]

Despite its satirical tone, its banter and humorous light touches, the novel is often thought to be deeply pessimistic, frequently alluding to melancholy and madness, and finishes with the words: 'I had no progeny, I transmitted to no one the legacy of our misery'. Brás Cubas and his philosophical friend, the inventor of 'Humanitism', Quincas Borba, fail to find the key to life. The themes are bleak, as Maria Luisa Nunes writes, they are: egotism, avarice, venality, hypocrisy, oppression, vanity and

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[80] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, p. 125.
[81] Machado de Assis, *Epitaph*, pp. 36-7.
[82] Earl E. Fitz, *Machado de Assis* (Boston, Mass.: Twayne, 1989), p. 13.
[83] Fitz, *Machado de Assis*, p. 12.

slavery.[84] This effective combination of saga, satire, comedy and seriousness, self-consciousness and intertextual complexity is bequeathed to magical realism.

Nancy Gray Díaz's study of metamorphosis in literature, *The Radical Self,* claims that ***Macunaíma***[85] (1928), by the Brazilian, **Mário de Andrade** (1893-1945), 'may be considered a legitimate forerunner of Magic Realism'.[86] Similarly, Martin argues that Andrade, endeavouring to create a Brazilian hero, 'found a literary form through which to narrate this avant-garde folk tale, and thus Magical Realism was born'.[87] It has undoubtedly had considerable influence on the development of magical realism in South and Central American literature. *Macunaíma*, according to Klein, has 'a place in Brazilian literature equivalent to that of Joyce's *Ulysses* in English literature'.[88] Interested in the cultural heritage of Brazil, Andrade had a distinguished academic career in musicology and art history, and founded and became influential in the São Paulo Department of Culture and the Brazilian Society of Ethnography and Folklore. Eager that Brazilians should 'view reality through Brazilian eyes', he encouraged 'creative artists to develop media or forms that would be attuned to the spirit and the language of their country'.[89] Despite this interest in his own country, he was knowledgeable about European culture and was influenced by Freud, surrealism and Marxism.[90] Klein views *Macunaíma* as having:

> ...some of the characteristics of the epic poem in that its hero is a mythical figure who is supposed to symbolize the Brazilian spirit and to incorporate in his psyche the collective unconscious.[91]

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[84] Maria Luisa Nunes, *The Craft of an Absolute Winner: Characterization and Narratology in the Novels of Machado de Assis* (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 74-5.
[85] Mário de Andrade, *Macunaíma,* trans. E. A. Goodland (London: Quartet, 1984).
[86] Nancy Gray Díaz, *The Radical Self: Metamorphosis to Animal Form in Modern Latin American Narrative* (Colombia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), p. 71.
[87] Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth,* p. 143.
[88] Klein, *Latin American Literature in the Twentieth Century,* p. 61.
[89] Klein, *Latin American Literature in the Twentieth Century,* p. 60.
[90] 'Dr. Sigmund Freud (pronounced Froyd)' is mentioned in *Macunaíma,* p. 68.
[91] Klein, *Latin American Literature in the Twentieth Century,* p. 61.

Furthermore, Martin claims 'the "carnivalization" of Latin American literature and the development of the "polyphonic novel" begin here', noting the year of its publication, 1928, was also the time when Volosinov (Bakhtin) wrote 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art'. He applauds Andrade as 'one of the first writers in the Third World to dare to take not only myth but also magic seriously and unapologetically'.[92]

In the introduction to Andrade's volume of poetry, *Hallucinated City,* Jack E. Tomlins writes that in the years around World War I young Brazilians,

> ...wanted a Brazilian art that was truly modern in the European esthetic tradition they had recently discovered. They wanted at the same time an art that was authentically and thematically Brazilian.[93]

Díaz devotes a chapter to a consideration of metamorphosis in this novel. She lists many of the aspects of its polyphonic nature, noting:

> The novel is a mélange, a fusion of extremely disparate levels and regions of discourse. In order to create a sense of pan-Brazilianism, Andrade incorporates words from various Brazilian Indian and African languages as well as street language, formal literary language, technological words, magical and mythical words, baby talk, folk songs, comic words, coined words, and obscenities.[94]

Its construction from disparate sources, the presence of satire, and the tone, which John Gledson describes as 'flippant and rumbustious', prevent this novel from locating comfortably in the genre of indigenous mythic writing.[95] The legends derive from the Taulipang and Arekuná peoples of Brazil and Venezuela.[96] The mythology prevails in the story, partly as a result of the obfuscation of usual time and space

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[92] Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth,* p. 144.
[93] Tomlins is also the translator of this bilingual edition of *Hallucinated* City (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), p. xii. First published as *Paulicea Desvairada* (São Paulo: Livraria Martins Editôra, 1922).
[94] Díaz, *The Radical Self,* p. 52.
[95] John Gledson, 'Brazilian Fiction: Machado de Assis to the Present', in *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey,* ed. King, p. 29.
[96] These legends were collected by Theodore Koch-Grünberg. See Díaz, *The Radical Self,* p. 51.

boundaries or markers, so that there is no sense of realism at all. In fact, the third edition of *Macunaíma* published in 1944 in Brazil, was subtitled, 'O herói sem nenhum caráter', effectively drawing the reader's attention to the lack of realism.[97] Significantly, bearing in mind the importance of Rabelais in this area, Haroldo de Campos referred to the hero as 'our national Pantagruel'.[98] Macunaíma has remarkably little dialogue, and in fact his speech tends to consist of an oft repeated vulgar phrase, translated as '[a]w, what a fucking life!' Díaz makes the following observations about the hero:

> Macunaíma's lack of character thus originates in the legends themselves, but it is carefully and consistently adapted to the modern character of his country. He exploits nature by force, consorts with colonial interests, goes back on his word, trades the durable for the ephemeral, and sets individual desire as the prime motive for action. Andrade, then, not only preserves the beauty and richness of the Indian legends but also stretches them in such a way as to explore their potential for expressing contemporary psychological, ethical and political concerns. As in the works of Carpentier and Asturias, a return to indigenous culture in Macunaíma opens a new route toward an understanding of heterogeneous and colonized culture.[99]

Macunaíma, whose origins lie in the legends of Brazil, is a recalcitrant hero, one who is impulsive and driven by the pleasure principle, with neither a moral character nor palpable, individual personality. He lives out a plethora of adventures, including at least eleven metamorphoses, but learns little from his experiences, having no introspective qualities. Díaz writes: '[h]is consciousness remains at the affective level, unable to attain the realm of judgement', so rendering him incapable of making moral decisions, for:

> Without judgement one cannot have "character", for character in the ethical sense, presupposes the ability to weigh alternative possibilities and to choose according to a system of values.[100]

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[97] Díaz, *The Radical Self*, p. 53.
[98] Haroldo de Campos, quoted in *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, ed. Martin, p. 143.
[99] Díaz, *The Radical Self*, p. 55.
[100] Díaz, *The Radical Self*, p. 65.

The lack of the hero's ethical system is balanced and redeemed by the novel's satirical nature for, as Díaz states, 'satire, by its very nature demands attention to ethics'.[101]

Magic is used in this novel, according to Díaz, as a major principle of mutability. She demonstrates how the magical manipulations of the hero are often connected to the breaking of taboos, leading to a sexually explicit story.[102] Macunaíma leads a dissolute life, failing to put his magic powers to good use, preferring to revel in mischievousness and egocentricity. Andrade does portray him with a conscience, but it is one which, amusingly, need not bother him:

> Early the next morning Macunaíma jumped into a corial and paddled to the island of Marapatá, at the mouth of the Rio Negro, to stow his conscience where it would not be a burden to him on his travels. He hid it at the top of a thirty-foot cactus so that it wouldn't be eaten by the leaf-cutting ants.[103]

There is a double dose of wry humour here: the reification of Macunaíma's conscience is bizarre and humorous, and any seriousness which might have crept in with the mention of conscience is undercut and dismissed with the practical considerations of keeping it out of harm's way and the leaf-cutting ants.

The narrator presents Macunaíma as a loveable rogue and scoundrel, whose raping and pillaging, however, grate on the ears of a reader seventy years on. The tale does have a moral, since he is finally caught out and transformed into the constellation of the Great Bear. In the epilogue to the story, the reader finds his tribe has vanished, prefiguring the endings of novels by García Márquez and Allende:

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[101] Díaz, *The Radical Self*, p. 70.
[102] Andrade himself referred to the novel's 'pornography'; Díaz, *The Radical Self*, pp. 52 & 59.
[103] Andrade, *Macunaíma*, p. 30.

> ...only the parrot had rescued from oblivion these happenings and the language which had disappeared. Only the parrot had preserved in that vast silence the words and deeds of the hero.[104]

The parrot then tells his story to a man and, 'that man, dear reader, was myself, and I stayed on in order to tell you this story'. The novel finishes jauntily and accurately with the words '[t]here's no more'.

Finally, the Argentinian, **Jorge Luis Borges** (1899-1986), must be considered as an invaluable precursor. Vargas Llosa writes of him as 'one of the most memorable artists of our age', the writer who 'heralded the end of a kind of inferiority complex that inhibited us all unwittingly from broaching certain subjects and that kept us imprisoned in a provincial outlook'.[105] Unequivocally a great writer, he paved the way for many including García Márquez, despite the fact, as Martin says, '[h]e was never interested in magic, nor in the primitive [...] nor in Freud, and certainly not in Marx'. He goes on to argue:

> Yet if Andrade, Asturias, and Carpentier brought about the opening to myth, oral expression and popular experience which was to allow the exploration of Latin American culture from the 1920s and thus to provide the essential basis for the New Novel, it is Borges, unmistakably, who supplied the sense of precision and structure which permitted the intertextual systematization of that culture and the creation of the Latin American literature in which, incidentally, he never believed.[106]

Since the seminal work of Borges is internationally acknowledged, and as there is no need to underline the importance of any writer whose name becomes adjectival (although whether it is Borgean[107] or Borgesian[108] is disputed), a short summary of his contribution will suffice here. He had a proclivity for mind-bending, enigmatic

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[104] Andrade, *Macunaíma*, p. 168.
[105] Vargas Llosa, *A Writer's Reality*, pp. 3, 4.
[106] Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, p. 152.
[107] Naomi Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 95.
[108] See André Maurois's preface to Borges, *Labyrinths*, p. 10.

stories executed in precision-engineered, effulgent prose. He was, Martin observes, 'always allergic to long narratives', preferring to write poetry and short stories.[109] Naomi Lindstrom lists a number of Borges's typical allusions; these include 'labyrinths, either constructed mazes or such metaphorical labyrinths as the desert, library stacks, treatises, gardens, houses, philosophy, time, memory, and human awareness'; she also identifies a number of 'treacherous' objects, 'especially mirrors, masks, coins, maps and reference books'.[110] A range of 'curious neurological aberrations' marks the characters.

Despite his professed affection for the traditionally lowly genre of detective fiction, Borges's work is undoubtedly cerebral, learned and metaphysically challenging. His characters tend to have little inner-life as a result of his move away from the exploration of psychological depth, and he developed a penchant for ideas-based writing which is evident in his whole *oeuvre*. John Sturrock considers that in relation to Borges the word 'characterization',

> ...must go into quotation marks because it is used in an etiolated, formal sense. The characters in his stories are not psychological entities, merely proper names. They are, as all fictional characters are to a greater or lesser extent, functions of the plot, and Borges gives them names as a concession to the protocol of fiction; they could as well have been identified more symbolically, perhaps by an algebraic notation.[111]

This can be seen in his short story, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', when the narrator resists revealing states of mind when describing the discovery of a significant book:

> I began to leaf through it and experienced an astonished and airy feeling of vertigo which I shall not describe, for this is not the story of my emotions but of Uqbar and Tlön and Orbis Tertius.[112]

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[109] Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, p. 378, n. 8.
[110] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, p. 95.
[111] John Sturrock, 'Odium Theologicum', in *Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), p. 162.
[112] Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', in *Labyrinths*, pp. 30-1.

This calculated lack of perceptiveness into characters' motivations continues into postmodern writing and magical realism, and is not, as is sometimes suggested, an amoral literary strategy, since Irby argues that far from being 'formalist games', Borges's 'idealist insistence on knowledge and insight, which means finding order and becoming part of it, has a definite moral significance'. He also argues Borges's work is ultimately about being a 'writer, reader and human being', saying '[h]e is the dreamer who learns he is the dreamed one', prefiguring devices used by García Márquez.[113] This aspect of his work reveals Borges to be the great connoisseur of the now common notion of textual self-reflexivity, the prime-mover in the exploration of metaphorical labyrinths and the infinite. His long-standing interest in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* evinces his fascination with the real and the illusory, the introduction of different narrative levels and intertextuality. His pseudo-essay, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', shows all three, and additionally conveys his wonderfully laconic sense of humour, both in his paratextual fake footnotes and the following literary critical judgement:

> Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)[114]

Amongst what Sturrock refers to as the essay's 'admirable tortuosities' is the apparent fact that two coincidentally identical texts have been produced by different authors.[115] This story, along with 'Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', also illustrates the blurring of boundaries between fictional and factual discourses. The reader is frequently unsure as to the veracity of certain features and is left wondering which parts of the story are factual and which fictional; and it is difficult, faced with Borges's formidable erudition, to decide without going to *hors texte* sources. This

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[113] Irby's introduction to Borges, *Labyrinths*, p. 20.
[114] Borges, 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*', in *Labyrinths*, p. 69.
[115] Sturrock, 'Odium Theologicum' p. 161.

uncertainty is a feature which has made its way into the postmodern fiction of subsequent decades.

However, it is worth mentioning that Borges was by no means the object of universal encomia. The Marxist Cuban poet and essayist, Roberto Fernández Retamar, is one of his detractors, finding fault not only with his politics, but his elitist literary style, attributing to him the statement, 'I believe that our tradition is Europe'.[116] Retamar believes Borges's works are 'the painful testimony of a class with no way out'.[117]

In conclusion, then, this chapter has shown that the ancestry of magical realism is diverse, with one branch emerging from Europe and the other, rather later, from Latin America. At first, the above influences may appear to have no relation of consanguinity, and indeed, in the analysis of precursory texts it is somewhat surprising to find that of the six, three are overtly comic, one seriously purports to be fact, others wryly do so, and only one of the three Latin American ancestors deliberately eschews a European perspective. González Echevarría, although he is not writing of magical realism in particular, argues:

> In Latin American writing, the New World then occupies a doubly fictive space: the one furnished by the European tradition and the one re-elaborated by Latin American writers. Writing within a Western tradition and in a European language, Latin American writers feel they write from within a fiction of which they are a part, and in order to escape from this literary encirclement they must constantly strive to invent themselves and Latin America anew.[118]

It is this desire to reinvent anew which has led to the formation of magical realism.

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[116] Roberto Fernández Retamar, 'Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in America', in *Caliban and Other Essays*, Roberto Fernández Retamar, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 26. The essay was first published in *Casa de Las Américas*, Havana, 68, Sept.-Oct. 1971.

[117] Retamar, 'Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in America', p. 29.

[118] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 28.

Finally, Zamora and Faris contend that magical realism appeals to an 'impulse to reestablish contact with traditions temporarily eclipsed by the mimetic constraints of nineteenth and twentieth century realism';[119] they regard the blending of the magical and the real as evident in the epic and chivalric traditions, the *Decameron, The Thousand and One Nights* and *Don Quixote.* There is evidence, they argue, to suggest that magical realism 'has had its waxings and wanings over the centuries and is now experiencing one more period of ascendancy'.[120] Whilst it may be true that aspects of magical realism have been glimpsed in previous centuries, it is, however, only in recent decades that it has become entrenched in the literary landscape as a mode in its own right. Magical realism draws its genetic material from all these earlier works of literature, as indeed Salman Rushdie acknowledges, when he refers to his own 'polyglot family tree'.[121]

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[119] Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism,* p. 2.
[120] Zamora and Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism,* p. 5.
[121] Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', p. 21.

3

The Politics and Poetics of Magical Realism

> Literature is like an ear that can hear things beyond the understanding of the language of politics; it is like an eye that can see beyond the color spectrum perceived by politics.[1]

The interrelatedness of the politics and poetics of magical realism is one of the central tenets of this thesis, and is the reason they are dealt with here together. This chapter deals broadly with four issues: realism, structures of feeling, postmodernism and postcolonial identity. Firstly, the characteristic features of classic realism are examined with a view to identifying the inherent limitations magical realism seeks to transcend. This is followed by a brief consideration of the position of surrealism in relation to magical realism, partly because, whilst there *is* a connection, the two

[1] Italo Calvino, 'Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature', in *Literature in the Modern World,* ed. Dennis Walder (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p. 101.

ought not to be conflated. Secondly, the notion of magical realism as a postcolonial structure of feeling is considered. This involves revisiting Raymond Williams's discussions on the subject, and then positing the nature of this particular structure of feeling. Briefly, I argue that the structure of feeling found in magical realism appears to be based on a set of oppositions, but these are then defeated through the use of indeterminacy and transgression. The notion of a structure of feeling is a matter of both poetics and politics. The value of the concept of transgression is considered along with Mikhail Bakhtin's development of theory regarding the functioning of the carnivalesque. With Bakhtin in mind, I provide a description of the spectrum which magical realism appears to impose on fictional events. The third section deals with magical realism as a type of postmodernism, while the fourth considers questions of postcolonial identity.

a. Illusion and Dis-illusion: magical realism's difference from other realisms

i. Classic Realism

García Márquez, when interviewed in 1981, revealed that he uses a 'journalistic trick' to make a scene more convincing:

> ...if you say that there are elephants flying in the sky, people are not going to believe you. But if you say that there are four hundred and twenty-five elephants in the sky, people will probably believe you.[2]

This common technique was utilised to great effect by all the nineteenth century realist novelists who recognised that by increasing specificity a writer was promoting credibility and thereby creating realism. Its association with the preternatural may lead one to disassociate magical realism from classic realism, but by virtue of its very appellation it can be placed against its primogenitor, realism, for

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[2] See Peter Stone's interview with García Márquez in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. George Plimpton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 324.

purposes of comparison. I will examine realism initially, in order that magical realism's literary specificity can be more firmly established.

Realism is a mode of writing which, by employing specific devices, gives the *impression* of recording or 'reflecting' accurately an actual way of life. It is an artistic construction which depends upon two elements: firstly, through the inclusion of a great deal of minutiae it achieves a high degree of specificity; secondly, it promotes the depiction of credible settings and events which obey generally accepted rules of causality, presenting an ordered world, and these together form the illusion that is known as realism.[3] True or pure realism, however, is difficult to identify, and in a sense it is an artistic impossibility. If we look at what are generally considered to be British classic realist novels from the nineteenth century, such as George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) for example, it is evident they often contain devices such as the intrusive narrator which have the effect of destroying realist illusion; in earlier novels, such as *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742) by Henry Fielding, the satirical and parodic nature also keeps realism at bay. In these novels, realism is sacrificed for the benefit of the author's more important agenda, whether it is comic effect and/or social criticism and/or moralising. Traditional realist novels have tended to encompass and promote one view of the world and it is with this view that the reader is usually encouraged to sympathise. This also frequently happens to be the perspective which encourages empathy with the protagonist, especially where this character is narrating or focalising. This position is not necessarily one that seeks to promote the *status quo*, but it often implicitly lays claim to the moral high ground. One of the consequences of classic realism is that the reader is channelled into a world and positioned or interpellated by the text. Successful realist novels have an internal consistency, a

[3] This view of realism is indebted to some extent to Georg Lukács's discussions in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1963) and *Essays on Realism*, ed. and introd. Rodney Livingstone; trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980).

feature that deludes the reader into thinking truth is on the page; to assist, an omniscient narrator may intervene to guide the reader in the right direction.

That realism is associated with various problems and limitations is evident, and consequently, it is becoming increasingly redundant as it is no longer equal to the task of representation in the late twentieth century, as indeed Lilian Furst recognises:

> As an artistic movement realism is the product and expression of the dominant mood of its time: a pervasive rationalist epistemology that turned its back on the fantasies of Romanticism and was shaped instead by the impact of the political and social changes as well as the scientific and industrial advances of its day.[4]

Classic realism is outmoded because of its adherence to a simplistic, common-sense notion of seeing, and this correspondence theory of realism has become untenable because of the innovations in the way language is perceived following Saussure. Raymond Williams writes: '[t]he old, naïve realism is in any case dead, for it depended on a theory of natural seeing which is now impossible', and goes on to say, 'a new realism is necessary, if we are to remain creative'.[5] Language is now seen as a self-contained sign system through which everything is mediated; texts consist of words on a page, not reflections of real life. We have seen that magical realism has been called oxymoronic, but it is worth remembering that the writings of the realists themselves, in the words of Furst, 'betrayed fundamental tensions within the concept of realism'.[6] Eliot, for example, in *Adam Bede,* acknowledges the difficulties in attempting to give a true account of something when she writes '[e]xamine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth'.[7] Eliot recognises the limitation of realism, namely its inherent representational assumption. Furst

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[4] Lilian R. Furst (ed.), *Realism* (London & New York: Longman, 1992), p. 1.
[5] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp. 314 & 316.
[6] Furst (ed.), *Realism*, p. 21.
[7] George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 223.

expresses this cogently when she says these writers were 'forced to realise the insuperable difficulty of capturing the nature of reality through the medium of language',[8] and Catherine Belsey is critical of classic realism because it 'cannot foreground contradiction'.[9]

Endings of novels effectively demonstrate the artificiality of realist texts as they often conclude either happily, in marriage, or unhappily, in death, a convention which has become known as 'the tyranny of the ending' because of the way closure is imposed on the novel. Williams refers to what he calls 'magic' in novels of the 1840s; this is a solution which takes one of two forms: either the unexpected legacy or the Empire device. This latter works in the following way:

> ...characters whose destinies could not be worked out within the system as given were simply put on the boat, a simpler way of resolving the conflict between ethic and experience than any radical questioning of the ethic.[10]

Theoretically, the whole concept of an ending is, in a sense, anathema to realism, which, in its earnest attempts at mimesis, has to organise the supposedly unstructured *fabula* or raw material of real life into chapters. Once a reader starts to analyse the *sjuzet* of the text, and perceives its anachronies, its structure and its narrative devices, it becomes clear that realism is only a deception. To achieve the purest form of realism one would advocate following rules such as these, for example: beginnings and endings should appear arbitrarily; events in a text should take the same length of time to relate as they would to happen in real life; and everything should be incorporated. This reveals the impossibility of pure realism, as to follow these rules would be preposterous and would not produce anything resembling what is commonly regarded as a realist text, but would in fact be highly experimental and bizarre. Kathryn Hume provides an apt illustration of this point when she writes: '[a]n unedited presentation of breathing and heartbeats would

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[8] Furst, *Realism*, p. 21.
[9] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 82.
[10] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 83-4.

provoke any sane reader to close the book',[11] showing, as Roland Barthes says, 'the most realistic narrative imaginable develops along unrealistic lines'.[12] Realist writing, as with any other type of literature, involves a complex, manipulative process of selection and rejection. At certain times a mimetic narrative method is required, characterised by the incorporation of minute details, sometimes with the use of direct speech and iteration; at other times, a diegetic method is preferred, involving the use of summary, often with reported speech and ellipsis. Mimesis is used at important moments; diegesis is used to avoid repetition, to link parts of the story, and to pass speedily over periods and incidents of no particular significance or interest to the story. These two narrative methods are used interchangeably and are found in all realist (and magical realist) novels, indicating that narrative is not the 'natural' technique it might at first appear, but is a highly constructed and artificial method of writing. The crucial requirements for the unity of plot — for exposition, complication and resolution — override the theoretical demands of realism. Although it may purport to be naïve and artless, once the surface is disturbed, the technique and manufactured characteristics of realism appear.

Writers of magical realism, as with classic realism, often claim to be telling what really happened. García Márquez is frequently quoted claiming: 'the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality'.[13] In his Nobel Lecture he remarks on many marvellous, strange events that have happened in South America. For example:

> Our independence from Spanish domination did not put us beyond the reach of madness. General Antonio López de Santa Anna, three times dictator of Mexico, held a magnificent funeral for the right leg he had lost in the so-called Pastry War. General Gabriel García Moreno ruled Ecuador for sixteen years as an absolute monarch; at his wake, the corpse was seated on the presidential

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[11] Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York & London: Methuen, 1984), p. 41.
[12] Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge/Open University, 1995), p. 260.
[13] Quoted in Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 322.

> chair, decked out in full-dress uniform and a protective layer of medals. General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, the theosophical despot of El Salvador who had thirty thousand peasants slaughtered in a savage massacre, invented a pendulum to detect poison in his food, and had street lamps draped in red paper to defeat an epidemic of scarlet fever. The statue to General Francisco Morazán erected in the main square of Tegucigalpa is actually one of Marshal Ney, purchased at a Paris warehouse of second-hand sculptures.[14]

In a similar vein, Isabel Allende also insists upon the mimetic aspect of her novels:

> For a writer who nourishes himself or herself on images and passions, to be born in a fabulous continent is a privilege. In Latin America we don't have to stretch our imaginations. Critics in Europe and the United States often stare in disbelief at Latin American books, asking how the authors dare to invent those incredible lies of young women who fly to heaven wrapped in linen sheets; of black emperors who build fortresses with cement and the blood of emasculated bulls; of outlaws who die of hunger in the Amazon with bags full of emeralds on their backs; of ancient tyrants who order their mothers to be flogged naked in front of the troops and modern tyrants who order children to be tortured in front of their parents; of hurricanes and earthquakes that turn the world upside down; of revolutions made with machetes, bullets, poems and kisses; of hallucinating landscapes where reason is lost.
>
> It is very hard to explain to critics that these things are not a product of our pathological imaginations. They are written in our history; we can find them every day in our newspapers.[15]

Writers of all kinds often make such claims because they have the effect of conferring the status of *truth* on the text, as opposed to *fiction*, producing the paradox that the literary work is apparently simultaneously both fictional and non-fictional. Magical realist writers want to extricate themselves from the disadvantages and the bonds of classic realism, but are sometimes reluctant to relinquish its advantages, and the principal prerogative of realism is that it implicitly claims to tell the truth.

Classic realism focuses on a few key characters, but magical realism has been part of the movement in fiction away from such intimate exploration of character and its attendants: psychology and personal morality. Realism has tended to incorporate a moralising stance, but we shall see, there are various reasons why magical realism

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[14] García Márquez, 'The Solitude of Latin America', p. 88.

[15] Isabel Allende, 'Writing as an Act of Hope', in *Paths of Resistance: The Art and Craft of the Political Novel*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), pp. 45-6.

does not. Realism is particularly effective at showing the individual against the backcloth of society, as Williams notes: 'in fact we are people and people within a society: that whole view was at the centre of the realist novel'.[16] The social continues to be heavily foregrounded in magical realism, as in other types of realism, but the attention given to specific characters varies from text to text. So, magical realism also shows the individual in society, but tends to offer fewer well-developed characters, and consequently, the reader's sympathy is slightly less engaged. However, I do not want to overstate the importance of this. In magical realism, the reader is frequently uncertain which of the characters deserves sympathy, and who is behaving morally correctly. Other means through which this feature is developed include internal focalisation, when the action is depicted through the consciousness of one or more characters, or external focalisation, where the narrator does not give information about a character's thoughts. The lack of a single, sustained point of view can result in a weakening of character, previously such an important constituent of the novel. A less idealistic notion of human nature is propagated by magical realism, but it is also qualified by reference to the flaws in the social fabric. It is frequently the way characters are positioned societally, and their reaction to this, that gives them their distinctiveness.

Magical realism contains only one of the two elements necessary for realism. The novels are, in many cases, immensely long and detailed and thereby fulfil the first requirement of realism: they have a high degree of specificity. Many incidents are also highly credible, but some are, at least from a European point of view, definitely not. However, as with the classic realist text, the novels have an internal consistency and coherence, so, at least for most of the characters, *within the world of the text,* the events are credible. The narrators, characters and readers do not usually consider the magical to be a malign influence or destructive force as in other

[16] Williams, *The Long Revolution,* p. 309.

narratives from fantastic or horror genres. The supernatural or preternatural events do not usually shock the people witnessing them. There are exceptions, for instance in the novels of Carpentier and Asturias, but in these cases innocent people have nothing to fear from the supernatural. The nefarious deeds depicted stem from the actions of people — from the human failings of cruelty, injustice, or the thirst for power — not from the magic or the spirits. In some novels, particularly those of Allende, the spirit world is a help and a form of support. Unlike Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the supernatural does not cause disequilibrium in the lives of the people, rather, as Faris says, the 'magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed'.[17]

Unlike traditional classic realism, the novels incorporate the possibility of different world views so, it can be argued, a relativist concept of the real is promulgated though magical realism. This is achieved through authorial reticence, and to a lesser degree, manipulations and shifts in the narrative point of view. In its willingness to embrace relativism, magical realism can be seen as a cultural or ontological view of reality that South and Central American writers adopted whilst striving to develop a distinctive literature, independent from European styles. García Márquez claims:

> My most important problem was to destroy the line of demarcation that separates what seems real from what seems fantastic. Because in the world that I was trying to evoke, that barrier didn't exist.[18]

So, it is evident that the line between what is real and what is not is now one that cannot be drawn definitively because the world is increasingly aware of different cultural practices and beliefs and, in order to respect them, has had to arrive at a relativistic notion of reality and, with the waning authority of the West, the absolutism of classic realism is an inappropriate literary credo. Classic realism implies an absolutist version of the world; magical realism implies a relativist

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[17] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 163.
[18] Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 101.

version. In this, magical realism may not be alone amongst postmodern fiction, but it is particularly well-equipped to present dual or multiple perspectives. Edward Said has stated that reading the magical realists, 'one vividly apprehends the dense interwoven strands of a history that mocks linear narrative, easily recuperated "essences", and the dogmatic mimesis of "pure" representation'.[19]

ii. Surrealism

Surrealism is an artistic movement whose origins are specifically associated with the French poet and critic, André Breton (1896-1966), who outlined its characteristics and purpose in his *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924).[20] In its European context, surrealism grew out of the nihilistic Dadaist movement, sharing with it a privileging of the unconscious over the conscious mind. Because of its amoral philosophical basis, surrealism sought freedom from all constraints, be they aesthetic, traditional, political or social. With regard to writing, automatism, regarded as a pure act of unconscious creation, was the apotheosis of surrealism, but dreams, hallucinations, delusions, trances and neuroses were also exalted as states of mind that unveiled the unconscious mind. Suzanne Césaire wrote that Breton wanted to 'liberate the mind from the shackles of absurd logic and so-called reason'.[21] Speaking highly of the power of surrealism, Paul Laraque claims '[i]t has laid bare certain arcana of the collective unconscious and taken a decisive step towards the psychic liberation of mankind'.[22] Surrealists did not seek to withdraw into a dream-like world, rather they tried to produce a dialectical synthesis involving dreams and reality. Literary figures associated with surrealism are Paul Éluard, Lois Aragon, and Benjamin Perét. Obviously, the philosophical basis for surrealism derives from Freud.

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[19] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 333.
[20] See *Manifestes du Surréalism* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michegan Press, 1972).
[21] Suzanne Césaire, '1943: Surrealism and Us', in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 124; first published in *Tropiques*, nos. 8-9, Oct. 1943.
[22] Paul Laraque, 'André Breton in Haiti', in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 224; first published in *Nouvelle Optique*, no. 1, 1971.

Surrealism is not only a European phenomenon, but is Caribbean, too. The French surrealists, precisely because they were rebelling against Western culture and philosophy, were attracted to non-Western cultures; they were also overtly opposed to colonialism. The Martiniquan writer, Aimé Césaire, published his important autobiographical poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Return to my Native Land*), in Paris in 1939. Césaire, who had spent time in France, used surrealistic methods in his poetry, although the extent to which he did this consciously is debatable. He claimed he was writing surrealistically 'without realizing it or being consciously committed to it ideologically',[23] and others, such as Michael Richardson, have noted that Césaire, despite his stature as a great poet, did not fully appreciate the theoretical foundations of surrealism.[24] Suzanne Césaire happily concedes that the writer does not necessarily understand at every level what s/he does and, writing on the subject of imitation, she says it is 'a defence reaction against an oppressive society' which has 'now passed into the ranks of the formidable secret forces of the unconscious'.[25] Consciously or otherwise, the politically committed Césaire used surrealism intuitively in his poetry to liberate autochthonous, repressed dimensions of the black inhabitants of Martinique. In other words, he started rebuilding the damaged sense of selfhood which French colonialism had effected. The neologism coined to describe these Caribbean writers who were trying to reassert their identity was *négritude*. Surrealism and *negritude* share a close relationship. Ronnie Scharfman writes: '*[n]égritude* combines the primitive and the poetic, the African and the Ur-French, to forge a new identity';[26] and the *Cahier*, he says, 'can certainly be said to practise this ethos and aesthetic of

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[23] See Ronnie Scharfman, 'Surrealism and Négritude in Martinique', in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 945.

[24] Michael Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow*, p. 8.

[25] Suzanne Césaire, 'A Civilization's Discontent', in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 99.

[26] Scharfman, 'Surrealism and Négritude in Martinique', p. 944.

the image and, as such, to echo the surrealism of Breton's 1924 *Manifeste'*.[27] Breton described the *Cahier* as 'nothing less than the greatest lyrical monument of these times'. Césaire was an uncompromising writer, and a man who declared he would not accommodate himself to European ways. He was one of a number of writers who set up and contributed to a range of lively journals, such as *Tropiques* (1941-46), and Breton proclaimed him as the 'the prototype of dignity'[28].

The Caribbean surrealists were as politically committed as the Marxist French contingent. Breton visited Haiti as a guest of the government and delivered a series of lectures in 1946, lighting the fuse that led, almost inadvertently, to the downfall of its dictatorial administration.[29] Laraque, bedazzled by the visitor he calls 'the Magus', describes meeting Breton on his arrival in Haiti: 'a god begotten by lightning. To see him was to grasp the beauty of the angel of revolt'.[30] René Depestre recalls the electrifying effect Breton created in the theatre where he spoke: '[f]rom the moment André Breton began to speak, we knew that the time was ripe in Haiti to unleash, before the event and *mutatis mutandis*, a terrific May '68 in the tropics!'.[31] This elation did not last and Breton was expelled by the military junta.

Its ephemeral popularity suggests there are disadvantages with literary surrealism. It became mechanistic and repetitious as the spontaneity of automatism proved to be unsustainable, meaning that, in reality, much surrealist art was far more heavily and consciously crafted than its defenders cared to admit, making the genre in some senses rather dishonest, as in its appeal to the unconscious it appears to deny its social construction and historical situatedness, as well as the cultural capital and

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[27] Scharfman, 'Surrealism and Négritude in Martinique', p. 945.
[28] André Breton, 'A Great Black Poet: Aimé Césaire', in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 193.
[29] For information on Breton's visit see Paul Laraque, 'André Breton in Haiti', and René Depestre, 'André Breton in Port-au-Prince', both in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson.
[30] Laraque, 'André Breton in Haiti', p. 218.
[31] René Depestre, 'André Breton in Port-au-Prince', p. 232.

personal experience of its practitioners. Some critics have condemned the mystification which surrealism produced, along with its amoral stance, and unsurprisingly, it disintegrated at the time of the Second World War.[32] Surrealism never really gained a substantial foot-hold in the realms of literature, although in the visual arts it became extremely influential.

Surrealists did have in common with magical realists an inherent desire to be emancipated from the traditional straitjacket of classic realism and Western, logocentric thought. They also exhibited the same respect for the unconscious which psychoanalytical theories in the early part of this century had shown to be so important. There is a sense in which contradiction marks them both: Paul Laraque writes: 'surrealism everywhere explodes the contradiction that is within us as much as within things'.[33] Similarly, for Richardson, it recognises the 'essential duality of all things, surrealism aims at the resolution of the contradictions such duality implies'.[34] Caribbean surrealist writers are open to the ideological objection that they adopted a European, albeit anti-establishment, mode of thought, but whether they did this admiringly and imitatively, or in a spirit of ironic, cannibalistic appropriation, makes all the difference.[35]

There are some significant differences between surrealism and magical realism which I will deal with here briefly. Surrealism is informed by Freudian theories; magical realism is informed, albeit less closely, by Jungian theories, especially of the collective unconscious. Looking at European surrealist works, it is immediately evident that artists and writers have preoccupied themselves with sex and death, with taboos, with the cabalistic and sinister side of life. Surrealism is frequently

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[32] See René Ménil, 'For a Critical Reading of *Tropiques*', in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 72.
[33] Paul Laraque, 'André Breton in Haiti', p. 225.
[34] Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow*, p. 12.
[35] Suzanne Césaire says: 'Martiniquan poetry will be cannibal or will not be'; quoted in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, intro., p. 15.

designed to be disruptive: to shock or unsettle the reader, whereas magical realism is not. Surrealism revels in bizarre juxtapositions, such as Salvador Dali's 'Lobster Telephone'; magical realism, whilst it does produce bizarre combinations, usually has some kind of implied logic and internal consistency, even if it is the logic of myth or magic. Surrealism, on the whole (there are exceptions) tends to promote an ahistorical vision; magical realism is deeply rooted in history and in historicity. Where surrealism is modern, magical realism is postmodern, as we shall see shortly.

b. Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Structure of Feeling

Elleke Boehmer, referring to narrative as a kind of '*form giving*', argues postcolonial fiction 'gives structure to, as well as being structured by history'.[36] Following Raymond Williams's analyses, this may be because it captures a structure of feeling that is articulated tacitly in the narrative. This is partly where literature is unique and where it diverges from journalism: literature contains certain implicit structures and symbols. The structure of feeling of a novel is not an aspect that reveals itself obviously on the first page, but is articulated in the structure of the text in a way that is analogous to a poem's form contributing part of its meaning. Italo Calvino argues that literature can give a voice to whatever is without a voice, and can give a name to whatever is without a name, enabling the writer to make discoveries that turn out to be 'vital areas of collective consciousness';[37] it is exactly this which the magical realist structure of feeling accomplishes.

i. Raymond Williams

I will now assess Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling in terms of its value to the study of magical realism. My central thesis here is that structures

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[36] Boehmer, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 198.
[37] Calvino, 'Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature', p. 101.

found in literature have their counterparts in society itself. In the case of magical realist texts the writers are, consciously or subconsciously, inscribed by and inscribing a new structure of feeling based on oppositional structures, but are striving to go beyond them, and therefore, they are both discovering and inventing a new structure of feeling, and turning it into a new narrative form.

Writers of magical realism have lived through great historical upheavals, frequently involving attempts to come to terms with postcolonial experience. The antinomy or contradiction that has been identified by critics endeavouring to define magical realism is expressed in such binary oppositions as the following, for example: colonisers/colonised, Western/Amerindian, rich/poor, religious/secular, religious/ magical, and rational/magical, and these inherent contradictions in South and Central American society, mainly resulting from the oppressive legacy of colonialism, are manifested in magical realism.

In *The Long Revolution* Williams explains structure of feeling in these terms:

> ...it is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization. And it is in this respect that the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance. For here, if anywhere, this characteristic is likely to be expressed; often not consciously, but by the fact that here, in the only examples we have of recorded communication that outlives its bearers, the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon. I do not mean that the structure of feeling, any more than the social character, is possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community. But I think it is a very deep and wide possession, in all actual communities, precisely because it is on it that communication depends. And what is particularly interesting is that it does not seem to be, in any formal sense, learned. One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere. For here, most distinctly, the changing organization is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately

> described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.[38]

Structures of feeling are distinctive to the cultures which produce them; they are located firmly within the socio-political character of the time and place from which they emerge and, according to Williams, they emanate largely unconsciously from a body of work which has reflexively engaged with other literature and art, and with the specific and distinctive accumulation of social and political experiences of the collective society of that time. Authors do not deliberately or consciously perceive, invent or construct a structure of feeling, rather it constructs and inscribes them and their work. They are part of the process, albeit an important part, for without them the structure of feeling would not be articulated and would never become apparent.

New structures of feeling revolve around rather vague constructs, which of necessity are nebulous and ill-defined partly because they have hitherto been unarticulated and are therefore inchoate and undetermined. Williams argues literature and the arts have the power and ability to articulate that which has yet to be articulated. Society has a variety of forms of self-analysis operating through, for example, the media and the academic disciplines of political science, economics, sociology and psychology. Yet these disciplines lag behind the arts which are able to capture the *Zeitgeist*. Art and literature differ from other types of social and political analysis in that they have distinctive formal and aesthetic qualities in which, Williams argues, the structures of feeling are to be found. When defined as subjects or themes it is easy enough to identify the content of literature in texts, and amassed content may indicate to the critic some of the preoccupations of a society, but the structures of feeling are revealed through the totality of the literature of a society, especially in its formal and aesthetic dimensions. Williams says '[a]rt reflects its society and works a social character through to its reality in experience'. The word

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[38] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 64-5.

'reflects' in this context appears rather old-fashioned, as the foregrounding of language in all areas of analysis has interposed itself between Williams's 1961 publication and late twentieth century readers. Following the insights of poststructuralism it is no longer appropriate to claim that language reflects reality, as this ignores the fact of its constructed medium. However, Williams is not reductive and does not hold a rigidly deterministic line, and he promotes the insightful nature of literature arguing:

> ...art creates, by new perceptions and responses, elements which the society, as such, is not able to realize. If we compare art with its society, we find a series of real relationships showing its deep and central connexions with the rest of the general life.[39]

In his view, literature is a means by which society's problems can be articulated and understood:

> We find also, in certain characteristic forms and devices, evidence of the deadlocks and unresolved problems of the society: often admitted to consciousness for the first time in this way.[40]

In a later text, *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Williams, albeit in a short section of the book, proceeds to undertake a more abstract elucidation of structures of feeling. He draws attention to the way in which the past is a barrier to the understanding of social forms as it implies a finished, defined product or outcome. It is always easier to look at the past, always easier to see with hindsight, a different and more concrete perspective. He suggests a possible alternative term, 'structures of *experience*', contains within it the problem that the word 'experience' implies the *past*, at least in one of its meanings. Williams argues we need way of looking at the present and our experience within it. Social forms, he says, are sometimes explicit and articulated, and may be fixed, but 'when they have all been identified they are not a whole inventory even of social consciousness in its simplest sense'.[41] This is because of a tension which becomes apparent between the official or received

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[39] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 86.
[40] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 86.
[41] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), p. 130.

interpretation and the practical experience. This tension can reveal itself as 'an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency: the moment of conscious comparison not yet come'. The alternative to received or fixed forms, Williams says, is 'a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulated and defined exchange'.[42]

Structures of feeling are social rather than personal. They cannot be reduced to the institutional or the formal, for 'although they are emergent or pre-emergent, they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures'. Williams explains structures of feeling are distinct from concepts such as 'ideology' and 'world-view' because, although these may be included within structures of feeling, they are rather more formalised and systematic. He writes: 'we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt', and goes on to acknowledge that the relations between these and more formal beliefs are variable and complex:

> We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension.[43]

Williams explains that the elusive character of structures of feeling stems from the fact that they are used to define 'a social experience which is still *in process*'. They are first perceived as 'private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating', but through the rigours of analysis they are recognised as having 'emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics', which are only later recognised, by which time they have been formalised and 'in many cases built into institutions and formations'.

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[42] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 131.
[43] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

Finally, the significance of structures of feeling for art and literature lies in their aesthetic aspects:

> The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions — semantic figures — which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming.[44]

Many texts do not link to a contemporary structure of feeling, but merely,

> ...relate to already manifest social formations, dominant or residual, and it is primarily to emergent formations (though often in the form of modification or disturbance in older forms) that the structure of feeling, *as solution*, relates. Yet this specific solution is never mere flux. It is a structured formation which, because it is at the very edge of semantic availability, has many of the characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articulations — new semantic figures — are discovered in material practice...[45]

Williams has been criticised on grounds of vagueness in his definition of structures of feeling, but the best defence is to show how his concept works in practice.

ii. Magical Realism's Structure of Feeling

Part II of this study illustrates the way magical realist narratives embody a structure of feeling which is directly attributable to the postcolonial societies of which they are products. There is a binary underpinning to the structure of feeling which manifests itself in the oppositions located in magical realist novels. It has been established in Chapter One that the term magical realism contains within itself a contradiction and a tension, and the way in which this is manifested in the texts will be examined. Written during the postcolonial era, they all deal in some way with colonial or postcolonial experience, although they cover widely differing periods. The way in which the structure of feeling produces a plethora of binary oppositions in the texts will be analysed, along with an investigation of some of the most significant oppositions. The analysis will be extended to embrace the colonisers/colonised opposition as it is manifested in various ways, and the

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[44] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 133.
[45] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 134.

polarisation and consequent mythologising of both opposing cultures. Other oppositions can be identified, including rationality versus the magical (natural/supernatural), male versus female, human versus animal, reality versus unreality (or reality/fiction). A focus on the omnipresent Manichaen opposition of colonisers and colonised is an inevitable part of the analysis of these texts. Dualisms and oppositions present themselves in the grand, overarching themes and epic narration and also in every infinitesimal nook and cranny, sometimes worn on the sleeve and sometimes in disguise. However, importantly, the oppositions are not allowed to stand: magical realism tends to set up oppositions only to knock them down by introducing all kinds of transgressive language, concepts and events. Boundaries are blurred in a questioning and self-questioning project that works at both a textual and a subtextual level. This transgressiveness is an integral part of the structure of feeling. This description may sound paradoxical, and indeed it is. To draw an analogy, it could be said that one side of the coin representing the magical realist structure of feeling comprises its oppositionality, and the other side of the coin comprises its destruction of oppositions, its blurring of boundaries. The two are dependent on one another for their definition, confirming the fact that try as it might, magical realism cannot separate itself from binary thinking, as it is still *difference* which provides definition. The blurring of boundaries always implies there is a boundary there to be blurred. European binary thought patterns become the bindweed of colonial interference and are monstrously difficult to eradicate.

Let us consider for a moment what magical realist writing achieves. Undoubtedly, it has played a role in the endeavour to construct South and Central American identity; these novels are part of a movement to restore, preserve and create culture and history which are distinctive to the continent, but they do not withdraw to that spurious notion of 'authenticity'. The structure of feeling they embody helps to form part of a huge project of pan-American self-imagining. In order to do this they must revisit their own histories. However, issues of colonial history, as Peter Hulme

demonstrates in *Colonial Encounters*, are shrouded in mystery and misinformation. He provides a critical analysis of five European texts, all having some connection with colonialism and claims there are two ways in which a radical history can present a new version of the past. There are 'two interdependent but separable moments: first, a critique of existing versions partly dependent on, second, the presentation of alternative and contradictory evidence'.[46] Hulme does not have access to alternative or contradictory evidence, partly because of our inability to read such evidence as does exist, but mainly because of the

> ...devastating speed and scale of the destruction of its societies in the period following 1492. The only evidence that remains, in other words, are the very European texts that constitute the discourse of colonialism.[47]

As we have seen in the chronicles, the colonisers considered the continent to have no social history before 1492, and any colony was conceived of as a blank page lacking all traces of history. It is, however, possible to engage with aspects of the culture that are not dominated by imperialism, such as Amerindian or African mythologies, magic, folklore and legends, as writers such as Asturias and Carpentier have shown. The novelists may be assisted by the fact they can often see beyond the restrictive discourses of their own countries as they tend to be cosmopolitan, and have committed political views which, again, stem from beyond the discourses of South and Central America, and additionally, they often live in exile. The writers in this study have all had access to both sides of the colonial equation.

Magical realism represents a postcolonial structure of feeling in which oppositions are acknowledged, but writers and populations are striving to think beyond these tired certainties, and destructive dichotomies, and the blurring of the boundaries between these is one of the techniques used to effect this. The next section deals with this as a kind of transgression.

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[46] Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, p. 8.
[47] Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, p. 8.

iii. Transgression

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), particularly on the carnivalesque, with its notion of transgression, is relevant to this study because of magic which transgresses the boundaries of the Western mind-set of the physical world. Also, threaded liberally throughout magical realist texts are numerous instances of hyperbole and the grotesque, deriving from a variety of genres. Hyperbole is produced through rhetorical exaggeration, whilst the grotesque is characterised by comical distortion or ludicrous, incongruous combinations, the fantastically extravagant or bizarre. Grotesque elements sit comfortably within magical realism, since as Philip Thomson observes, the grotesque benefits from a matter-of-fact tone of narration, and derives at least some of its effect from being presented within a realistic framework.[48] The grotesque frequently highlights the hideousness of the physical body, as we shall see later, particularly in 'Innocent Eréndira'. Mário de Andrade muses on what he calls 'hideous beauty', confessing the 'attraction which the hideous exercises'.[49] Obviously, some of the grotesque aspects are strongly reminiscent of Rabelais.

Bakhtin is also relevant here because of his sensitivity to the incompleteness of the novel, to the sense of development that pervades the genre and to its multiple realities, which he demonstrates in his description of the novel as 'the maximally complete register of all social voices of the era'.[50] His conception of the novel as dialogic is particularly appropriate to magical realism with its dual perspectives and antinomies. For Bakhtin, the novel's dialogic nature stands in opposition to the monologic, canonised genres such as the epic.[51] His notion of polyphony

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[48] Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen, 1972).
[49] Andrade's 'Extremely interesting Preface' to *Hallucinated City*, p. 9.
[50] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 430.
[51] 'Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*.

acknowledges the novel's capacity for containing various ideological voices going far beyond any individual writer's intentions. Barthes has warned about the disadvantages of concentrating on authorial intention:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.[52]

Magical realism is particularly polyphonic because its contexts are racially and culturally heterogeneous, unstable, fragmented and syncretic, as they are rooted in three continents and the historical freight of several centuries. It is such matrices of forces which Bakhtin claims is virtually impossible to map. Issues of context and reception are also raised by Bakhtin, who uses the concept of heteroglossia to describe the conditions controlling the operation of meaning. At any time and place certain conditions, be they physical, social or historical, produce a unique environment which will have a bearing on the way a text is perceived.

Bakhtin's much-used concept of the carnivalesque is especially pertinent to the analysis of magical realism. There is a connection between the carnivalesque and a great deal of modern Latin American writing. Martin claims the 'carnivalization' of Latin American literature began with the publication in 1928 of Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma*, examined earlier.[53] The carnivalesque, with its notion of transgressing boundaries, is relevant because the magic that appears in the texts transgresses the boundaries of the occidentally perceived physical world. Carnival, whether used literally or figuratively is not synonymous with the concept of transgression, but the whole notion of exceeding boundaries set by societal norms is suggested by both words. Carnival places emphasis on change and renewal, equality, parody and profanity. The literal carnival is an arena, albeit contained by time and space, where norms are transgressed and liberties are sanctioned, where exuberance is celebrated,

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[52] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana/Collins, 1982), p. 146.
[53] Martin, *Journeys through the Labyrinth*, p. 144.

where social hierarchies no longer hold sway, and boundaries are crossed in a way not normally permitted. The concept of carnival is common to many widely differing societies and is known to date back certainly to the times of Greek and Roman antiquity. Saturnalia, for example, an ancient Roman holiday celebrating the feast of Saturn in December was originally a festival designed to ensure a good harvest, but became an occasion for feasting and merriment, in which even the slaves could participate, and they were given full freedom of speech for the duration of the holiday. However, importantly, there is a duality at the heart of carnival; it is celebratory, but is also potentially frightening, and is frequently found alongside abjection, as both have a sinister sense of fear or terror hidden below the surface.

Abjection, a state of misery or degradation, lays an emphasis on physicality, on bodily parts, any discussion of which is often outside the realm of polite social norms. There is no room for consideration of the metaphysical once bodily functions enter the arena, as Carlos Fuentes makes clear, saying that although we are all sometimes like Don Quixote, most of the time we are like Sancho Panza: '[w]e would all like to mean something more than we do, but we are tied down to the earthly bondage of eating, digesting, sleeping, moving'.[54] Abjection emphasises the restrained animality of humankind, hinting at the possibility of a cimmerian, bestial, feral nature only just held in check, but this sometimes comic, sometimes grotesque, and often repulsive notion, is at the crux of a web of questions about the existential differences between animal and human worlds, and exactly what it means to be human, and whether an essential human nature really exists. The transgression of the boundary between human and animal forms is a standard technique of Menippean satire which interested Bakhtin. The literary use of abjection also provides a foothold for marginalised groups such as women to unveil the dominant ideology within which they are inscribed, by drawing attention to, and questioning

[54] Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, p. 192.

taboo topics. Transgression is just one of the means through which texts become subversive. However, transgression for its own sake is an absurdity, as literature must have some object against which to direct its transgressive power. In these works, the target is the plethora of dominant institutions and ideologies in the real world. It must also be norm-referenced, and these norms are set by ideologies in society, determined by social, political, economic and religious institutions. Keith M. Booker analyses transgression in a range of otherwise incongruous texts declaring: 'the notion that literature can be genuinely transgressive in a political sense has risen from anathema to apotheosis'.[55] He accepts it is difficult to quantify the effects of subversive literature on a society and does not make exaggerated claims that it sends the outraged public into the streets demonstrating, but rather that it progressively undermines hegemonic ideologies which uphold any repressive society. The operation of transgression will be examined particularly as it is manifested through abjection and the carnivalesque in Part II.

iv. Magical Realism's Transgressive Spectrum

Bearing in mind some of the ideas deriving from Bakhtin, I shall show how transgression is used in magical realism, here in a theoretical way, and in Part II, in an applied way. It is important to realise that the reader should not be unduly concerned about which events are supernatural, preternatural or natural, since ambiguity is part of the epistemological interest of the story: the lack of certainty is a fundamental theme. As we have seen, Borges, amongst others, recognised ambiguity as a source of richness. However, as incidents in magical realist narratives range along a continuum from the preternatural or supernatural and marvellous on the one hand, to the mundane and quotidian on the other, it is worth taking a moment to consider the different types of events, as this helps to demonstrate the implicit ambiguity and indeterminacy in which magical realism revels. It will also

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[55] Keith M. Booker, *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection and the Carnivalesque* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 3.

illustrate the inherent difficulty encountered when attempting to define the genre of magical realism. Like a mirage it disappears, resisting all attempts to fasten it.

Specifically, magical realism contains a spectrum of different types of events spanning the full range of possibilities from the explicitly preternatural to the mundane and ordinary. There are occasions when there is a suggestion of the preternatural, or when a character believes the supernatural is at work, but the narrator or reader is not convinced, as well as reported supernatural events which are not actually depicted. Interlaced amongst these is an impressive array of devices from other genres, such as the grotesque, fairy stories, myths and legends. Also adding to the rich ambiguous texture of the novels are freak events, altered psychological states, sensory confusion, coincidences and intense metaphors which evoke the supernatural. Any given magical realist text does not necessarily incorporate all of these features, but many of them are commonly found.

At one end of the spectrum the designations 'preternatural' and 'supernatural' compete for attention. Enrique Anderson Imbert rejects the supernatural in magical realism, arguing that the preternatural is a more appropriate concept.[56] Although 'preter' and 'super' have similar definitions, and both signify notions of 'beyond', 'above', 'in addition to' and 'besides', 'preter also signifies 'past', 'by' and 'more than', so preternatural would appear to be a more flexible term. Magical realism in some way exceeds what is 'normal', ordinary or explicable. Whilst it can be considered to be broadly synonymous with 'supernatural', the term 'preternatural' carries different connotations, partly owing to the over-utilisation of the former term and the concomitant neglect of the latter. The word 'supernatural' tends, through the way it has been employed, to be associated with certain types of phenomena, such as ghosts, vampires, werewolves and witches. Magical realist

[56] Enrique Anderson Imbert, 'El "realismo mágico" en la ficción hispanoamericana', in *El realismo mágico y otros ensayos*, pp. 9-10.

novels do not necessarily exclude any of these, but they do generally have a far wider range of 'unnatural' incidents, many of which cannot be slotted into neat categories. Furthermore, two other connotational factors add to the inappropriateness of the term supernatural: firstly, concepts such as werewolves and vampires tend to be culture-specific to Europe, and secondly, they are almost always allied to diabolical forces. For these reasons, 'preternatural' will be used more frequently, but there are occasions when 'supernatural' may be more appropriate. There are events in magical realist novels about which the narrator, characters and readers all concur, namely that within the world of the work the preternatural is present.

Further along on the continuum are highly improbable, almost incredible events, freak incidents and strange coincidences which, however unlikely, could still be explained without recourse to any supernatural agency. Some incidents and events are extremely difficult to place on this continuum owing to the conflicting cultural codes evident in the text and in its interpretation; there are grey areas between the categories all along the continuum.

Frequently, characters experiencing altered psychological states, such as nightmares, madness, guilt or delusions, believe in the preternatural. Consequently, at times the reader is not sure whether an event is happening within the mind of a deluded character or in world of the text, never mind whether it could happen in the real world. Related to this phenomenon is the subjectivity of the realm of the senses. In some novels, particularly those of Allende, certain characters have a hypersensitivity which at times borders on the preternatural. There are also episodes in which characters have bizarre experiences, although most of them are not preternatural, but result from drunkenness, delirium, terror, nightmares and guilty consciences. Altered states of mind, madness, hallucinations or strange dreams do play a part in magical realist narratives, but these psychological factors *alone* are

not strictly sufficient for magical realism; other genres such as the uncanny also incorporate these features.

Highly poetic language, especially the frequent use of metaphor, can have the effect of evoking the preternatural. The reader is presented with difficulties when there is some ambiguity as to whether an event is literally happening or whether the figures of speech are becoming rather intensely poetic. Although in a sense all language is figurative because every utterance is constituted by signs, it is the case that figures of speech, in the traditional sense, are used extensively and this highly metaphorical language blurs the lines of demarcation between the natural and the preternatural.

It is not always possible to reduce, categorise and compartmentalise events in these texts. Faris observes this, noting the capacity of magical realism to obfuscate the boundaries between literal and metaphorical language:

> The reader may experience a particular kind of verbal magic — a closing of the gap between words and the world, or a demonstration of what we might call the linguistic nature of experience. This happens when a metaphor is made real... [57]

This phenomenon, which is sometimes called 'literalization', but might better be called phanopoeia (Gk. meaning 'making visible'), will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five in the discussion of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*

These categories have in common only their frequent occurrence in magical realism and their obscured boundaries. Ambiguity, or obfuscation, plays an important part in many magical realist fictions. As the narrator does not always delineate and neatly categorise events, it is frequently impossible for the reader to decide into which of the categories any given event should fall. This indeterminacy serves a purpose: ambiguities are not weaknesses, but rather strengths of the text, as they serve to

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[57] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 176.

underline, at a very fundamental level, the epistemological difficulties that exist in determining what reality is. 'Plurisignation', rather than ambiguity, may be preferable as it is more strongly suggestive of abundance and richness, rather than vagueness or weakness. As a consequence of this blurring, epistemological problems relating to how present reality can ever be known, and how past reality, or history, can ever be constructed, are present implicitly and explicitly in the text. It is the way in which magical realism tends to transgress previously discrete genre boundaries, as well as boundaries between different understandings of the world, that makes Bakhtin's work on transgression so appropriate.

Transgression, used in many different ways, is a key trope in magical realism. The genre transgresses any definition which is placed upon it; the events depicted constantly stray from one categorisation to another; boundaries are in flux. Transgression is used on a formal level, and it is also used in terms of content: for example, people transgress the bounds of their lives, by appearing to be alive in the afterlife. The carnivalesque, which has a key role in promoting transgression, is used for a number of reasons: firstly, it depicts celebration and the subversive side of life which is normally held in check; secondly, it allows for the depiction of extravagant behaviour, hyperbole, and all kinds of transgressions; thirdly, it allows people to think the unthinkable.

c. Magical Realism as Postmodernism

The structure of feeling found in magical realism is postmodern on account of the way it promotes indeterminacy, blurring and destabilising boundaries, but there are additional factors which help to situate magical realism within postmodernism although, unlike the structure of feeling, they are not unique to magical realism and are found commonly in late twentieth century works. Postmodernism exists, at least to some degree, in an attitude of mind of the reader: some events may be considered

preternatural, but other readers would consider them natural. A reader's perspective may depend on his/her geographical location, cultural capital and belief system. Some readers are prepared to believe in the supernatural for the purposes of reading only, and so suspend their disbelief; indeed if a reader were incapable of doing so, the novels would prove unpalatable.

Faris locates magical realism specifically within postmodernism, as many other critics have done, describing it as 'a strong current in the stream of postmodernism'.[58] In the first part of her essay, discussed above in Chapter One, Faris considers magical realism in its widest sense and at its most geographically diverse and goes on more tentatively to outline nine 'accessory specifications' which are 'helpful in building magical realist rooms in the postmodern house of fiction'.[59] She enumerates several points already dealt with elsewhere in this thesis, and which will not, therefore, be revisited in this chapter. Three aspects of magical realist writing will be examined here: metafiction, repetition and decentring, the first two suggested by Faris, and the last by Theo L. D'haen.

First, it is essential to clarify the terms of the argument by looking at the specific interpretation placed upon postmodernism in this study. Since postmodernism is a huge and complex area, and there is no consensus on its definition and significance any more than there is on magical realism, I propose to take, broadly, as my parameters, the analysis of Linda Hutcheon in which she describes politics and postmodernism as 'curious, if inevitable, bedfellows'.[60] Hutcheon differs from a variety of other writers on the subject of postmodernism in her enthusiasm for, and willingness to see, its political and subversive dimension. Postmodernism is often thought to be politically quietist as it tends to thrive on parody and self-

[58] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 165.
[59] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 175.
[60] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

reflexiveness. Certainly, it is often *not* overtly political, but politics can easily go undercover in literature. Hutcheon considers postmodernism is irreducibly political:

> I realise that I am going against a dominant trend in contemporary criticism that asserts that the postmodern is disqualified from political involvement because of its narcissistic and ironic appropriation of existing images and stories and its seemingly limited accessibility - to those who recognize the sources of parodic appropriation and understand the theory that motivates it.[61]

Magical realism fits very neatly into Hutcheon's delineation of postmodernism, a fact that can be confirmed by her assertion:

> This is the confrontation that I shall be calling postmodernist: where documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody. At this conjuncture, a study of representation becomes, not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past.[62]

Returning to Faris's point on the subject of metafiction, she says:

> Metafictional dimensions are common in contemporary magical realism: the texts provide commentaries on themselves, often complete with occasional mises-en-abyme — those miniature emblematic textual self-portraits.[63]

Postmodern fiction frequently deals with its own fictionality and in doing so problematises the conventions of writing. Patricia Waugh's definition is particularly pertinent to magical realism. She describes metafiction as:

> ...a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.[64]

Most magical realist narratives contain some metafictional devices, signifying self-refentiality, self-consciousness or self-reflexivity, and therein lies an acknowledgement that writing is to some degree about writing; fiction is about fiction. Realism, the literature of illusion, tells us, for the most part implicitly, that

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[61] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 3.
[62] Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 7.
[63] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 175.
[64] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 1984), p. 2.

the world is knowable; magical realism, the literature of dis-illusion, using its metafictive lens, tells us the world is not knowable as it was once thought to be.

On the surface a contradiction arises, then, as metafiction contains within its own definition a presupposition of, or at least the conscious neglect of, and in most cases the deliberate rejection of, any reflectionist or correspondence notion of the real world. However, it has already been established that straightforward classic realism does not have a real correspondence with the world either, only an *illusion* of correspondence. As Wenche Ommundsen argues, the problem of metafiction's apparent divorce from the real world is the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of fiction.[65] There is no real opposition between realism and metafiction, merely a semblance of a substantive difference. The incorrectly perceived opposition stems from the view that realism is somehow normative and correspondential in a way that other writing is not. As we have already seen, one is no more correspondential than the other; one is no more divorced from the real world than the other. One of Ommundsen's stated aims is to 'challenge the perceived incompatibility between reflexivity and involvement with reality'. In order to do this it is necessary to look at some of the ways in which 'factual and fictional discourses construct the world'.[66]

Following the metafictional rubric, the toolbox of the writer is foregrounded in magical realist texts to reveal the nuts and bolts, metaphors, signs and symbols used by writers. Faris remarks on this:

> ...the magical power of fiction itself, the capacities of mind that make it possible, and the elements out of which it is made — signs, images, metaphors, narrators, narratees — may be foregrounded.[67]

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[65] Wenche Ommundsen, *Metafictions? Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1993).
[66] Ommundsen, *Metafictions?*, p. 4.
[67] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 175.

Metafictional devices may appear to be superfluous, whimsical, experimentational witticisms which flatter the initiated reader, but they do, sometimes blatantly and sometimes tangentially, indicate the sheer weight and significance of writing. Carlos Fuentes's discussion of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* addresses the historical importance of writing:

> The saga of Macondo and the Buendías thus includes the totality of the oral, legendary past, and with it we are told that we cannot feel satisfied with the official, documented history of the times: that history is also all the things that men and women have dreamed, imagined, desired, and named.
>
> That it understands this is one of the great strengths of Latin American literature, because it reveals a profound perception of Latin American reality: a culture where the mythical constantly speaks through voices of dream and dance, of toy and song, but where nothing is real unless it is set down in writing — in the diaries of Columbus, in the letters of Cortés, in the memoirs of Bernal, in the laws of the Indies, in the constitutions of the independent republics. The struggle between the legal literature and the unwritten myths of Latin America is the struggle of our Roman tradition of statutory law, and of the Hapsburg and French traditions of centralism, with our intellectual response to them and ultimately with our perennially undiscovered, inexhaustible, and, we hope, redeemable possibilities as free, unfinished human beings. Legitimacy in Latin America has always depended on who owns the written papers...[68]

Adding a humorous, yet at the same time, serious touch, Fuentes ends his paper with a pastiche of the scene in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in which the inhabitants of Macondo experience loss of memory and have to label *everything*, even down to the cow, showing the key significance of writing:

> This is a novel. A novel is something that is written. A novel is something that is read. A novel is something that is heard. We must do this so that reality can be remembered. The names in a novel are times and places in the present. There is no other way of truly knowing the relationship between things. The alternative is silence. The alternative is death.[69]

Nothing could illustrate more clearly or passionately the vital role of the writer in society, something which metafiction underlines, while at the same time implicitly providing a critique of the weaknesses of the naïveté of realist expressionism.

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[68] Fuentes, 'Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America', pp. 11-12.
[69] Fuentes, 'Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America', p. 13.

Faris observes that repetition operates 'as a narrative principle, in conjunction with mirrors or their analogues used symbolically or structurally',[70] and writes:

> A variation on this mirror phenomenon is the occurrence of reversals of various kinds — plot-mirroring, so to speak. This is a common feature in all literature, of course, but in these texts it occurs with particular frequency and highlights the metaphysically revisionist agenda of magical realism.[71]

Repetition can reveal itself in many ways, for example, as motifs, repeated actions or events affecting the plot construction, so giving the impression of cycles of history. Following Williams, the cyclical structures of certain magical realist narratives can be cited as 'evidence of the deadlocks and unresolved problems of the society'.[72] All the narratives studied here have some degree of circularity in their structures with the possible exception of 'Innocent Eréndira'.

In Theo D'haen's discussion of the specific role magical realism plays within postmodernism, he acknowledges Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, arguing that it is the 'notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place "other" than "the" or "a" center', which is a crucial characteristic of magical realism.[73] He argues ex-centric writing has the effect of 'dis-placing' the discourse of 'privileged centres', and comes to the conclusion that magical realism is 'a *ruse* to invade and take over dominant discourse(s)'.[74] Some of the texts often use, as their central characters, subaltern figures such as slaves; others use characters who are middle class, but who are oppressed by the imperialism of the gringos, their history of strife, and economic and political corruption.

Postmodernist fictions raise epistemological questions about the nature of historical knowledge. They ask whose knowledge is relevant, and question the memories,

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[70] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 177.
[71] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 178.
[72] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 86.
[73] Theo D'haen, 'Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentring Privileged Centres', in *Magical Realism*, eds. Zamora and Faris, p. 194.
[74] D'haen, 'Magic Realism and Postmodernism', p. 195.

archives, or documentation that are to be taken into account. They ask which elisions are permitted and on what grounds. Hutcheon repeatedly reminds the reader that all representation has its politics. Similarly, Fredric Jameson, amongst others, argues for the politicisation of interpretation. So, history is no longer the ingenuous, disinterested discipline it was once thought to be. It is to this that we next turn our attention.

d. The Politics of Postcolonial Identity

This section deals briefly with several issues which are tied up with postcolonial identity. They are: the politics of historicity, the politics of religion and magic, and the politics of language. In many ways, of course, it is absurd to speak of 'postcolonial identity' as if every person and place which had experienced colonialism in the past (or their ancestors' pasts) is defined by that experience alone, as if people and places are the same at heart because of their colonisation, whether they are in India, Australia or Peru; at the very least we should speak of 'postcolonial identities'. Broadly, there are three types of postcolonial situation: the predominantly black and Asian countries (the Indian subcontinent and Africa), the predominantly white Anglophone, 'settler' colonies (North America and Australia), and those colonised by Iberian settlers in the early period of colonisation (Central and South America). It is this last type of colonisation that concerns us here. As magical realism has a direct connection with postcolonialism, or more specifically, with the clashing or interweaving of cultures occurring at the multi-cultural, postcolonial interface, it is necessary to try to establish the reasons for magical realism originating in South and Central America. I will contrast these colonial experiences with those of the other most heavily colonised continent, Africa, where

magical realism only developed later as a result of the 'cross-pollination' which Salman Rushdie recognises in world literature today.[75]

For centuries South America was a very heavily colonised continent and, in many respects, colonisation was further reaching and more effective, within its own terms, in imposing a culture and high a degree of uniformity. After Columbus's invasion or 'conquest' vast areas were taken by various Spanish *conquistadores*, and a large white population from the Iberian peninsula established itself. Colonisation was effected early on throughout the sixteenth century. Many of the indigenous civilisations, principally the Mayan in Guatemala, the Aztecs in Mexico, and the Incas in Peru, were completely overthrown and some were utterly destroyed. Over the centuries, the various racial groups integrated and miscegenation produced the large *Mestizo*[76] population that exists today.

After the conquest, Spain had a monopoly on all external trade with its colonies, leading to the belief among colonisers that they were being exploited by the mother country. Other European countries also opposed this monopoly as they lost valuable markets. South America gained its independence from Spain and Portugal, on the whole, in the early nineteenth century. Argentina, for example, became independent between 1812-16; Peru, the centre of Spanish authority, was the last to be liberated and, after years of disputes and strife, was recognised as independent in 1879. Trade exploitation was just one of the colonists' grievances. More importantly, American-born descendants, or *españoles americanos,* were excluded from government posts that were only for home-born Spaniards or *peninsulares.* The enforced separation of Spain from its colonies during the Napoleonic Wars meant the colonists had to act for themselves and became aware of their power. In

[75] Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', p. 20.
[76] *Mestizo*: descending from different races, usually Caucasian and Amerindian.

this lay the fundamental cause of the nineteenth-century revolts that brought independence.

This brief outline allows us to see some of the important differences from Africa in terms of colonial experience. The so-called 'scramble for Africa', 1880-1912, marks the partitioning of the continent into European possessions. Colonialism in Africa was not fully put into effect until well into the nineteenth century, despite the fact it had been started early by Portugal. Early colonisation took the form of the setting up of trading posts for slavery. Later on, colonial rule and policing was established, but generally speaking, large numbers of Europeans did not migrate permanently to Africa in the way that Spaniards had gone to South America to seek their fortunes, as it was romantically termed, and to make new lives for themselves, largely severing connections with Spain. The people who were exploiting Africa were wealthy Europeans wanting to be wealthier. The 'partition' of Africa was complete by 1914. In that year only two countries, Liberia and Ethiopia, were independent. This was post-Industrial Revolution colonisation, as opposed to the Iberian, feudal colonisation of South America in which, in the early period, Spanish and Portuguese men went with a view to getting a plot of land, known as an *encomienda*, or searching for gold.

South America has been independent for longer and has more ethnically mixed populations than Africa, and although there are distinct Amerindian populations, such as the Quecha and Aymara in Peru, who have their own languages and cultural identities, there is generally a more integrated population. In Africa, by comparison, there are few whites and they have not integrated. Obviously, memories of colonialism are not so fresh in South America as they are in Africa. Historical documentation of the colonisation is more limited than it is on Africa, and the stretch of time, and the colonial discourses within which it is written, render it more difficult to assess. Postmodernism has problematised history and has created the

recognition that concepts that were once taken as universal facts are actually the hegemonic inventions of European imperialism. One of the facets of life which intrigues those who are interested in issues of national or cultural or racial identity is history and the ways in which history is made. It is to this issue that I turn next.

Writers, Mario Vargas Llosa has said, have to be politicians, agitators, reformers, social commentators and moralists, and their texts consequently have a blend of social and political themes which are combined with magical and poetic elements. Certainly, the three authors under consideration here are or were politically *engagé*. The political and historical backdrop is very powerfully represented in the novels. Readers are informed about the socio-political systems of parts of South America, even though they are well aware they are reading a fiction, not a historical text. There is a concern not just with history, but with historicity itself and the ways knowledge and memory function, as all this has powerful implications for the cultural identities of certain peoples. History provides the backbone of magical realism. Indeed, Seymour Menton views Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* as 'first real New Historical Novel'.[77] It is no coincidence that this novel is also designated by some critics as the first novel of magical realism, since the historical material provides the substance of magical realism just as it does for the New Historical Novel. So the relationship of contiguity between these two modes of writing is evident, but of course, the New Historical Novel does not have the magical dimension. Menton lists the six characteristics he believes the New Historical Novel tends to possess, emphasising that not all six are found in each novel. What is remarkable about this list is the huge overlap with magical realism. Briefly, the first three points are:

> 1. The subordination, in varying degrees, of the mimetic recreation of a given historical period to the illustration of three philosophical ideas, popularized by

[77] Seymour Menton, *Latin America's New Historical Novel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 20.

> Borges and applicable to all periods of the past, present, and future [...] (a) the impossibility of ascertaining the true nature of reality or history; (b) the cyclical nature of history; and (c) the unpredictability of history—that although history tends to repeat itself, occasionally the most unexpected and amazing events may and do occur.
> 2. The conscious distortion of history through omissions, exaggerations, and anachronisms.
> 3. The utilization of famous historical characters as protagonists...[78]

The third trait does not quite ring true for the magical realist texts analysed here because, although historical figures do appear as characters in the novels under scrutiny, they are not *protagonists* as such. For example, in *The House of the Spirits,* the character known simply as 'The President' is obviously a representation of President Salvador Allende, and the speech he makes at the end, just before his death, bears a strong relationship to that Allende made in 1973 which is recorded in historical sources. The central characters tend to be ordinary people, since the foregrounding of formerly marginalised groups, such as slaves or women, is part of the rehabilitative project of postcolonial writing.

The first and second points of Menton's analysis are of greatest interest to us in considering the historical dimension of magical realism. When claiming that history is problematised, we are drawing attention to the fact that history has for many centuries been viewed as self-evident and transparent; as Ana Maria Alonso writes, we view the past from the vantage point of the present, which means there is a gap between past and present which historiography has traditionally ignored:

> ...historiographies tend to conceal the effects of this gap between past and present, between contingency and necessity, occluding the process of interpretation and the conditions of its production, and re-presenting historical action as an objective and transparent 'given', as 'what really happened'. Historiographies hide their hermeneutics and create an illusion of unmediated reality through several strategies which, though unconsciously deployed, are nonetheless effective. In this project, language, whether spoken or written, conspires with history-making. Not only does the fixity of the printed word or the freezing by repetition of the spoken word aid the work of simplification and

[78] Menton, *Latin America's New Historical Novel*, pp. 22-3.

> reification, but also, it helps to establish the authority which re-presentations require if they are to be seen as representative.[79]

Magical realist novels draw our attention to the construction of history by showing how it can be intentionally manipulated to produce deceptions. A more insidious form of manipulation operates through the notion of truth and its connection with power, exercised through what Elleke Boehmer terms 'imaginative command'.[80] Magical realist novels actively engage with history and recognise the precarious nature of historical knowledge. History is constantly re-actualised and can be manipulated for political reasons. The nature of a society and its idea of itself depend partly on its own conception of its history. History plays a major role in forming the identity of a culture, its sense of itself. A culture that does not know its history is, in some respects, a culture without an identity. As Stephen Minta says:

> ...once you fail to admit the existence of something important in your past, you are close to denying the past any significance at all; and, from then on, it is easy to deprive the present and the future of all significance too.[81]

Moving on the politics of religion and magic, then, it is erroneously assumed the emphasis of magical realist texts is on magic, whereas this is rarely the case, and it is more interesting to look at the deeper significance of the role of magic although, of course, it can be read on a literal level too. The magic does not serve an identical purpose in all cases, but effectively serves a more or less political function. Barthes claimed it is impossible to represent the political in a mimetic way, saying 'where politics begins is where imitation ceases'.[82] As we will see, politics can be located both in the content and structures of these complex narratives.

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[79] Ana Maria Alonso, 'The Effects of Truth: Re-Presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 1, no. 1, Mar. 1988 (pp. 33-58), p. 35.
[80] Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 5.
[81] Stephen Minta, *Gabriel Garcia Márquez: Writer of Colombia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), p. 170.
[82] Quoted in Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 3.

Aspects of Christianity appear in magical realism, frequently welded onto Amerindian religions and mythologies extending back beyond the Aztecs and Incas. Spain and Portugal, since they were both strongly Catholic countries, zealously spread their faith to South America. Catholicism has a stronger concern with icons, ritual, miracles and symbolism than other, later developing, branches of Christianity, as well as beliefs in the powers of people and the saints to intercede for the living and the dead. Some of these aspects of the faith, especially its iconography, were appropriated by the Amerindian people and over the centuries hybrid faiths developed. Carlos Fuentes discusses this syncretism as 'the blending of Christian and aboriginal faiths, one of the cultural foundations of the Spanish American world', and gives illustrations of syncretism in action: in Mexico, Cortes had the mask of the Nahuatal god, Quetzalcoatl, the winged serpent, imposed upon him, but he refused it and instead 'imposed on Mexico the mask of Christ. Ever since, it has been impossible to know who is worshipped at the baroque altars of Puebla, Oaxaca and Tlaxcala: Christ or Quetzalcoatl?'.[83] Edwin Williamson notes the attempts of the Mexican clergy in the eighteenth century to claim Quetzalcoatl was in fact the apostle, St. Thomas, who had arrived before the conquistadores. Also in Mexico, is the cult of the Virgin of Guadelupe, the Aztec shrine to the goddess Tonantzin, Mother of the Earth at the site of the church commemorating the appearance of the Virgin in 1531.[84] The indigenous artisans and masons, in constructing new places of worship, incorporated their own religious and cultural capital into the altars and statues of the saints. Fuentes says: '[r]eligious syncretism triumphed as, somehow, the conquerors were conquered'.[85] Just as faiths became syncretistic, so did the arts associated with those faiths. Of course, literature uses language rather than iconography, so it is to this we must next turn our attention.

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[83] Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, p. 146.
[84] See Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 102.
[85] Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, p. 147.

European culture has contributed to the literature now described as magical realist, in the sense that the Iberian Peninsula imposed upon the South American continent the two languages the vast majority of its population now speak: Spanish and Portuguese.[86] As a result, magical realism is a type of discourse which is both antipathetic and sympathetic to the formerly dominant European culture. Writers are obliged to engage with colonial languages because they have been so effective they have eclipsed others. The Cuban, Roberto Fernández Retamar, makes the following observations on the use of colonial language:

> While other colonials or ex-colonials in metropolitan centers speak among themselves in their own language, we Latin Americans continue to use the language of our colonizers. These are the linguas francas capable of going beyond the frontiers that neither the aboriginal nor Creole languages succeed in crossing. Right now as we are discussing, as I am discussing with those colonizers, how else can I do it except in one of their languages, which is now also *our* language, and with so many of their conceptual tools, which are now also *our* conceptual tools?[87]

Similarly, González Echevarría refers to what he calls a 'double sense of otherness', quoting Juan Marinello's essay, written in 1932:

> Since we are born to language as to life, without the opportunity to choose, when we think, when we exist, the language of Castille is already our only language. We *are* through a language that is our own while being foreign.[88]

Like Caliban, like the negritudist, the magical realist writers recognise the Other within themselves and their culture. Colonialism has ensured that the Other is already there in the form of all-embracing, inscribing language. So, the ideals of critics and writers like Ngugi, who oppose the use of the coloniser's language, arguing it holds the 'soul prisoner' and that it is a means of 'spiritual subjugation',[89] on the grounds that it will perpetually contain embedded colonial values, are

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[86] However, many languages do exist in Latin America. Colombia, for example, has forty-one, but the principal one is Spanish, which is spoken by 26,000,000 inhabitants; the next, Quechua, is spoken by 100,000. See *Statistical Abstract of Latin America (SALA)*, vol. 32, ed. James W. Wilkie (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1997), table 649.

[87] Fernández Retamar, 'Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in America', p. 5.

[88] Quoted in González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 51.

[89] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft *et al*, p. 287.

impossible to realise in much of South and Central America. The imposed, hegemonic language constitutes the longest shadow cast over the continent by colonialism. However, as a result, magical realism implicitly shows a sensitivity to a variety of cultures, and because of its authorial reticence, no single world view dominates. The mode is an interrogative one, posing ontological and epistemological questions, resisting simple, reductionistic views of the world, resisting absolutism and closure.

In conclusion, then, I have suggested in this chapter on the politics and postmodern poetics, that on the level of narrative form, magical realism is akin to realism, using as it does, the detailed common-or-garden methodology of classic realism. Where it breaks away is in its depiction of marvellous, improbable and possibly unreal or supernatural/preternatural events; the status of these events may depend on the reader's perspective. The destabilization of both of the reader and of boundaries within the work are integral elements of magical realism and place it firmly within postmodernism. The metafictive element is commonly found in recent fiction, but in magical realism it emphasises the preoccupation which previously colonised peoples have with maintaining their histories intact or recreating them. The structure of feeling magical realism locates appears to be sharply oppositional, but it actively undercuts these oppositions repeatedly. Cycles of behaviour, and the repetition of certain motifs suggest a fairly pessimistic view of world history. The awareness the writers have that they write opposing colonialism but within the language of the former aggressor, provides a sense of a double-voiced discourse which implicitly shows sensitivity to the 'Other'. As García Márquez has said: 'the quest for our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them'.[90]

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[90] García Márquez, 'The Solitude of Latin America', p. 89.

PART II

4

Alejo Carpentier's

The Kingdom of This World

Alejo Carpentier (1904-80) was born in Havana of white immigrant parents. His mother was a Russian language teacher; his father was an architect. After briefly studying architecture, he went into journalism at the age of eighteen. He was a founder member of the avant-garde and nationalist Cuban Minority Group (*Grupo Minorista*), which deliberated political, artistic and ideological issues. Imprisoned for forty days for his political beliefs in 1927 after signing the group's manifesto, Carpentier became a committed Marxist revolutionary opposed to Gerado Machado's dictatorship which lasted from 1925 to 1933. Following his period of imprisonment, Carpentier became an exile, leaving the country for France using a friend's identification papers. Between the years 1928 and 1939, he lived in Paris where he moved in the artistic and literary circles of the day, mixing with Breton, Aragon, Picasso, de Chirico, Villa-Lobos and others, and worked in various

publishing ventures as well as in French radio, where he had a role producing and directing arts programmes. In 1939 he returned to Cuba where he married Lilia Esteban. He then spent some time living in Venezuela, returning to post-revolutionary Cuba in 1959 to take up a series of government jobs in which he undertook various diplomatic missions and became the Cuban Cultural Attaché in Paris. In the last five years of his life, Carpentier was awarded a number of prestigious literary prizes, including the Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 1978. He died in 1980 leaving unfinished his memoirs and a novel.

Artistically, Carpentier was actively interested in developing a novel form that articulated a specifically American identity. Anxious not to become what he described as 'one of those hybrid products', he returned to Cuba from Europe, afraid he would become exiled from America without ever becoming European.[1] From his experience of living in Paris and his proximity to the surrealists, he was obviously attracted to many aspects of modernism, and although he criticised surrealism heavily in his prologue to *The Kingdom of This World,* he was at one time greatly under its influence.[2] Edwin Williamson observes this curious mixture:

> The new nationalism [...] combined with modernist experimentalism to produce a current of nativist or *indigenista* writing whose aim was to eschew foreign-derived models and create an autocthonous culture in which tradition could be reconciled with modernity.[3]

Carpentier himself acknowledged that this project of combining the *avant-garde* and the nationalistic was a forbidding one, because nationalism suggests reverence for the traditional, and *avant-garde* conversely conveys a desire to sweep tradition away.[4] His fiction, like that of his contemporary, the Guatemalan, Asturias, was

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[1] Quoted in González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home,* p. 38.
[2] See Donald L. Shaw, *Alejo Carpentier* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), who quotes Carpentier saying: 'Surrealism meant a great deal to me. It taught me to see 'textures', aspects of [Latin] American life I had not noticed', p. 17.
[3] Edwin Williamson, 'Coming to terms with Modernity: Magical Realism and the Historical Process in the Novels of Alejo Carpentier', in *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey,* ed. King, pp. 81-2.
[4] See Martin, *Journeys Through the Labyrinth,* p. 146.

innovative, especially in its treatment of time and space, and was part of what was known as the 'New Narrative' in Spanish American literature which began in the 1940s. Some credit Asturias and Carpentier with the first magical realist writing.[5]

Carpentier frequently engages with history in his novels. In his first, *¡Ecué-Yamba-Ó!* (1933), he deals with politics, Afro-Cuban religious and magical rites, and the struggle of the black people against their exploitation.[6] It was written whilst Carpentier was in prison. Martin suggests this was 'one of the first attempts to characterize the Black presence in narrative', but also says it was 'more interesting for what it promised than what it achieved', a view which is fairly widely accepted. Carpentier was, as Naomi Lindstrom observes, very knowledgeable on Caribbean history, and was 'part of a widespread intellectual movement toward a greater appreciation of the African element in Cuban culture'.[7] Martin suggests the 'guiding thread of their quest for identity was Afro-Cubanism, the effort to integrate the Black experience into Cuba's national self expression'.[8] However, Edwin Williamson considers this novel betrays ambivalence about African-derived beliefs such as shamanism, arguing Carpentier wrote:

> ...as if he could not quite shake off the idea that it was barbarous and retrograde. Although he admired the vitality of the blacks, he was still too much under the influence of European culture himself to accept voodoo and shamanism without reservation.[9]

Later, in the 1950s, Carpentier departed from the style he named *lo real maravilloso* established in *The Kingdom of This World,* his second novel, although he retained many of the themes of Latin American identity, especially its history and politics, and its complex relationship with Europe. *Los pasos perdidos* (1953; *The Lost Steps,* 1956) drew on his extensive knowledge of ethnomusicology. An

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[5] See, for example, Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction,* p. 11.
[6] The title is taken from a Ñáñigo phrase meaning 'god be praised'.
[7] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction,* p. 104.
[8] Martin, *Journeys Through the Labyrinth,* pp. 144-6.
[9] Williamson, 'Coming to terms with Modernity', p. 82.

extraordinary man, with 'encyclopedic erudition',[10] he had, Lindstrom notes, rather odd passions which found their way into his writing. For example, he:

> ...gathered a miscellany of expertise in such diverse areas as manufacturing processes and botany, favouring information with a specifically New World reference. Highly ornamental architecture, with its intricate vocabulary of mouldings, cornices, turrets, and various other outcroppings and adornments, particularly fascinated Carpentier; he read in the often lavish decoration of Latin American architecture the signs of the baroque vision he attributed to the region. Carpentier turned his reservoirs of specialized knowledge into a novelistic resource. One of the hallmarks of his narrative is the appearance of unusually technical, erudite terms for both cultural artifacts and natural phenomena found in the Americas.[11]

El acoso (1956; *The Chase*, 1989), a short novel, and *El siglo de las luces* (1962; *Explosion in a Cathedral*, 1963) followed. He also published a collection of stories, *Guerra del tiempo* (1956; *War of Time*, 1970), and other lesser-known novels including *El recurso del método* (1974; *Reasons of State*, 1976), *Concierto barroco* (1974; *Baroque Concerto*, 1991), and *El arpa y la sombra* (1979; *The Harp and the Shadow*, 1990). During his lifetime, Carpentier published essays and thousands of articles in newspapers and magazines.

His most well-known novel, and the one of most interest in the study of magical realism is *The Kingdom of This World*. Unlike the works by Allende and García Márquez analysed here, it does not deal with an historical period in living memory. It is generally thought the ideas were inspired by a visit to Haiti which he undertook in 1943. According to Williamson, it was during this visit that Carpentier,

> ...realized that the motive force behind the first successful movement for independence in Latin America had been the voodoo of the black slaves, not the ideas of the enlightenment. Magic and religion — the repositories of authenticity and wholeness — were capable also of intervening positively in history as vehicles of freedom.[12]

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[10] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 29.
[11] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, p. 147.
[12] Williamson, 'Coming to terms with Modernity', p. 83.

As his outlook on history shifted, he saw the promise and possibilities of replenishment in the diverse ethnic cultures of the Americas. Williamson also states that Carpentier's view of his role as a novelist changed so he felt,

> ...he must assume the functions of a mythologist like Mackandal, whose stories bonded his people into a community by sinking roots into the past, by creating a stock of images that served to spell out a collective identity.[13]

Textual Analysis

The novel examines the historical events surrounding the Haitian revolution, from the actions of the revolutionary independence movement (the first in Latin America), during the period of colonisation by the French, when the country was known as Saint Domingue, leading up to the revolution and subsequent period of independence and the postcolonial reign of Henri Christophe, the first black king of Haiti. The story follows a Negro slave, Ti Noël, through his adult life from the colonial years before the revolution to the period of independence following the death of King Henri Christophe. Most of the action takes place in Haiti, but there are interludes set in Santiago de Cuba and Rome. The novel is divided into four parts. Part I deals with the inhuman treatment of the slaves on the island during the period of French colonial reign, and builds up to the slave uprising inspired and led by the shaman, Macandal. Ti Noël works for M. Lenormand looking after the horses on his plantation, where Macandal also works until he has to have his arm amputated after it is caught in a mill wheel.[14] Thereafter, he disappears into the hills, becoming a maroon (fugitive slave), from where he instigates the rebellion. When

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[13] Williamson, 'Coming to terms with Modernity', p. 85.

[14] It was common for slaves to lose fingers, hands or whole arms when loading the mills for grinding. See Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), p. 29.

the sign is given, Ti Noël and the slaves, filled with ferocity and hatred of the white colonisers, go on an orgy of rape, pillage and murder, which because of its lack of direction, is doomed to failure. This section ends when the governor has Macandal burned at the stake as a warning to others. The slaves, believing in his theantropic powers, think he has metamorphosed and escaped. Part II also deals with rebellion, this time the successful insurrection lead by Bouckman, the Jamaican revolutionary. General Leclerc is sent from France, accompanied by his wife, Pauline Bonaparte, sister of Napoleon, to restore French rule. The attempt fails and Leclerc dies during an epidemic of yellow fever. Pauline turns to her servant, Soliman, for help and he uses Voodoo to protect her. Part III, having skipped over the initial period of independence with Dessalines in power, shows the rule of the black king, Henri Christophe, revealing his abuse of privilege; his despotic rule is as bad as that of any of the *ancien régime*. He enslaves thousands of blacks, including Ti Noël, to build his massive citadel at La Ferrière. His lifestyle duplicates that of the French aristocracy. Even the palace at Sans Souci is built in the Bourbon style. Henri Christophe silences all opposition, including that of his chaplain, Corneille Breille, who is walled up in the Archbishop's palace, and left to starve to death, but who appears as a ghost in a dramatic scene during mass in the cathedral. Following another rebellion Henri Christophe commits suicide by shooting himself, rather than face defeat. The final part reveals the establishing of a new mulatto-led republican government, yet uncertainties and problems still abound. Ti Noël, now elderly and alone, possibly suffering some delusions, returns to live in the ruins of the house at Lenormand's former plantation. He experiments with metamorphosis, as Macandal had done, and finds that the animal kingdom is no better than the human one. A mighty storm, with ambiguous consequences, produces the sense of an apocalyptic ending, and Ti Noël's death is one probable outcome.

The Kingdom of This World is described by some as a novella; Richard A. Young comments upon its 'narrative economy' and 'cohesion';[15] Donald L. Shaw notes its 'extreme compression', which he says is 'achieved by large-scale elimination both of physical description and psychological commentary'.[16] There is also very little dialogue, making this text the least realistic, in terms of its methodology, of the fictions under scrutiny. For this, and other reasons which will become clear, this is a nascent novel of magical realism, rather than a full-blown one.

The novel tells the story by focusing on one character, a participant who is swept along by events, rather than a major player, following him from young adulthood to old age, and to some extent, whilst remaining a third person narrative, many events are shown through the eyes of this protagonist, the slave of African descent, Ti Noël. It is this character who gives the story its unity. If the novel's plot is laid against the extra-textual version of events, it can be established that the duration of the narrative covers the period 1751 to approximately 1830, too long for one slave's life, especially at a time when the average life expectancy of a slave was thirty-five years.[17] Macandal's revolt took place in 1751; the first successful slave uprising, led by Toussaint Louverture was in 1791. General Leclerc, who landed on the island in 1802, lost approximately 25,000 out of the 35,000 of his men in a period of about nine months.[18] Haiti declared independence on 1 January 1804. However, no precise dates are mentioned in the novel.

Although Carpentier's interest in history has already been indicated, it is important to observe the closeness which this novel bears to historical documentation, especially to that of Moreau de Saint-Méry, who is mentioned by name in the novel

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[15] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 118.
[16] Shaw, *Alejo Carpentier*, p. 33.
[17] See Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 21.
[18] See David P. Geggus, *Slavery War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint-Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

(p. 58).[19] Carpentier had already spent a good deal of time researching historical matters for his study, *La música en Cuba*,[20] which he incorporated in his fiction writing. He used many details from historical sources. For example, there is in the records a plantation owner named Lenormand de Mézy on the island; the names and roles of historical figures are genuine: Mackandal, Bouckman, Rochambeau, General Leclerc and Henri Christophe; Ti Noël was a common slave name, but the character is likely to be based upon a composite of slaves, rather than an individual. Many quite minor details are historically accurate, even down to the names of the ships on which Pauline and Leclerc travel. Although the novel contains no complete dates, there is strong evidence to show that the *chronology* of events has not been manipulated greatly (there is one section which is told analeptically), although the *duration* of events has been skewed and foreshortened to provide a more condensed and narratively coherent plot. Young, who points out that Carpentier tried to 'limit any sense of demarcation' between history and fiction, has provided a systematic and comprehensive collation of the novel's events with extra-textual sources of information, some of which were used by Carpentier in the construction of the novel.[21] These include the writings of Moreau de Saint-Méry, the memoirs of Mme. Laura Junot, the Duchesse d'Abrantes (mentioned on p. 39), the published correspondence of Estanislao de Wimpffen, a regular visitor to Saint Domingue (p. 52), as well as legislation and a report to the French National Assembly of confessions taken from slaves published in 1792. The account of Bouckman's speech to the slaves in Part II (p. 48) can be shown to be an exact transcription from Creole, taken from historical sources.[22] In this way, Young is able to provide a picture of the novel's impressive level of historical accuracy. Yet, had Carpentier wanted to convey precise dates, he could have easily done so, as in themselves

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[19] Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry published his three volume *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle de Saint-Domingue* in 1797-8.
[20] (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946).
[21] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 33.
[22] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 24.

dates are not incompatible with fiction; instead he manipulates the events of the time, mainly so that certain periods are compressed to appear shorter, but this is done purely for the technical enhancement of the narrative, which is essential in a novel, since historical sources are not necessarily plot-shaped, but have to be made so. The lack of a time-span provided by Carpentier makes it impossible to reconstruct the history without reference to other sources. In a similar way, he has omitted some of the historically crucial interim periods, especially that covering the role of the black military hero, Toussaint Louverture, and the rule of the first republican leader, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, although he, and others such as Rochambeau and the monarchist Governor Blanchelande, are mentioned in passing. Effectively, Carpentier has produced a novel with a great many gaps, and despite his earnest and substantiated claims to historical veracity, he has been, as all novelists unequivocally are, highly selective in what he has chosen to include. There are several historical and biographical studies covering the important period surrounding the independence of Haiti.[23]

Clearly, an awareness of the fundamental opposition of colonisers and colonised is absolutely crucial to an understanding of the structure of feeling of this text. This opposition is found at every level in a variety of guises and configurations and will be seen firstly, as it manifests itself in the simple economic relationships of coloniser and colonised, or the powerful and powerless, and secondly, and more interestingly, as it manifests itself through culture, and thirdly, through religion and magic.

The division between the slaves and their masters is one of race, first and foremost. This is represented in a societal schism in which the economic and cultural relations are based on racial divisions. Dealing with economic relationships then, it is evident

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[23] See C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980) and Martin Ros, *Night of Fire: The Black Napoleon and the Battle for Haiti* (New York: Sarpedon, 1994).

in *The Kingdom of This World* that the colonial society of Haiti is highly divisive and repressive. The affluent, white French colonisers enjoy a life of easy, excessive luxury; the black African slaves, who work on the sugar plantations, endure a life of powerlessness, poverty, pain and deprivation. The unsurprising antagonism between colonisers and colonised is revealed clearly in the master-slave relationship of Monsieur Lenormand de Mézy and Ti Noël. The sharp contrast in the lives of the two groups of people is brought to the reader's attention at the beginning of the story in an episode in which the slave, Macandal, has his arm amputated after trapping it in a mill wheel. The master 'called for the whetstone to sharpen the machete to be used in the amputation' (p. 13), and this simple, unembellished sentence reveals the unfeeling, matter-of-fact way in which the serious injury of a slave is treated. Later, when Macandal disappears becoming one of the maroons, a half-hearted search is organised, but '[a] one-armed slave was a trifling thing' (p. 17). The slave owner rates his dogs more highly and does not want to risk sending a couple after him in case he manages to kill them. The casual cruelty inflicted on the slaves is observable at many points in the narrative, not least in the two slaves 'whose buttocks were zebra-striped with scars from the red-hot irons applied as punishment for stealing brandy' (p. 20).

Secondly, postcolonial structures of feeling are manifested through the mythologising (both in the form of romanticising and demonising) of the opposing cultures. Many effective illustrations of colonial antagonism are found throughout the text. One of the most significant cultural oppositions centres on substantiality and insubstantiality. The artificiality and hollowness of the French colonisers are repeatedly emphasised, for example, when 'the house servants, directed by the new mistress's cane, began to arrange Provençal saints around a papier-mâché grotto' (p. 30), the papier-mâché signifying the insubstantiality of the French colonial culture. Another illustration is the description of Pauline Bonaparte's vanity on the ship carrying her to Haiti. She,

> ...now had to put her mind to more important things. Sealed hampers carried kerchiefs brought from the island of Mauritius, shepherdesses' basques, skirts of striped muslin [...] having been briefed in all such matters by the Duchess of Abrantès. [p. 68]

Overly concerned with frippery, and thoughtful only about her inappropriate and anachronistic finery, her shallowness is exposed. Pauline behaves like an actor, in a variety of 'queenly roles' (p. 68), wallowing in mawkish books, imagining herself in romantic roles, having read Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's sentimental novel, *Paul and Virginia*, which gives an impression of the colonies as a 'leafy paradise' (p. 51). She has verses of Racine's *Bajazet* and *Mithridate* recited by her lover; she feels 'part Virginia, part Atala' (p. 73), a reference to Chateaubriand's *Atala.* Her flighty nature is emphasised as she feels 'part bird of paradise, part lyrebird' (p. 71). There is a suggestion her daughters resemble her; they are pictured spending their days reading gothic novels which have covers 'adorned with woodcuts of cemeteries at midnight, Scottish lakes, sylphs encircling a young huntsman, maidens hiding a love letter in the hollow of an old oak' (p. 128).

In a number of instances the complete and utter lack of mutual cultural understanding is made farcically obvious. In this extract Ti Noël, attending a service in the cathedral with Lenormand, is unimpressed with the sounds of the choir:

> It was really impossible to understand why this choir-master, whom everyone seemed to respect notwithstanding, was determined that the singers should enter the chorus one after the other, part of them singing what the others had sung before, and setting up a confusion of voices fit to exasperate anyone. But this was undoubtedly pleasing to the verger, a personage to whom Ti Noël attributed great ecclesiastical authority because he went armed and wore pants like other men. [pp. 64-5]

Not only has Ti Noël no comprehension of the conventions of European sacred music, but he also misinterprets Roman Catholic ecclesiastical vestments, wrongly assuming the humble verger is of high standing, and clearly showing the laughable chasm of understanding between the two cultures. Although Ti Noël's ignorance is highlighted, we do not laugh at ***him***, but rather at the pomp and self-importance of

the clergy which is brought to our attention through the unconscious defamiliarisation of the slave's focalisation. A similar situation arises with Mlle. Floridor, a failed actress and third wife of Lenormand, who takes to the bottle and acts out the roles she never had the chance to play on the stage:

> It was not unusual on such occasions for her to order all the slaves to turn out, and under the full moon, between belches of malmsey, to declaim before her captive audience the great roles she had never been allowed to interpret. Wrapped in her confidante's veils, the timid player of bit parts attacked with quavering voice the familiar bravura passages:
>
> *Mes crimes désormais ont comblé la mesure*
> *Je respire á la fois l'inceste et l'imposture*
> *Mes homicides mains, promptes à me venger,*
> *Dans le sang innocent brûlent de se plonger.*
>
> *(My sins are heaped*
> *Already to overflowing. I am steeped*
> *At once in incest and hypocrisy.*
> *My murderous hands, hot for avenging me,*
> *Are fain to plunge themselves in guiltless blood.)*
>
> Agape with amazement, at a loss to know what it was all about, but gathering from certain words that in Creole, too, referred to misdemeanours whose punishment ranged from a thrashing to having one's head chopped off, the Negroes came to the conclusion that the lady must have committed many crimes in days gone by, and that she was probably in the colony to get away from the police of Paris... [pp. 44-5]

The slaves' interpretation of dramaturgical practice again illustrates the dearth of mutual understanding, and also adds a touch of irony and humour, as the situation is both pitiable and comic. It never occurs to Mlle. Floridor that her high European art may be misconstrued; her rendition of Racine's *Phèdra,* considered by many to be the highest achievement of France's greatest tragic poet and dramatist, who took the subject from Euripides' Greek tragedy, that most respected of genres, is seen as nothing more than a confession of atrocious crimes. Again, the ignorance of the slaves is highlighted, but the joke is undoubtedly on Mlle. Floridor because of the dramatically ironic gap between her self-perception as *une femme distinguée* and the way others see her, as a common criminal. Her cultural straitjacket does not

allow her mind to contemplate even the possibility of the existence of other interpretations.

Whilst Ti Noël is focalising in the opening pages of the novel, the reader is clearly permitted to see his conception of the cultures as diametrically opposed, the one representing dynamism, the other, decay. He considers the differences between the African and the French kings and finds the latter woefully lacking. Here, he begins with a pathopoetic consideration of African kings:

> ...those kings rode with lances in hand at the head of their hordes, and they were made invulnerable by the science of the Preparers, and fell wounded only if in some way they had offended the gods of lightning or of the Forge. They were kings, true kings, and not those sovereigns wigged in false hair who played at cup and ball and were gods only when they strutted the stage of their court theaters, effeminately pointing a leg in the measures of a rigadoon. These white monarchs lent more ear to the symphonies of violins and the whisper of gossip, the tittle-tattle of their mistresses and the warble of their stringed birds, than to the roar of cannon against the spur of the crescent moon. Although Ti Noël had little learning, he had been instructed in these truths by the deep wisdom of Macandal. In Africa the king was warrior, hunter, judge and priest; his precious seed distended hundreds of bellies with a mighty strain of heroes. In France, in Spain, the king sent his generals to fight in his stead; he was incompetent to decide legal problems, he allowed himself to be scolded by any trumpery friar. And when it came to a question of virility, the best he could do was engender some puling prince who could not bring down a deer without the help of stalkers, and who, with unconscious irony, bore the name of as harmless and silly a fish as the dolphin. Whereas Back There were princes as hard as anvils, and princes who were leopards, and princes who knew the language of the forest, and princes who ruled the four points of the compass, lords of the clouds, of the seed, of bronze, of fire. [pp. 7-8]

As a second-generation slave he has no *direct* experience of either group; all his ideas are based on second-hand information, yet, or perhaps *because* of this fact, Ti Noël's impression of the different kings is obviously very highly polarised. As the extract indicates, most of this knowledge is derived from the tales of the shaman, Macandal. At times, there is a celebratory air about the lives of the slaves, but equally, there is also an undertone of menace. The celebratory ideas about African culture become evident when the slave is focalising. As he has little knowledge, except what he has gleaned from others, Ti Noël's notions are romantic and

idealised, and are constantly emphasised in their opposition to the white colonisers' aristocratic lifestyles. The French monarchs are, in Ti Noël's estimation, characterised by artificiality and feebleness; they are derided as sterile, effete and cowardly. In contrast, the black kings are more natural, more in harmony with the world; he sees them as having greater communion with nature, as virile, courageous and powerful. His perspective is dictated by his situation as a slave, the totality of his personal experiences, and his knowledge acquired through the narratives of Macandal, an enigmatic, revolutionary figure whom the slaves believe has special powers, and who as a *loa* can transmogrify. In his bid to sustain the slaves, Macandal, creates a mythology and himself becomes a part of that mythicolegendary phenomenon. There is some difficulty in interpreting the stories of Macandal, especially since the reader is presented with them only once they have passed through the thoughts of Ti Noël, an illiterate man who has never set foot in Africa. Michel S. Laguerre writes of Voodoo as the 'collective memory of slaves, as far as it preserved and perpetuated the African religious traditions'.[24] It is possibly *because* of their lack of experiential knowledge, that the slaves have a romanticised, glorified perception of Africa, as can be seen in the rhapsodic eloquence of the passage above. Ti Noël's anaphoric final sentence with the repetition of the word 'princes' communicates his heightening excitement at the prospect of such kings, and the syntax becomes suggestive of grandiose oration. This passage is skilfully composed so the reader is under the impression that Ti Noël's opinions are being given voice, yet the diction is, in places, too erudite, and the syntactic construction too sophisticated. This leads to the conclusion that he has internalised Macandal's rhetoric and the discourse of dissent. In order to rebel, in order that he can attempt to kill his master's family, he has to demonise them, as indeed he has been demonised by the whites: 'Mandigue[25] was a synonym for intractable, rebellious, a devil' (p. 17). So, Ti Noël accordingly demonises the whites, setting them up as the

[24] Michel S. Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 70.
[25] Mandigue is the name of an African tribe from whom Macandal is descended.

Other, and exalts his people, and this polarisation becomes part of the socio-political world-view of the slave. Such is the power of myth that it is seen to be capable of changing the course of history. The structure of feeling has entered into, and is sustained by, myth.

A powerful culture-nature opposition is at work on various levels. For example, whilst barrenness is associated with the colonisers, in the figure of Lenormand, who despite his three wives has no progeny, the richness of nature is associated with the slaves and with transgression: Ti Noël fathers twelve children; Macandal has the knowledge to be able to make political use of the hidden aspects of nature of which the whites are ignorant.

There is a strong opposition between the characters who have the ability to metamorphose, namely Macandal and Ti Noël, and the 'somatic petrification' to which several other characters are exposed.[26] In the following examples, oppositional structures are being used symbolically. After his reign of terror, the body of Henri Christophe is fittingly interred in the very walls of his stupendous citadel. The Governor, after excising one of Henri Christophe's fingers and giving it to the queen, 'gave an order, and the pages laid the body on the pile of mortar into which it slowly began to sink, as though pulled down by slimy hands' (p. 123). Finally,

> Henri Christophe would never know the corruption of his flesh, flesh fused with the very stuff of the fortress, inscribed in its architecture, integrated with its body bristling with flying buttresses. [p. 124]

We read later on that his finger is preserved:

> All of his fabulous person that remained was in Rome, a finger floating in a rock-crystal bottle filled with brandy. And in keeping with that example, Queen Marie-Louise, after taking her daughters to the baths of Carlsbad, had ordered

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[26] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 153.

> in her will that her right foot be preserved in alcohol and given to the Capuchins of Pisa in a chapel built by her pious munificence. [pp. 142-3]

In the same vein, the archbishop, Corneille Breille, is buried alive, incarcerated by the walls of his palace, and finally, Pauline Bonaparte's marble statue is discovered accidentally, in the Borghese Palace in Rome, giving Soliman a moment of terror, since owing to his intoxicated state he mistakenly thinks it is her corpse. After caressing and massaging the statue, as he used to do for Pauline,

> ...suddenly the chill of the marble rising to his wrists as the pincers of death stiffened him into a cry. The wine in his head began to whirl. The statue, yellow in the light of the lantern, was the corpse of Pauline Bonaparte, a corpse newly stiffened, recently stripped of breath and sight, which perhaps there was still time to bring back to life. [pp. 133-4]

González Echevarría finds this theme of petrifaction recurs in Carpentier's work, and has the effect of emphasising the way in which the past survives into the present in the form of ruins:

> In his rescue of history, in his pilgrimages in search of the lost origin, Carpentier finds ruins, dismantled monuments, epitaphs. The only presence of the past is the ruins, the petrified texts—hieratic and monumental, archaic and artificial...[27]

Preservation of the social order, of the *status quo*, is deemed to be important to those in power and is symbolised by the rendering of their images into statues and preserved artefacts. Whereas the statue is only a three dimensional representation of Pauline, by the sculptor, Canova, the preserved finger of Henri Christophe both represents him synechdochically and, significantly, *is* a part of him. Additionally, dryness, inflexibility, fossilisation and death are all implied by petrifaction. These grotesque interments stand in stark contrast to the amazing vivacity of the organic changes experienced by Macandal and Ti Noël. Lindstom perceives:

> A number of contrasts in the novel suggest that African-Cuban life has a vigor lacking in Europe and its derivates. Such an implication furthers the contemporary view of European civilization as in decay. African-derived religion, rituals, and healing practices are a vivifying force capable of rousing

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[27] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 153.

> spirits and creating bonds of community. A common faith fortifies and unites the slaves in their uprisings.[28]

Metamorphosis comes to signify hope, freedom from captivity and from the constraints imposed by being human, as well as suggesting the possibility of change, or as Díaz prefers, 'mutability'. The metamorphosis of their hero, Macandal, provides the slaves with faith in his abilities to procure their liberation. Díaz writes that here change to animal form 'is a positive process because it enables the being to participate in the dynamism that is the essence of life and art in this created world'.[29] Besides metamorphoses there are other ways in which the animals are aligned with the slaves. Horses are often used as a classic symbol of virility, for example. At the opening of the novel, the reader sees Ti Noël '[a]stride the stallion' (p. 9); his master, rides a 'lighter-limbed sorrel' (p. 5); and Father Corneille rides a 'donkey-coloured mule' (p. 9). Ti Noël has a particular affinity with animals, and Lenormand always trusts him to select his horses:

> Ti Noël [...] felt with satisfaction the breadth of the heavy dappled beast, sensing against his thighs the lather of sweat that gave an acid reek to the percheron's thick coat. [p. 3]

But comparison with the animal kingdom is, at best, a backhanded compliment, even though within the ambience of this novel it is perceived as admirable. The affinity with animals suggests the slaves are in tune with the rhythms of nature and have an unadulterated sense of life. On the other hand, it also insinuates they are unsophisticated, elemental, and by extension, lacking in moral fibre, since morality is not normally seen to be associated with animals, who behave according to their instincts, not a system of ethics. This effectively serves to diminish rather than enhance the status of black people. Carpentier refers in his preface to the 'Faustian presence' of the Indian and the Negro, which he interpreted as meaning 'full of longing for liberty, for the infinite and the mysterious'.[30] This he contrasted with 'Apollonian', presumably in reference to the geometer, Apollonius of Perga.

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[28] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, pp. 104-5.
[29] Díaz, *The Radical Self*, p. 26.
[30] Quoted in Shaw, *Alejo Carpentier*, p. 27.

The postcolonial, postmodern structure of feeling is also revealed through the religious opposition between Voodoo and Christianity. The instances, to which I have alluded above, of cultural misapprehension, show the black people in ignorance of white cultural traditions of high art. There are no obvious cases of the converse situation arising, as the white colonists, although they have no understanding of the black culture, make not the slightest attempt to comprehend it, considering it unworthy of their attention. It is worth at this point interjecting a few words about Voodoo, as it plays a large part in *The Kingdom of This World.* Voodoo (also known as *vodu, vodou* or *vodun*), meaning 'spirit', is thought to have its roots in the religions of Nigeria and Dahomey, from where it was transported to the Caribbean with the slaves. It began to emerge between 1730 and 1790. Leslie G. Desmangels observes that Hollywood is largely responsible for the common perception of Voodoo in the Western world, which is obsessed by the idea that it is used to inflict disease and death on people.[31]

Voodoo is practised by nearly six million Haitians. It is not one unified belief system; it varies from place to place, and Laguerre suggests that 'doctrinal unity and ritual uniformity in Voodoo never existed'.[32] However, there are certain common beliefs, including that in the *Gran Mèt,* or Supreme Being, and a range of lesser *loa.* The central idea behind the Voodoo practice of religion is that the spirit, known as the *loa* (or *lwa*), can manifest itself through a human being who goes into a trance, involving the temporary retreat of his or her own personality, in order to allow the spirit to pass through. An individual is 'mounted' by the *loa* and becomes its 'horse' or servant. This is an important part of the Voodoo rites. It is believed to represent the revelation of the divine will of the *loa*; the ordinary man or woman is

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[31] Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism* (Chapel Hill & London: University of California Press, 1992), p. 1.
[32] Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti,* p. 38.

the medium. This trance state is accompanied by the use of dance, drums and chanting. The drum, or *tamboula*, is particularly important. The *houngan* or *mambo* (male and female Voodoo 'priests' respectively) also has an important role using skills of divination and curing illnesses. Broadly speaking, Voodoo can take two forms: white, or *Arada*, which is not harmful to anyone, and is used to obtain health, advantage, money and love, and Red or *Petro* (*Petwo*), which is the type which calls upon malevolent spirits and can be harmful to others. Some have suggested that this division is not valid.[33] The spirits are uncontrollable and may even refuse to leave the body of the person they have been called into, turning him or her into a *zombi*, a person who lives in a state between life and death. This *zombi* state can also be produced in somebody who has recently died. It has been suggested by anthropologists that the *zombi* phenomenon may, in some way, be a psycho-social reaction to the powerlessness felt by those who were subjected to slavery and those who are aware, at some level, of the enervating effects of slavery in their ancestry. The poet, René Depestre writes: '[t]he history of colonialism is that of a process of generalized "zombification" of mankind'.[34] According to Laguerre, 'Voodoo played a very important role in the Haitian Revolution as far as it allowed the unification of slaves and provided them with a revolutionary ideology'.[35] Although Voodoo is fairly commonly presented as a positively vivifying force for the oppressed black people at the time of the revolution, it has had a less glorious subsequent history. It is identified as an agent maintaining the repressive *status quo* during the notorious Duvalier era, when it was used to manipulate the population. Interestingly, in legal terms, Voodoo has always been outlawed in Haiti, and surprisingly, when independence was declared in 1804, the religion of the colonisers, Catholicism, became the state religion.[36]

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[33] Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 292.
[34] Quoted in the introd. to *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 27.
[35] Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti*, p. 68.
[36] Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti*, p. 19.

The role of Voodoo as a kind of social cohesion and means of resistance is brought to the fore in *The Kingdom of This World*; there is a significant moment when Lenormand, speaking to the Governor about the slave revolt, has a rather belated realisation about the religion of the slaves:

> The Governor then pronounced a word to which M. Lenormand de Mézy had not given the least thought up to that moment: Voodoo. Now he recalled how, years earlier, that ruddy, pleasure-loving lawyer of the Cap, Moreau de Saint-Méry, had collected considerable information on the savage practices of the witch doctors in the hills, bringing out the fact that some of the Negroes were snake-worshippers. Now that he remembered this, it filled him with uneasiness, making him realize that, in certain cases, a drum might be more than just a goatskin stretched across a hollow log. The slaves evidently had a secret religion that upheld and united them in their revolts. Possibly they had been carrying on the rites of this religion under his very nose for years and years, talking with one another on the festival drums without his suspecting a thing. But could a civilized person have been expected to concern himself with the savage beliefs of people who worshipped a snake? [p. 58]

It was, and still is, a common misconception that Voodoo involves the worship of the snake. The snake functions symbolically, much as the fish and the dove do in Christian iconography.[37] In the above extract, with Lenormand focalising, his vituperative attitude to the slaves' convictions becomes evident: he sees for the first time the sustaining potency and the ideological power of the belief system; he recognises that he took no heed of its manifestations, its materialisation of beliefs as practices in the form of rites and symbols, and that he has suffered as a result.

The Christianity in the novel is hardly worthy of the name. The Catholicism represented has ossified into an empty shell of itself, obsessed with outward signs and symbols, but no longer aware of the deeper meanings of those. It has become a vain show, a kind of desperate adherence to a grand and glorious past, and is far removed from the daily lives of the people of the island. Later on in the novel, there is a hypocritical turning to religion, or to the outward emblems of religion, but these

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[37] Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti*, pp. 32-3.

only serve to underline the vacuousness of the colonists' religious and cultural beliefs: they are deluded by superficiality, by appearance, by theatricality. González Echevarría writes:

> *Horror vacui* thrusts the colonists toward the most tangible aspects of the cult, to the theatrical rituals and the ornate temples—the signs and symbols of the ecclesiastical baroque...[38]

In this way, the cathedral becomes merely another stage on which the drama of Corneille Breille is enacted: theatricality replaces spirituality and life.

In this next section I hope to demonstrate that the high level of indeterminacy found in the novel effectively counters the stark and seemingly rigid oppositionality which I have already analysed. First we will look at the status of incidents on the preternatural-natural continuum. The sceptical reader of *The Kingdom of This World* is undecided, and possibly unconvinced, of the existence of anything beyond the natural world for much of the novel, and may well expect this degree of ambiguity to last until the end. There have been tales of the metamorphosis of Macandal in particular, but they cannot be considered to be incontrovertibly preternatural for the reason that they are reported, or deduced from hearsay and omens. Much of the magic in the novel is of such a type as to make the reader dubious about its existence. Regarding Macandal's preternatural aptitude, the evidence is that the slaves *believe* it to be so, and therefore they do not require ocular proof; they take the most insubstantial indication as confirmation of Macandal's magical powers. Given that there is, for some time, no tangible sign of the preternatural in the text, the reader may be inclined to attribute the events purely to *faith,* rather than to actuality. Eventually, an incontrovertibly preternatural event does occur in the form of the appearance of the ghost of Archbishop Breille in the cathedral. That the congregation apparently witnesses this apparition is significant as it demonstrates that the sighting is not a mental aberration of King Henri

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[38] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home,* p. 148.

Christophe, who had Breille incarcerated in jail where he was left to die. This is how the scene is narrated:

> Suddenly, Juan de Dios González began to shrink back toward the royal chairs, clumsily stumbling against the three marble steps. The Queen's rosary fell from her fingers. The King's hand reached for the hilt of his sword. Before the altar, facing the worshippers, another priest had arisen, as though conjured out of the air, with part of his shoulders and arms still imperfectly fleshed out. And while his face was taking on contour and expression, from his lipless, toothless mouth, as black as a rat-hole, a thundering voice emerged which filled the nave with the vibrations of an organ with the stops pulled out, making the stained-glass windows tremble in their lead frames:
>
> *Absolve Domine, animas omnium fidelium defunctorum ab omni vinculo delictorum....*
>
> The name of Corneille Breille stuck in the throat of Henri Christophe, leaving him dumb. Because it was the immured Archbishop, whose death and decay were known to all, who stood there before the high altar in his vestments intoning the *Dies Iræ*. [pp. 106-7]

This preternatural incident has many observers, or at least it occurs in the church during mass whilst the congregation is present, but there is, in the narrator's voice, a trace of ambivalence. Whilst the incident is not seen through the eyes of Henri Christophe, his *mood* is an integral part of the account; his disturbed state of mind is described on the preceding page, including his paranoia and his terror, inclining the reader to think he may have been predisposed to have a paranormal experience or simply a moment of insanity. The historical accounts describe a heart-attack or a stroke. The description of the events moves over to Henri Christophe as focaliser, and, just a few lines further on, the spectre leaps onto one of the roof beams,

> ...in the very line of Henri Christophe's vision, spreading wide arms and legs as though the better to display his bloodstained brocades. A rhythm was growing in the King's ears which might have been that of his own veins or that of the drums being beaten in the hills. [p. 108]

The line of vision of the King is emphasised, enabling the reader to see the spectre as he does. The narrator is omniscient, yet claims not to know the source of the drumming in Henri Christophe's ears, leading the reader to be uncertain, and to participate in the shock and confusion surrounding the sighting. Although the

appearance of the spectre is preternatural, an element of uncertainty is introduced since the King's subjectivity colours the whole episode, both before and after.

Another event which at first sight is plainly presented as unequivocally preternatural is the metamorphosis that is depicted. Towards the end of the novel, Ti Noël decides to investigate metamorphosis for himself:

> Inasmuch as human guise brought with it so many calamities, it would be better to lay it aside for a time, and observe events on the Plaine in some less conspicuous form. Once he had come to this decision, Ti Noël was astonished at how easy it is to turn into an animal when one has the necessary powers. In proof of this he climbed a tree, willed himself to become a bird, and instantly he was a bird. He watched the surveyors from the top of a branch, digging his beak into the violated flesh of a medlar. The next day he willed himself to be a stallion, and he was a stallion, but he had to run off as fast as he could from a mulatto who tried to lasso him and geld him with a kitchen knife. He turned himself into a wasp, but he soon tired of the monotonous geometry of wax constructions. [pp. 143-4]

Here, the much rumoured metamorphoses are presented as if they are taking place physically. At the end, Ti Noël, now an old man, jaded by a hard life and a succession of despotic regimes, and unable to think of ways to help the people, decides to abjure human form. He experiments with a variety of animal incarnations, but finds fault with them all, and in a moment of lucidity finally realises that Macandal used the animal form only to 'serve men' (p. 148), not to avoid the discomforts of the human condition. The uprising and King Henri Christophe's corrupt reign are perceived by Ti Noël in such a way that the brutality of both regimes is apparent to him and finally, in a moment of self-reflection, he comes to a realisation that his salvation lies in the 'kingdom of this world'— in struggle:

> Now he understood that a man never knows for whom he suffers and hopes. He suffers and hopes and toils for people he will never know, and who, in turn, will suffer and hope and toil for others who will not be happy either, for man always seeks a happiness far beyond that which is meted out to him. But man's greatness consists in the very fact of wanting to be better than he is. In laying duties upon himself. In the Kingdom of Heaven there is no grandeur to be won, inasmuch as there all is an established hierarchy, the unknown is revealed, existence is infinite, there is no possibility of sacrifice, all is rest and joy. For this reason, bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his

> misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of this World. [pp. 148-9]

At the end, Ti Noël is metamorphosing; the text states this clearly. He has been possessed by the spirit of the King of Angola, enabling him to undergo these transformations. However, the reader knows the slave is very elderly at this point in the story, and could well be mentally scarred by his experiences, and there is evidence that he suffers delusions of grandeur. For example, he wears a 'dress coat that had belonged to Henri Christophe, of green silk, with cuffs of salmon-colored lace' (p. 137), holds 'a guava twig in his hand as a scepter' (138), and thinks the animals in neighbouring areas are 'gifts from his subjects' (p. 139). Furthermore, there are no witnesses to these transformations bar the narrator, Ti Noël himself and the animals, such as the geese he attempts to join. These metamorphoses could, therefore, be interpreted as nothing more than manifestations of senile dementia. In either case, however, he has experienced a transformation into otherness.

As these examples show, the status of some incidents in *The Kingdom of This World* is rather ambiguous, and the reader is left to make judgements as to whether they are natural or preternatural, although s/he does not have to make a judgement of course and may choose to live in postmodern uncertainty. This is complicated by the fact that a decision may be made both at the time of reading, and in retrospect, having reached the end of the novel. Rather like Todorov's formulation of the fantastic, the uncertainty causes the reader to hesitate between two explanations, only in this case the reader may not be able to make a firm decision having reached the end of the novel. The reader's ambivalence, for much of the time, arises because the evidence, one way or the other, is not sufficiently convincing.

Let us look at a further example of the way indeterminacy functions in this novel, by examining the intriguing character of Macandal, an important presence in the novel, although he only appears in the first quarter. He is said by the slaves to be endowed

with 'superhuman powers'. This is revealed when a tortured slave named Fulah, in fear of his life, reveals the truth about the strange deaths afflicting the white population:

> Macandal, the one-armed, now a *houngan* of the Rada rite, invested with superhuman powers as the result of his possession by the major gods on several occasions, was the Lord of Poison. Endowed with supreme authority by the Rulers of the Other Shore, he had proclaimed the crusade of extermination, chosen as he was to wipe out the whites and create an empire of free Negroes in Santo Domingo. Thousands of slaves obeyed him blindly. [pp. 24-5]

The passage is not a direct quotation from the character, Fulah, but, as with many sections of the novel, is coloured by his consciousness. Whatever it is that wipes out the animals and kills some of the colonisers is never confirmed. It is very likely that poison is the tool used by Macandal, but as with many things in *The Kingdom of This World* the actual evidence is sketchy.

Macandal is said to metamorphose into a variety of creatures, yet the evidence is not sufficient to convince the reader that he *is* actually metamorphosing:

> At night in their quarters and cabins the Negroes communicated to one another, with great rejoicing, the strangest news: a green lizard had warmed its back on the roof of a tobacco barn; someone had seen a night moth flying at noon; a big dog, with bristling hair, had dashed through the house, carrying off a haunch of venison; a gannet — so far from the sea! — had shaken the lice from its wings over the arbor of the back patio. [pp. 27-8]

The 'proof' of Macandal's metamorphoses depends on a kind of faith, which rests in the sightings of various animals, not in a mimetic rendering of the transformations. When he reappears in human form after four years, he has gained a grandiose, mythic and iconic status:

> Behind the Mother Drum rose the human figure of Macandal. The Mandigue Macandal. The man Macandal. The One-Armed. The Restored. The transformed. None spoke to him, but his glance met that of all. And the glasses of brandy began to move from hand to hand towards his single hand, which had known a long thirst. Ti Noël saw him for the first time since his metamorphoses. Something of his sojourns in mysterious places seemed to cling to him, something of his successive attires of scales, bristles, fur. His chin had taken on a feline sharpness, and his eyes seemed to slant a little toward his

> temples, like those of certain birds whose appearance he had assumed. [pp. 31-2]

Macandal has been such an important figure for the slaves; he has given them hope and forbearance, and as the reader realises this, so it becomes easy at this point in the story, to attribute their judgements to faith alone. Looking at Macandal through Ti Noël's eyes, the narrator says it *seemed* as though he still had something of his adventures about him, and this significant word colours the following observations too, resulting in a scepticism on the part of the reader. Ti Noël wants to believe Macandal has passed through a four year cycle of transformations, because that gives him hope that the powers of Macandal can be put to good use helping the slave people against their owners, and that someday he will give the sign for the great uprising. Macandal, in human form, then stands ready for revolt; he is described hyperbolically 'with testicles like rocks' (p. 29), emphasising his phenomenal strength, toughness and virility. His power is 'boundless' (p. 28).

Indeterminacy has an unsettling effect in *The Kingdom of This World,* putting the reader on alert, as certain events, such as the metamorphoses of Macandal, present an ambiguous picture. The reader is consequently destabilised. This is evident in a problematic scene in which Macandal undergoes an experience that is recounted rather extraordinarily in the text. As a result, there are two different, incompatible explanations. When the whites do catch up with Macandal after the initial rebellion, they decide to make an horrific example of him at a 'gala function' by burning him alive. As he is lashed to a stake in preparation, the reader is told of the slaves' preconceived ideas about what will happen:

> When the moment came, the bonds of the Mandingue, no longer possessing a body to bind, would trace the shape of a man in the air for a second before they slipped down the post. And Macandal, transformed into a buzzing mosquito, would light on the very tricorne of the commander of the troops to laugh at the dismay of the whites. This was what the masters did not know; for that reason they had squandered so much money putting on this useless show, which would prove how completely helpless they were against a man christmed by the great Loas. [p. 35]

During the events that follow, there are two accounts given; the first is the black account, and the second is the white. The first describes the escape of Macandal in these terms:

> The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square:
> 'Macandal saved!' [p. 36]

However, a few lines further on a different version is given:

> ...the noise and screaming and uproar were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry. [p. 36]

Although there are these two contradictory versions, they are not, at this point in the text, given equal weight because the second one tends to bear greater authority, partly because it *is* second and last, and also because of the words *very few saw* which give the impression this is the true account. Consequently, at this point in the story the rational view is favoured, and the whites' view of the world is being prioritised over that of the black people. Weight is added to this interpretation when account is taken of the fact that Macandal never appears in the novel again.

Evidently, the events of the metamorphoses and the escape/death of Macandal in the story present an ambiguous picture to the reader. However, given that there is as yet no sign of the tangible preternatural in the text, the reader is inclined to attribute the events to *belief* in the supernatural, rather than to actuality. Thus, in this instance, the indeterminacy producing the destabilisation of the reader does not last, as once it is established that the white account is the 'true' one, the reader is able to categorise the incident as normal/natural. This is a deficiency in the story, one which Carpentier could have avoided by qualifying the second explanation or by using a white onlooker to focalise — a character with vested interests — rather than using, as he does, the narrative voice. It is important to note that he is establishing here, possibly unconsciously, that the narrative voice is white. It may be

argued that this conclusion does not impinge on the story negatively, because the slaves *believe* Macandal is saved, and so to them he *is* saved. They behave in a way that illustrates they have been hugely inspired by Macandal's oblatory selflessness. Although Macandal is a *loa* and a supporter of Voodoo, parallels with Christ are inevitable: his immolation saves his people.

Voodoo and Christianity are not as oppositionally located as may at first be apparent. There is a blurring of boundaries between them. There is a folk expression that 'Haiti is 90 percent Catholic and 100 percent voodoo'.[39] Desmangles describes Voodoo as a *tertium quid*.[40] Some would not deign to call it a religion, preferring to see it as an idolatrous and dangerous cult. It is deeply syncretic, helped presumably by the fact it has no sacred text, making it dependent upon oral transference. Although we have seen that its roots lie in Africa, it has been hugely impinged upon by Catholicism. The cross, for example, was incorporated into Voodoo early on,[41] and there is one mentioned in the early part of the novel, when the old woman who has knowledge of poisons has, hanging on her wall, 'wire hooks that held rusty spoons hung to form a cross to keep off Baron Samedi, Baron Piquant, Baron La Croix, and other Lords of the Graveyards' (p. 15). At the end of Part II, a black priest is officiating: the 'Voodoo warmth' in the church at Santiago de Cuba appeals to Ti Noël, and some of the signs and symbols especially were 'similar to those of the altars of the *houmforts* consecrated to Damballah, the Snake god' (p. 65). Reference is also made at this point to the parallel nature of Christian saints and Voodoo deities: 'St. James is Ogoun Faï, marshal of the storms' (pp. 65-6). Desmangles shows how Voodoo has adapted the Catholic liturgical calendar so the Catholic holy day reserved for the Virgin Mary is used to honour Ezili and Damballah, creating a kind of parallelism.[42] In the novel, unordained black priests

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[39] Thomas E. Weil *et al*, *Area Handbook for Haiti* (Washington: FAS, 1973), p. 49.
[40] Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods*, p. 173.
[41] Laguerre, *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti*, p. 28.
[42] Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods*, pp. 172-3.

known as Fathers of the Savannah, say Catholic prayers in Latin, but 'when they recited the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary, they gave the words accents and inflections that made them like the other hymns everyone knew' (p. 80), 'everyone' here referring to the slaves. This syncretism survives to this day as evidence shows that outwardly Haitians are Catholic, and yet at the same time six million claim to be voudouisants. Even today, almost two hundred years after Haiti gained its independence, there is a great deal of confusion about the status of Voodoo. It has a mysterious aura, partly because it has been illegal, and because of this it has had to be practised clandestinely. In the literature on Voodoo there is a great deal of contradictory information. Some of it tends to romanticise and some of it to demonise; it all emphasises the otherness of it, rather than the sameness.

The grotesque and the carnivalesque in the novel serve to increase the level of indeterminacy. A blurring of the boundaries reveals itself in the scenes after the slaves have initially revolted, but have failed to completely overthrow the whites. Norms established by the colonists, perverse though they are, come crashing down. The French find themselves enjoying a period of revivification, but one inspired by a desperate bid to keep their privileged lifestyles, spontaneously embarking on a debauched and carnivalesque spree, giving

> ...themselves over without let or hindrance to a vast orgy. Nobody paid any attention to clocks, nor did dawn mark the end of night. The watchword was eat, drink, and be merry before catastrophe swallows up all pleasure. [p. 78]

This transgression of social norms soon spills over into a transgression of moral norms, even by their standards, and deteriorates into sheer horror as the 'daughters of slaves were forced while still infants', the slaves are set upon by hundreds of specially imported dogs, and poisonous snakes are let loose to kill them. This reveals, as Young points out, that despite the fact *The Kingdom of This World* 'is not normally considered a Gothic novel, it reveals an almost Gothic fascination with

the macabre and violent'.[43] There are numerous violent incidents in the novel, although many of them are not depicted mimetically. One example is the rape and evisceration of Mlle. Floridor. In this scene, her husband, Lenormand, who has been hiding down a well for two days, finds her body:

> The master approached the house, passing the swollen corpse of the bookkeeper. A horrible stench came from the burned kennels. There the Negroes had settled a long-pending score, smearing the doors with tar to make sure none of the dogs got through alive. M. Lenormand de Mézy directed his steps toward the bedroom. Mlle. Floridor lay on the rug, legs sprawled wide, a sickle buried in her entrails. Her dead hand was still clenched around one of the bedposts in a gesture cruelly reminiscent of that of a sleeping girl in a licentious engraving entitled *The Dream* which adorned the wall. [p. 55]

Similarly, we hear of the incarceration and death of Corneille Breille. The door has been cemented up, apart from a small hole:

> Out of this whole, black as a toothless mouth, burst from time to time howls so horrifying as to send a shudder through the entire population and make the children sob. When this happened, pregnant women held their bellies with their hands and some of the passers-by took to their heels without completing the sign of the cross. And the howls, the senseless screams, continued at the corner of the Archbishop's Palace until the throat, choked in blood, lacerated itself in curses, dark threats, prophecies and imprecations. Then they turned into weeping, a weeping that came from the depths of the breast, with the whimpering of a child in the voice of an old man, which was even more unbearable than what had preceded it. [p. 102]

Even the plant-life appears to have a grotesqueness about it, as it is described with verbs which are suggestive of characteristics more usually associated with animals or humans. We read of

> ...vines that wove nets among the stones; solitary bushes with furry leaves that sweated at night; sensitive plants that closed at the mere sound of the human voice; pods that burst at midday with the pop of a flea cracked under the nail; creepers that plaited themselves in slimy tangles far from the sun. [p. 14]

The plants are described in such a way that they sound malevolent and foul, which is apt because they are to be used to poison the colonists. The fungi are particularly disturbing in the way they are suggestive of both life and death. They

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[43] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 42.

> ...smelled of wood rot, of medicine bottles, of cellars, of sickness, pushing through the ground in the shape of ears, ox-tongues, wrinkled excrescences, covered with exudations... [p. 14]

The plants transgress botanic expectations, blurring the boundaries between animals and plants. The description of the sea on Pauline's outward journey, is similar:

> It was garlanded with what seemed to be clusters of yellow grapes drifting eastward, needlefish like green glass, jellyfish that looked like blue bladders, dragging after them long red filaments, repulsive, toothed garfish, and squids that seemed entangled in the transparencies of bridal veils. [p. 69]

This description alerts the reader to Pauline's view of the sea, and prefigures some of the awful events to happen in Haiti, as it concentrates on the ghastly nature of it.

Part of the reason for the fall of Henri Christophe can be construed as his failure to stay loyal to his culture. He transgresses, rejecting Voodoo in favour of Catholicism; he apes the aristocratic lifestyles of the French kings, even to the extent of setting up a whole court, which Ti Noël looks upon in awe, unable to comprehend the splendour of it all. He sees, to his amazement:

> ...a rose colored palace, a fortress with ogival windows, rendered almost ethereal by the high socle of its stone stairway. [...] As he drew nearer, Ti Noël could make out terraces, statues, arcades, gardens, pergolas, artificial brooks, and boxwood mazes. At the foot of heavy columns, which supported a great sun of black wood, two bronze lions stood guard. Across the main esplanade white-uniformed officers busily came and went, young captains in bicornes, reflecting the glitter of the sun, sabres rattling on their thighs. Through an open window came the sound of a dance orchestra in full rehearsal. [p. 89]

To the slave this is a 'marvelous world'. It demonstrates Henri Christophe's betrayal of his race and culture by giving himself so wholly over to the kind of debauched and cruel regime which had existed previously, and which the slaves had fought to overcome. The King had endeavoured to 'give his court a thoroughly European air' (p. 115). At the end, he has a realisation that he has betrayed his people, and commits suicide rather than be murdered by them.

The only other character to transgress her native culture is Pauline, who turns to Soliman, her servant, for assistance in her time of crisis when her husband and many

other troops die of yellow fever. She does it only in the name of self-interest and fear of death. She also becomes superstitious, 'avoiding stepping on the cracks of the tiles' (p. 76). Soliman, who has effectively been her masseur, no longer uses perfumes but 'salves of brandy, crushed seeds, oily juices, and the blood of birds' (p. 76). She tries anything: 'vows, penitence, hair shirts, fasts, invocations' (p. 76), and takes her husband's body back to Europe with 'her breast covered with scapulars' (p. 77) and her luggage containing an amulet to Papa Legba. Like everything about Pauline, her new-found faith is not genuine, and on the journey back to Paris she begins to 'shed her cilices' (p. 77), symbolising the casting off of her confused and transient religiosity.

Turning our attention next to the issue of the extent to which the novel is postmodern, Young says: '[t]he reflexive consciousness of Carpentier looms over' the whole novel.[44] The narrative is certainly structured on very specific lines which have been analysed by González Echevarría, who observes a structural, textual symmetry in which the twenty-six chapters fall into two thirteen chapter cycles, containing many parallels. His analysis does become convoluted and is stretched rather too far, weakening especially in his analysis of dates, but the basic point, emphasising parallels is certainly valid.[45] The first two parts of the novel concentrate on colonial rule; the last two feature independence and black, then mulatto rule. The text is full of fitting patterns of behaviour mirroring these parallels. For example, Ti Noël is required to work as slave labour in the building of the tremendous fortress, and later, he is one of he people who plunders it, carrying off, amongst other mainly useless artefacts, an embalmed moonfish. The picture that the repetition builds up promotes the idea of the sameness of the different regimes. Thus, Ti Noël is a slave under the whites, and yet finds himself still enslaved under the black dictatorship of Henri Christophe when, even after pleading old age, he is

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[44] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 55.
[45] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, pp. 137-46.

required to help in the construction of the fortress; at the end, the mulatto regime scarcely looks to hold any more promise. Shaw notes that 'circularity in literature normally implies futility',[46] so, the novel, whilst suggesting the hopeless cyclical repetitions of abuses of power, introduces the mulatto government towards the end which, whilst it has the effect of cancelling out the black-white opposition that held so much sway over the novel, merely serves to reinforce the circularity. In the mulatto, the two races combine. Nonetheless, the races are unable to come to any type of *modus vivendi*, as each wants to be in the ascendant. Incidentally, the term 'mulatto' designating the offspring of a European and a Negro, is epistemologically far from neutral, deriving as it does from the Spanish for 'young mule'.

The novel, through its structure, asks questions about the progress of humanity, suggesting possible cycles rather than linear progression, a theme for which Carpentier drew on the ideas of Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), whose *The Decline of the West* (1919-22) was introduced to a Spanish audience in the journal, *Revista de Occidente* in 1923.[47] Spengler promoted the idea of history as a series of cycles of growth and decay. He suggested cultures are like organisms, arguing '[e]very Culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age'.[48] Some Latin Americans were encouraged by Spendler's thesis, which was that European culture was completing its cycle and was in decline, and American culture was about to experience a renaissance. However, this does not really harmonise with the ending of *The Kingdom of This World*, in which the mulattos appear to be setting up yet another tyrannical regime, as they are shown introducing a system of forced labour. Although the story shows how tyranny can be overcome, it does not show how it can be replaced by any better order. The final scene is bleak and hopeless, as a catastrophic, undetermined

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[46] Shaw, *Alejo Carpentier*, p. 9.
[47] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, ed. Arthur Helps, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962).
[48] Quoted in González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 56.

earthquake or whirlwind finishes the novel. One of the effects of the cyclical nature of things as represented by Carpentier is that it does represent a world with no centre. In this sense it can be seen to be a postmodern, decentring, novel.

Carpentier's work is rich in allusive, postmodern winks at the educated reader. The opposition of black and white is obscured at times by the cracks which appear in colonial society. For example, as Young observes, during the period in Cuba, after the plantation owners have fled Haiti, they sing both the *Hymn of St. Louis* and the *Marseillaise* (p. 64):[49] the former portrays republican sentiments, and the latter, monarchist, serving to show the social and political confusion felt by the colonisers, who want to keep their cultural connections intact as therein lies their claim to legitimacy, but who also want a high degree of autonomy giving them the power to rule the island as they wish, namely, to their advantage. Appropriately enough, at the point in the story when the slaves, building the Citadel La Ferrière, are carrying bricks endlessly up the mountain in Sisyphean style, the Queen's chaplain 'was reading Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to the Crown Prince' (p. 92). Plutarch's work, which sets up in pairs the biographies of fifty great Greeks and Romans, leads the reader to conjecture with whose lives these characters can be paralleled. The text also contains implicit references to the French Revolution, which some in the colony came to hear of, especially the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789). At the meeting in Bois Caïman, Bouckman tells the slaves about developments in France:

> Ti Noël managed to grasp that something had happened in France, and that some very powerful gentlemen had declared that the Negroes should be given their freedom, but that the rich landowners of the Cap, who were all monarchist sons of bitches, had refused to obey them. [p. 48]

As we saw earlier, the novel is replete with magpie allusions to other texts, all of which have some ironic bearing on the story. It is no accident, for example, that when the colonists retreat to Cuba out of danger, Monsigny's *Le Déserteur* can be

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[49] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, p. 26.

heard (p. 63); an aria from Rossini's *Tancredi* is sung by one of Pauline's daughters, fitting because the Italian composer came to have a disdain for the revolutionary spirit of the times; Racine's *Mithridate*, read to Pauline, also has significant undertones, as the king, Mithridates VI, had to abandon his conquests, much as Pauline and the troops had eventually to abandon Haiti. At the end, we find Ti Noël using a pile of three volumes of the *Grande Encyclopédie* from the ransacked palace as a seat, having nothing else on which to sit.

However, in the absence of a great many metafictive devices, to argue wholeheartedly for *The Kingdom of This World* as completely postmodern would be disingenuous. It nods in that direction, but given its time of composition, and its author's scholastic interests, it is unsurprising that it attempts no more than that. Carpentier was basically a humanitarian, whose idea of being modern and radical was to show an open mind to the culture of the black people in the Caribbean. Another reason why he may have chosen not to take metafictional aspects further is that he did not convey a sense that there was any great difficulty in re-establishing historical accuracy. His plentiful use of a diversity of sources is not problematised in the novel. Also, his reliance on the thinking of Spengler may be significant here, as Spengler himself argued that self-reflexiveness only occurred in a culture that was in decline, using the analogy, '[o]nly the sick man feels his limbs'. Carpentier was influenced by Spengler's thesis that there is a sharp difference between a fresh *culture* which is spontaneous and alive, and a *civilization* that is tired and self-reflexive, that pontificates and preserves, and is ready to fold, creaking under the strain of its estrangement from itself. González Echevarría sums this up his view as '[t]he European experiences his culture intellectually; Latin Americans feel it'.[50] The central aspect of the novel that can be considered postmodern is its extensive indeterminacy, which we have already seen. This shows a concern for differing

[50] González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, p. 57.

points of view, but this is not followed through with extensive metafictiveness. The lack of concern for individual characters is also postmodern. The characters serve a purpose, as functions of the plot, rather than being well-developed or hugely interesting in their own right.

The Kingdom of This World is an early illustration of the way in which preternatural events can be incorporated into the novel. The 'magic' functions as an aid to the slaves. It is a form of inspiration to them as it operates in their favour, providing a vigorous, invisible bond between those who are suffering oppression. Whether or not the reader accepts its reality within the world of the text, for the slaves it exists. Voodoo is important to the slaves precisely because it is not permitted. Therefore, by definition it is subversive and has to go underground where it manufactures racial solidarity, a factor which is important as it helps the slaves to retain a resolute sense of communal and individual selfhood.

In many ways, the style of the narrative is very different from the that of the other authors under consideration here, so it is worth analysing this further. As far as narrative technique is concerned, it has to be acknowledged that the novel is written in a lean style, with few preparatory scenes to build up characters, and is actually very short. There is little dialogue and little direct access for the reader to the minds of the characters. They tend to be illustrated in their dealings with others, and, importantly, through free indirect discourse. The novel uses information very economically, synechdochically using a single incident or depiction to signal much more: so the treatment of Macandal when his arm is severed speaks volumes regarding the ill-treatment of the slaves; Mlle. Floridor is in many ways a very minor character, but her little 'balcony scene' exposes a great deal about her: her vanity, her mental distance from her audience, her pitiable and unrealisable ambition. Because of these narrative features, this the least technically realistic text under consideration here. Ironically, the novel achieves the admirable feat of being both

sparely written, withholding huge amounts of detail, and yet richly baroque, the latter particularly in its depiction of the French. The novel has, Young perceives, a vivid 'pictorial' character evoked by techniques which give it the characteristics of tableaux, or 'the quality of a series of crowded baroque canvasses', and he notes the way in which there is 'a tendency to develop the narrative in terms of a series of visual images'.[51] The description of the fortress is one such startling image. It is 'a mountain on a mountain':

> That mass of fired brick, towering above the clouds in proportions whose perspective challenged visual habits, was honeycombed with tunnels, passageways, secret corridors and chimneys all heavy with shadows. Light, as of an aquarium, a glaucous green tinted by ferns already meeting in space, fell above a vaporous mist from the high loopholes and air vents. The stairways to hell connected three main batteries with the powder magazine, the artillerymen's chapel, the kitchens, cisterns, forges, foundry, dungeons. Every day in the middle of the parade square several bulls had their throats cut so their blood could be added to the mortar to make the fortress impregnable. [p. 93]

The florid nature of the descriptions of the French and their obsessions with extravagance, ostentation and folly work very well, as the language fits the subject, whilst also deriding it. However, this also shows where Carpentier's allegiance and heritage lie. After all, *his* texts are peppered with Latin, even though he mocks one of his characters, M. Lenormand, for thinking of a speech 'on the inequality of the human races' which he planned to give 'larded with Latin quotations' (p. 37). The arrogance and idiocy of Lenormand are presented to the reader, his use of Latin being just one of the ways in which he becomes pretentious, yet the author falls into exactly the same snare as Lenormand does. Although Carpentier does use some of the proper nouns associated with Voodoo and the slaves, mentioning the different spirits, the rituals and beliefs, it is never quite as convincing for the reason that at crucial moments we see events through the eyes of the white narrator. We are never told he is white, but, as we have seen, the reader can deduce this. This must be a weakness in the novel, since an omniscient narrator does not need to be racially

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[51] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, pp. 113-4.

determined. The narrating voice is very male-orientated, even bordering on the misogynistic, although this is a difficult fact to establish when the narrator is so caught up with the free indirect discourse of misogynistic characters. The female characters are stupid and vain, and are usually described in terms of their sexual parts; they are either lascivious and adulterous, or frigid, being portrayed negatively in both cases. Not that the men are admirable either. In fact, this is another weakness of the novel: the reader has too little sympathy with even the central character. We might view him in a better light had he and his sons not raped and murdered Mlle. Floridor. A novel lacking an admirable central character, or preferably a more *understandable* one, produces a lack of engagement on the part of the reader. So, when the slaves rebel, instead of rushing to take over the governance of the country, 'driven by a long-standing thirst, most of them rushed to the cellar looking for liquor' (p. 53), showing the slaves to be as idiotic and as orgiastic as the whites given half the chance.

So, this novel is flawed, I believe, for a number of reasons. Firstly, its connecting of black slaves with animals is ethically unsatisfactory; secondly, the privileging of the white narrator's voice, which is revealed unquestionably in the scene depicting the 'death' of Macandal, holds the narrative hostage, restricting the richness of its pleochroic potential; thirdly, whilst appearing to have a scornful view of the confused Catholicism represented by Lenormand, the novel can be charged with reinforcing a Christian view of events, even though it is ostensibly sympathetic to the Voodoo faith of the blacks. This is discernible in two incidents, namely in the execution of Macandal, with its strong parallels with Christ, and the appearance of the ghost of the Archbishop: he appears reciting parts of the Latin Mass, suggesting the existence of a Christian cosmos. He was a Christian minister, not a Voodoo practitioner. Fourthly, although the narrational style is full of gaps: for example thirty three years pass between Parts I and II, this is not openly acknowledged by the narrator, yet what is there is written in a fairly florid manner, suggesting an

underlying sympathy for the style of the colonists, rather than the slaves. Fifthly, on the subject of spontaneity versus self-reflexivity, Carpentier is doomed to reach an impasse. He cannot carry through his ambition of creating a truly American form of expression, which by his definition (and that of Spengler), is extemporaneous. In his prologue he paraphrases Unamuno, saying 'imaginative poverty [...] consists in learning codes by heart'. In his role as writer, he consciously and meticulously crafts his work, and his style is highly wrought, baroque and full of antiquarian terminology which has all been meticulously researched. His near Gongorian style of writing is very *un*spontaneous, so fails in its own terms.[52] The text is more Apollonian than Faustian. Finally, at the end of the novel, Ti Noël, observing the new establishment of mulattos,

> ...began to lose heart at this endless return of chains, this rebirth of shackles, this proliferation of suffering, which the more resigned began to accept as proof of the uselessness of all revolt. [p. 143]

Shortly after, the slave finds the animal kingdom is just as hierarchical and autocratic as the human one. This is conveyed humorously in a delightful fable in which Ti Noël becomes a goose and joins a flock only to suffer disappointment:

> It had been made crystal clear to him that being a goose did not imply that all geese were equal. No known goose had sung or danced the day of Ti Noël's wedding. None of those alive had seen him hatch out. He presented himself, without proper family background, before geese who could trace their ancestry back four generations. [pp. 147-8]

Two factors are important in these extracts. The first is that there is an inconsistency in the way the animal kingdom has been held up all through the novel as being admirable and spontaneous, but here is described as being no better than human civilization. The other is the disappointment with which the slave ends the novel with a 'cosmic weariness' on his shoulders; the revolutions have achieved

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[52] Gongorism: a style of writing derived from the poet, Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561-1627). It is a baroque and affected style characterised by Latinistic vocabulary and syntax, intricate metaphors, excessive hyperbole and mythological allusions.

nothing. So all the inspiration of the slaves following Macandal, Bouckman and Toussaint is all useless in the final analysis.

In conclusion, *The Kingdom of This World* is a darkly beautiful, highly distinctive and innovative piece of writing. It sets up massive oppositions and yet its indeterminacy absolves them, producing a wonderfully enigmatic text, rich and opaque, scholarly, yet lucent. The 'magic' is always prevented from fulfilling its promise, and close analysis shows there is little that is indisputably preternatural or supernatural in the novel. Yet, we are encouraged to keep faith with the preternatural as a living presence in the slaves' lives, admiring their superior, vibrant belief system, which in the end produces freedom from the European colonisers, even if it is not the paradise they envisaged. In the following chapter we look to a writer who develops the magical realist style, including a greater range of overtly preternatural incident, but who does so without ruining the indeterminacy and historicism established by Carpentier as vital to *lo real maravilloso*.

5

Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and 'Innocent Eréndira'

'Critics commit suicide for lack of fresh superlatives',[1] writes Salman Rushdie of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*[2] This is undoubtedly a novel that shook the world when it was published in 1967, inspiring a host of imitators. Vargas Llosa describes its appearance 'provoking a literary earthquake throughout Latin America';[3] many concur with George R. McMurray's assessment of it as a 'tragicomic masterpiece'.[4]

[1] Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands,* p. 299.
[2] Hereafter referred to as *Solitude.*
[3] Mario Vargas Llosa, 'García Márquez: From Aracataca to Macondo', in *Gabriel García Márquez,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), p. 5.
[4] George R. McMurray, *Gabriel García Márquez* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1977), p. 67.

It may well be considered to be *the* quintessential magical realist novel, as Lindstrom confirms: '[m]agical realism may never have been so unmistakably exemplified as in *One Hundred Years*'.[5] This certainly is the work that brought García Márquez instant international fame and fortune, establishing him as the foremost magical realist of the day and the most renowned Latin American writer. Even so, although he is closely associated with magical realism, *Solitude* is sometimes said to be uncharacteristic of his *oeuvre*. In one of the many paradoxes abounding in this field, it would appear this novel, as Bell argues, is 'at once deeply representative and highly untypical'.[6] As with the other writers in this study, García Márquez has not restricted himself to the magical realist style, and apparently resents the thirty year-long eulogising critical focus on this novel, once stating in an interview, *'One Hundred Years of Solitude*. A book I detest!'[7] One suspects he may be somewhat disingenuous in this stance, given that this was the novel which launched his whole career into a different orbit, but he does repeat this sentiment in his interview with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, stating: *'The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a much more important literary achievement'. He has also said he prefers *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold.* He says of *Solitude*: '[i]t's everybody's life story. Also, it's written in a simple, flowing, linear and I'd even say [...] superficial way'.[8] However, as we shall see, *ars est celare artem*.

An introduction to García Márquez's life, literature, influences, politics, and a brief background of the history of Colombia follows before discussion of the two texts. A moment to look at his well-documented life and times assists in providing a useful launching point. The first section of textual analysis is on *Solitude,* and the second, on the lesser known short story, 'Innocent Eréndira'.

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[5] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, p. 189.
[6] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 41.
[7] Quoted in Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 7.
[8] Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava*, p. 63.

Gabriel José García Márquez was born the first of a large family on 6 March 1928 in the town of Aracataca in the province of La Guajira in tropical northern Colombia.[9] His mother, Luisa Santiaga Márquez Iguarán, chose a husband of whom her family did not approve, Gabriel Eligio García. They were Liberal supporters who objected to the fact that he was a Conservative, as well as *la hojarasca*, a term which translates as 'dead leaf', but locally refers to the people who were attracted to the area by the banana trade. It is derogatory, having overtones of uselessness or 'trash'.[10] García Márquez spent his childhood until the age of eight with his maternal grandparents who proved to be tremendous influences in his life. His grandfather was Colonel Nicholás Ricardo Márquez Mejía, a Liberal war veteran of the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902). His grandmother, Tranquilina Iguarán Cotes, was an imaginative storyteller. Following the death of his grandfather in 1936, he was sent away to a boarding school in Barranquilla, a city at the mouth of the Magdelena River. There he apparently learned about Marxist theory (amongst other things, we assume) from his teachers. In 1947, he went on to study law at the National University, Bogotá, but this was closed after the rioting following the assassination of the Liberal, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, who was standing in the presidential elections. García Márquez moved to the University of Cartagena, but gave up his law studies in 1950 in order to devote himself to writing. He became associated with a group of intellectuals called *el grupo de Barranquilla,* under whose influence he was introduced to the literature that affected him most. He had a column in *El Universal* based in Cartagena. During the 1950s, García Márquez's career in journalism flourished and he found himself writing for Barranquilla based papers, *El Heraldo* and *El Nacional*, and *El Espectador* in Bogotá.

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[9] It is possible there were fifteen or sixteen children according to Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 34, although others say twelve, for example, Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. ix. The discrepancy may depend on whether the illegitimate offspring are counted. There are those, including his father, who have claimed 1928 is not his date of birth, and that he was born a year earlier. See Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. vii. and Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 33.

[10] See Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 37.

To date, his writing career has spanned more than four decades, but García Márquez's first fiction to be published was the short story, 'The Third Resignation', which appeared in *El Espectador* in 1946. He wrote several further stories for the paper. In 1952, he unsuccessfully submitted *La hojarasca* (*Leaf Storm,* 1972) for publication. It finally went into print in 1955. Also, in that year he went to Europe as a correspondent for *El Espectador* and became increasingly interested in left-wing politics and film-making. In 1958 he married Mercedes Barcha Pardo and they had two sons, Roderigo and Gonzalo. His literary success grew with the publication of *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (1961; *No One Writes to the Colonel,* 1968), *La mala hora* (1962; *In Evil Hour,* 1979), and *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (1962; *Big Mama's Funeral,* 1979). In 1967, *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude,* 1970), was published to great critical and popular acclaim although, it must be said, the novel does have its detractors.[11] Until this publication, he had never received any royalties from his writing. The seeds of *Solitude* had been planted in García Márquez's mind many years before, but it took only eighteen months to write. His literary career continued with the publication in 1972 of the collection of stories incorporating 'La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada' ('The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother'). This was followed by *El otoño del patriarca* (1975; *The Autumn of the Patriarch,* 1976), *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1981; *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* 1982); *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1985; *Love in the Time of Cholera,* 1988), *El general en su laberinto* (1989; *The General in his Labyrinth,* 1991), *Del amor y otros demonios* (1994; *Of Love and Other Demons,* 1995), and various compilations of stories. Amongst other honours, he was awarded the most prestigious Spanish American literary prize

[11] For an of overview the novel's critical reception, see Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading,* Chapter 3.

— the Rómulo Gallegos Prize — in 1972, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, thereby confirming his eminence and enhancing his celebrity status.

García Márquez's earliest influence on his fiction came from the orature of his grandmother whom he has been keen to acknowledge. He has paid homage to other key literary influences, including Kafka. At university, upon reading the opening lines of *The Metamorphosis,* he says: 'I thought to myself that I didn't know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago'.[12] Appropriately enough, the story had been translated by Borges. García Márquez also credits James Joyce with a technique which proved useful to him, that of interior monologue. However, he does say he prefers the way it is used by Virginia Woolf but, ever conscious of his literary tap roots, credits the anonymous writer of *Lazarillo de Tormes* with having invented it.[13] A single sentence from Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), had a dramatic impact on him, to the extent that he said he would be a quite different author had he not read this:

> But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within [the motor car]; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first time and last, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth.[14]

García Márquez's preoccupation with the sclerotic effects of time can be seen here, as well as the notion of cyclical movement, both of which feature heavily in his work. The resemblance does not stop at a thematic one, however, as he uses the slightly melancholy tone, and the complex construction which manages to encompass the past, present and future, both of which are developed fully in

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[12] See Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 319.
[13] See Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 320.
[14] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Grafton, 1976), pp. 16-17. See Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 3, and Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 32.

Solitude. In addition, García Márquez used the pseudonym of the shell-shocked 'Septimus' from Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* for his newspaper column.

William Faulkner (1897-1962), is often named as an influential figure in García Márquez's development, and is referred to as 'my master, William Faulkner'.[15] Abstrusely, he has also, on occasions, played down his influence, claiming the resemblance was more of a coincidence, as he 'simply found material that had to be dealt with in the same way that Faulkner had treated similar material'.[16] It is possible Faulkner's mythical Yoknapatawpha provided the germ of an idea that became Macondo. Harley D. Oberhelman writes: '[b]oth Yoknapatawpha County and Macondo bear the scars of prior civil strife, and both contain enigmas that are insoluble', arguing, 'a comparison of both writers' understanding of Macondo and Yoknapatawpha County on a parallel mythical and conceptual level reveals the common factors that shape their view of human destiny'.[17]

Apart from literature, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say *alongside* literature, García Márquez has an abiding and active interest in both politics and journalism. He has said: 'I've always been convinced that my true profession is that of a journalist'.[18] He has both established and worked for a multitude of political organisations in various countries in which he has lived. He has always had a desire to establish fresh opportunities for debate in print, fighting against covert and overt censorship at home and abroad. For example, in Bogotá in 1974, in the face of establishment disapproval, he launched *Alternativa*, a publication designed to open up a space for political argument and to provide a forum for left of centre opinion and analysis. However, disputes, both internal and external, combined with financial

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[15] García Márquez, 'The Solitude of Latin America'.
[16] See Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 321.
[17] Harley D. Oberhelman, 'The Development of Faulkner's influence in the Work of García Márquez', in *Gabriel García Márquez*, ed. Bloom, pp. 68 & 72.
[18] See Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 317.

difficulties and physical attacks on the paper's offices, led to its collapse in 1980. Again, in 1982, using the money from the Nobel Prize he set up *El Otro*, an alternative paper, but as with many of these projects, it was crushed by severe opposition. He has managed, more recently, to raise the profiles of certain of his concerns. For example, *Clandestine in Chile*, is the true story of Chilean film director, Miguel Littín, who fled his home country after the 1973 *coup*.[19] Twelve years later he returned from exile under a false identity to investigate life under Pinochet. In 1986, the Chilean authorities impounded and burned 15,000 copies of the book, which in itself shows their perception of the power of the written word.

García Márquez has exhibited a life-long commitment to socialist politics and human rights, and has been actively engaged in a range of social and political causes. His views have often made him the centre of great controversy, and he has been forced to live in exile, at times in fear of his life. He has been seen by some as having an uncritical, blanket appreciation of all aspects of socialism and socialist governments. However, he has provided evidence of a more complicated, considered view of the issues. Strangely, he once said that East Germans (under Communism) were the saddest people he had ever seen.[20] Minta, in his extensive analysis of his politics, believes García Márquez has tended to be uncritical of socialist regimes, even where they have turned out to be failures, because of a desire to acknowledge the inherent difficulties in meeting socialist ideals. He has long since stepped back from labelling himself as a communist; when asked about his political affiliation in an interview in 1972 he claimed to be a communist, but in 1983 he said he was not.[21] It may of course be politic to avoid any alignment with organised political parties of the day, since what appears to frustrate García Márquez from

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[19] Gabriel García Márquez, *Clandestine in Chile*, trans. Asa Zatz (Cambridge/Harmondsworth: Granta/Penguin, 1989). First published as *La aventura de Miguel Littín, clandestino en Chile* (Madrid: El País, 1986).
[20] See Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 53.
[21] See Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 55.

one decade to the next, is the dearth of constructive debate on the issues most pressing to his country and others in similar circumstances. Minta also feels that to be politically labelled would reduce his sphere of influence. However, the Cuban Revolution has been a great influence on García Márquez. He has enjoyed a long friendship with Fidel Castro, and did at first, after the revolution, work for the Cuban press agency, Prensa Latina, for two years, with a view to providing an alternative source of information to the existing hostile ones.

The importance of journalism to García Márquez has already been established, but equally significant is his strong sense of the interrelatedness of literature and journalism. He says: '[t]he more I live and remember things from the past, the more I think that literature and journalism are closely related'.[22] When asked, '[d]o you think the novel can do certain things that journalism can't?' he responds, '[n]othing. I don't think there is any difference. The sources are the same, the material is the same, the resources and the language are the same'. The interviewer then presses him further, asking whether 'the journalist and the novelist have different responsibilities in balancing truth versus the imagination', to which he replies, '[i]n journalism just one fact that is false prejudices the entire work. In contrast, in fiction one single fact that is true gives legitimacy to the entire work'.[23] To explore the interface and cross-currents between the two kinds of texts, as García Márquez has done even from the start of his writing career, is an exciting and challenging undertaking, and is by no means an adulteration of either genre, but to argue that there is *nothing* that literature can do which journalism cannot, is to devalue both forms of writing. There is an automatic assumption on García Márquez's part that his faculties are such that he is in full possession of complete knowledge of the import of what he writes. Yet, in this same interview it becomes apparent, as he himself admits, that he was not always cognisant of some of the latent content of his

[22] Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 326.
[23] Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 318.

own fiction, of which he says: 'I came to see that in fact my writings about my childhood were *more* political and had more to do with the reality of my country than I had thought'.[24] He acknowledges that at the time of writing fictions such as *Leaf Storm,* he had been under the impression he was evading writing about political realities by concentrating on his childhood and the village where he lived, only later realising the political element was there. This acknowledgement should have alerted the author to the wider significance of political subtexts. This minor disclosure, coupled with García Márquez's dismissal of the critics, reveals his intellectual distaste for the subtextual meanings which critical analysis can locate:

> I really have no interest in what critics think of me; nor have I read critics in many years. They have claimed for themselves the task of being intermediaries between the author and the reader. I've always tried to be a very clear and precise writer, trying to reach the reader directly without having to go through the critic.[25]

Without doubting the writer's intention to be 'clear and precise', it is of course impossible to accept this unsophisticated conception of literature in this age, given the level of intellectual debate now in existence on the subject of literary interpretation. Moreover, he says 'unlike novelists critics find what they want to in books, not what is there'.[26]

Before going on to analyse the literature, I will provide some brief contextual information on Colombia. Observed from any angle, Colombian history is saturated with violence. Drake attacked Riohacha in the late sixteenth century; Colombia declared its independence from Spain in 1810 when Napoleon ousted the Spanish King; it was reconquered by General Murillo in 1815; Simón Bolívar liberated the country in 1820 and became its first president; in 1849 the Liberals and Conservative parties formed, and they continue to dominate the political system. Neither party has a good record of government, both tending to fall prey to

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[24] Plimpton, *Writers at Work,* p. 323.
[25] Plimpton, *Writers at Work,* p. 332.
[26] Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava,* p. 72.

corruption and abuses of power. Their ideological differences have been eroded through the years. Despite a postcolonial history of democracy, the country has been plunged into civil wars at frequent intervals ever since it gained its independence from Spain. A dualism at the heart of Colombian society is at least partly responsible for this. The country is divided into two groups which are geographically as well as culturally distinct: the highlanders and the coastal people. The Andean Highlanders, or *cachacos,* of the interior are mainly descended from the Spanish, and are considered reactionary and inward-looking; the people from the tropical, lowland, coastal regions known as *costeños* are more ethnically mixed, consisting of indigenous Guajiro Native Americans and descendants from African and Hispanic peoples. This population is considered more open, progressive, outgoing, and has a lively popular culture akin to other parts of the Caribbean. Both groups use the terms *cachacos* and *costeños* perjoratively when referring to each other. The tropical Caribbean part of Colombia has traditionally tended to support the Liberals, whereas the highlanders have been Conservative. Kathleen McNerney indicates the contrast in a brief description of musical styles:

> The differences in types of popular music are symbolic illustrations: while the gay, carefree, rhythmic cumbia, with its African influences, and the national dance that goes with it, characterize the Caribbean coast, slow-moving, almost funereal music is more typical of the highlands.[27]

García Márquez has his roots in the Caribbean side of the divide, and has made his affinity with it clear in his work, describing himself as a *costeño* and a *mestizo.*

During this century, Colombia has seen, besides the War of a Thousand Days at the turn of the century, a period of prolonged upheaval known as *la violencia.* This erupted after the death of Gaitán in 1948 and lasted until 1962. Up to 300,000 people died.[28] During this time the dictator, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla held

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[27] Kathleen McNerney, *Understanding Gabriel García Márquez* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 6.
[28] William Rowe, 'Gabriel García Márquez', in *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey,* ed. King, p. 198.

power, between 1953-7. Many of these events find their way into the fiction of García Márquez.

Textual Analysis:

One Hundred Years of Solitude

Solitude is a story which begins, *ab ovo,* with the founding of a small Arcadian community named Macondo, and ends six generations later with the complete destruction of the town in an apocalyptic storm. The steady development of Macondo is charted through a focus on the Buendía family and their experiences of the numerous transformations traditionally deemed, by the West, to mark the transition from primitive life to civilisation. However, the movement towards mechanisation, bringing with it large scale, neo-colonial multinational companies, along with a great deal of prolonged in-fighting between the political parties, produces a situation where the pleasures and benefits of 'progress' are obliterated by the harsh realities of abused power and postcolonial struggles, producing only pain and misery for the inhabitants.

Solitude has a panoramic sweep, encompassing civil wars, exploitation by United States companies, the imposition of the rule of law, the romantic entanglements of various characters, the disappointment and dejection in the face of 'progress', the visits of a troupe of gypsies, and a set of historic, oracular manuscripts. The novel is too full of incident, and too vast, to summarise easily, but the following précis gives some of the major points of interest. A newly married couple, named Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía, who are also cousins, desist from consummating their

marriage for some time because of a fear that their progeny may bear tails, signifying incest. After suffering humiliating taunts from Prudencio Aguilar, a neighbour, José Arcadio kills him. As a result, the couple set out with a group of people to establish a new settlement. Macondo is, at first, an idyllic place, but gradually becomes immersed in prolonged civil conflicts. The 'gringos' arrive to exploit the banana crop, bringing the railroad and other signs of 'development'. A strike is called, as the workers protest about their exploitation, but it achieves nothing and a massacre ensues. Rain falls, in true realist fashion, for exactly four years, eleven months and two days, bringing complete devastation to the town which is finally destroyed in an apocalyptic whirlwind. The novel's characters are, to some extent, rather archetypal figures, and are numerous. There is no single hero or heroine, although the tough, wise matriarch, Úrsula Buendía comes close. Her husband is quixotic and ridiculous, and they have a daughter, the bitter and twisted Amaranta, whose name is ironic, as the Spanish 'amar' means 'to love'. Their sons, José Arcadio and Aureliano, have distinctive physical characteristics and personalities, the former being a *macho* prototype, and the latter becoming the legendary, mysterious, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, who leads the Liberals in the civil conflicts. Their offspring and other interesting characters, such as Rebeca, Remedios the Beauty, Pilar Ternera, the prostitute, as well as the remarkably prescient gypsy, Melquíades, make up the rich mosaic of the story.

The narrative style of *Solitude* is deceptively simple. It is one which García Márquez claims he has derived from his grandmother's storytelling, and it does have a certain quality of orature or the oral epic. This tends to give a deeply deceptive impression of spontaneity and lack of structuration. Although the novel is intelligently structured, that there are twenty unnumbered chapters may not be evident at first to the reader. It contains a highly coherent, diagrammatic organisation which, combined with the fact that Macondo goes through a full cycle from edenic beginnings to an apocalyptic closure, led Vargas Llosa to describe it as

a 'total novel'. William Rowe describes its 'prodigious narrative energy';[29] McMurray admires its 'volcanic vitality';[30] undoubtedly, it is a fast-paced narrative. Bell has observed what he describes as 'carefully curtailed omniscience' in García Márquez's writing. There is little guidance for the reader from the narrator. His novels are not novels of thesis. Bell, writing about the dialogue of García Márquez's characters, claims it 'typically tends to the lapidary and the aphoristic'.[31] Direct speech is something of a rarity in *Solitude*, and this has certain effects, one being the dominance in the narrative of the storytelling gene. Another is the lack of insight, on the reader's part, into the characters' inner lives; they have an 'inviolability', as Bell says, an integrity that cannot be broken apart. This estrangement, due to the epic quality of the narrative in which characters are shown from the outside, does not weaken the narrative style, however, but merely shows us their solitude. Bell argues the characters have a reserve:

> It is not a baring of the soul, or an elaboration of a view, so much as the summary expression of an inner process which could not perhaps be made either fully conscious or fully rational. It preserves its own mystery and asks to be met by its hearer in the same spirit.[32]

It is also the structure of feeling which is the expression of an inner process, namely the processing of the experience of postcolonialism that is not represented in the form of an argument, but experientially and structurally in fictional form.

Solitude, despite its author's apparent anti-intellectual stance, does amount to more than the sum of its parts. There is a sense in which other comments, made by García Márquez himself, add weight to the idea that a structure of feeling is present unknown to the author at the time of writing. Intuition, he says, is fundamental to a fiction writer, and

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[29] Rowe, 'Gabriel García Márquez', p. 193.
[30] McMurray, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 103.
[31] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 145.
[32] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 145.

> ...is a special quality which helps you to decipher what is real without needing scientific knowledge, or any other special kind of learning. The laws of gravity can be figured out much more easily with intuition than anything else. It's a way of having experience without having to struggle through it. For a novelist, intuition is essential. Basically it's contrary to intellectualism...[33]

He claims he cannot understand theorists and dislikes them, that he has no aptitude for abstract thinking, preferring to relate anecdotes. On the one hand, this highlighting of intuition exposes García Márquez's humility, but on the other, it implies some novelists have a quality which is *other* to intellectualism, and whatever it is: insight, genius, sensitivity, or extra antennae, it enables them to produce some of the best literature of their age. However, to argue for such a prominent role for intuition is again to concede that the writer does not always know, on an intellectual level, what it is s/he does; there may be elements in the text the writer does not recognise as bearing significance, and again, these can be structures of feeling. Following Barthes's arguments, no writer is entirely aware of the long-term meanings generated by any given text.

Solitude relates to and helps to construct a contemporary structure of feeling. On publication, the novel was an immediate success which, as Carlos Fuentes says, is comparable in the Hispanic world to only *Don Quixote*. This was due,

> ...to the element of immediate recognition present in the book. There is a joyous rediscovery of identity here, an instant reflex by which we are presented, in the genealogies of Macondo, to our grandmas, our sweethearts, our brothers and sisters, our nursemaids. Today, twenty years after the fact, we can see clearly that there was more than instant anagnorisis in the García Márquez phenomenon...'[34]

The phrase 'instant anagnorisis', of course, suggests the massive success of the text derived from the readers' sense of overwhelming recognition. Yet in 1967, when the novel was published, the peoples of South America knew the contemporary reality as they were living it, but even so, according to Fuentes, it appeared like a

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[33] Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, p. 332.
[34] Fuentes, 'Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America', p. 9.

revelation. Although dictionaries define anagnorisis bluntly as merely 'recognition', it derives from Aristotle's application of the term to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Whilst accepting that Oedipus is a textual construct, unlike the readership of South and Central America, there is an analogy to be found here. García Márquez located a structure of feeling in his novel, which although it was being lived through by millions, was expressed by him in a way it never had been before, and this articulation provided the 'instant anagnorisis' which Fuentes perceives. I will now examine a number of areas in which the structure of feeling is revealed.

A great many oppositions feature in the novel, but when analysed in any detail they begin to dissolve, as I demonstrate in the following section on indeterminacy. There is a large scale opposition between civilisation and nature. From the beginning, the characters struggle to make their mark on the planet, and nature fights to reclaim everything. Like the opera house overgrown by jungle in *Flaubert's Parrot*, the environment seems hostile and has to be kept at bay. There is also an opposition between men and women, who have sharply contrasting characteristics. The women are largely practical and sensible, whereas the men are flighty, unreliable, and become embroiled in all kinds of unhelpful and doomed enterprises. For example, José Arcadio Buendía spends his time trying either to invent impossible contraptions or artefacts already in existence elsewhere in the world. He tries to turn base metals into gold, with ridiculous consequences; he believes he can prove the existence of God by capturing Him in a daguerreotype. Meanwhile, Úrsula and the children break their backs growing food in the garden. While he uses up her life's savings in his absurd schemes, she establishes a successful business in candy animals. The men of the Buendía family seem to be of two types, indicated by their names, as if there is some predestination operating: '[w]hile the Aurelianos were withdrawn, but with lucid minds, the José Arcadios were impulsive and enterprising, but they were marked with a tragic sign' (p. 152).

Oppositional economic relations in *Solitude* are best exemplified through an analysis of the role of the United Fruit Company in Macondo. To mention the very existence of The United Fruit Company in South America is political. It was a company that established and maintained the hold of the tentacles of United States economic imperialism. Owing to its near monopoly it could control prices. As the setting is obviously a postcolonial one, the kind of trading practices depicted may be described as economic imperialism or as neo-imperialism, rather than colonialism proper. An obvious opposition is established between the workers and the employers. Tantalisingly, at first the company appears to offer work, prosperity and modern technology. The workers involved in cutting and loading bananas strike, hoping to gain the privilege of having Sunday as a day of rest, and José Arcadio Segundo leads the union in its fight against the banana company. McNerney provides some historical data which serve to show the remarkably far-reaching effect of this type of company:

> United Fruit Company began operations at the turn of the century and by the 1930s controlled 60 percent of the banana trade world wide. It owned three-quarters of the banana-producing land in the province of Magdalena by 1938 and controlled much of the train system in Colombia, so that noncompany fruit could not be shipped. For a period of eight years it paid no export taxes. The peak years were the 1920s, when increasing construction caused a labor shortage, which in turn resulted in a certain labor militancy. But the laborers were no match for the powers against them, and the sad results of their struggles form a pattern constantly repeated in other Latin American countries as well.[35]

After the massacre of the demonstrating workers, which is witnessed by José Arcadio Segundo and a small child, and the subsequent blanket silence and official denial, a torrential rain follows, ostensibly begun by the scientists of the banana company. It continues for five years, symbolising the devastation caused by economic imperialism, as obviously, through a wider lens, this episode can be seen as representative of the stresses and strains that become apparent when a developed

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[35] McNerney, *Understanding Gabriel García Márquez*, pp. 29-30.

country, meeting an undeveloped one, tries to impose its methods and market philosophy without regard for local exigencies.

The massacre of the workers and its aftermath, involving the disposal of the bodies, is one of the few descriptions of carnage in the novel, and is the most graphic:

> Several voices shouted at the same time:
> 'Get down! Get down!'
> The people in front had already done so, swept down by the wave of bullets. The survivors, instead of getting down, tried to go back to the small square, and the panic became a dragon's tail as one compact wave ran against another which was moving in the opposite direction, towards the other dragon's tail in the street across the way, where the machine guns where also firing without cease. They were penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicentre as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns. [...]
> When José Arcadio Segundo came to he was lying face up in the darkness. He realized that he was riding on an endless and silent train and that his head was caked with dry blood and that all his bones ached. He felt an intolerable desire to sleep. Prepared to sleep for many hours, safe from the terror and the horror, he made himself comfortable on the side that pained him less, and only then did he discover that he was lying against dead people. There was no free space in the car except for an aisle in the middle. Several hours must have passed since the massacre because the corpses had the same temperature as plaster in autumn... [pp. 249-50]

However, the density of metaphors and similes in this passage effectively makes the scene less graphic and more poetic so, despite the obvious horror of the event, an inexplicable beauty is evoked. The dragon's tail and the whirlwind remove us from the immediacy of the pain and suffering. These incidents have a strange resonance, as the fictional world is in some way impinging on the construction of the real world. Minta examines the historical information available on the events of 6 December 1928 at Ciénaga in Colombia, when striking banana workers were fired upon.[36] Accounts of the number of fatalities differ widely. Cortés Vargas, who gave the orders to fire, claims nine people died, but it is widely held that a conspiracy of silence has meant that the 'truth' will never be known. Attempts of writers to raise

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[36] Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, pp. 163-72.

the profile of such tragic events have been successful: a monument was erected in Ciénaga, and on the fiftieth anniversary 8,000 people gathered to remember the dead. The difficulty of establishing the truth, when so many opposing narratives are either deliberately or unwittingly told, is one of the lessons to be deduced from this terrible episode. The stark opposition of worker and owner ends up in a terrible indeterminacy and confusion, where the truth of the massacre is a casualty.

Solitude contains many incidents which can be found all along the spectrum from preternatural to natural. The following is an illustration of the preternatural at work. In order to raise funds for the building of a new church, the priest levitates, 'by means of chocolate', considering this feat to be 'an undeniable proof of the infinite power of God'. After drinking a cup of hot chocolate,

> ...he wiped his lips with a handkerchief that he drew from his sleeve, extended his arms, and closed his eyes. Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground. It was a convincing measure. He went among the houses for several days repeating the demonstration of levitation by means of chocolate while the acolyte collected so much money in a bag that in less than a month he began the construction of the church. [p. 74]

This incident is not a *reported* sighting, but an event related in detail by the omniscient narrator. That the levitation is precipitated by such a mundane and homely activity as drinking hot chocolate makes it humorous, although the characters do not share this humour with us. To them, this ability is not hugely remarkable, but it does spur them into giving donations. The tone in which the scene is related is characteristic of this novel, being rather dry, and tending to debunk what otherwise may prove to be a sense of wonder. The preternatural is understated, and is mentioned seemingly *en passant*, or in incidental detail. For example, the flying carpet 'went swiftly by the laboratory at window level carrying the gypsy who was driving it' (p. 33). Again, many characters witness this incident, but more importantly, the narrator asserts unequivocally that it is happening. The use of the prosaic word 'driving' adds to the humour of the incident.

One key preternatural incident takes place later in the story, when one of the women, known as Remedios the Beauty, ascends to the skies:

> ...Amaranta noticed that Remedios the Beauty was covered all over by an intense paleness.
>
> 'Don't you feel well?' she asked her.
>
> Remedios the Beauty, who was clutching the sheet by the other end, gave a pitying smile.
>
> 'Quite the opposite', she said, 'I never felt better.'
>
> She had just finished saying it when Fernanda felt a delicate wind of light pull the sheets out of her hands and open them up wide. Amaranta felt a mysterious trembling in the lace on her petticoats and she tried to grasp the sheet so that she would not fall down at the instant in which Remedios the Beauty began to rise. Úrsula, almost blind at the time, was the only person who was sufficiently calm to identify the nature of that determined wind and she left the sheets to the mercy of the light as she watched Remedios the Beauty waving goodbye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her, abandoning with her the environment of beetles and dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o'clock in the afternoon came to an end, and they were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest-flying birds of memory could reach her. [p. 195]

Almost everyone appears to believe this incident to be true, and the implied reader does too, as it has been mimetically conveyed. It is on these occasions that the reader tends to believe, rather than in the diegetically related events, or those reported by other characters. In this example, there are some who do not believe the story, and who suspect the whole episode has been invented to hide the fact that Remedios 'had finally succumbed to her irrevocable fate of a queen bee and that her family was trying to save her honour with that tale of levitation' (p. 195). It was part of folklore in Colombia that unmarried pregnant girls were said to have miraculously ascended to the skies, when in reality, they had been spirited away to convents to avoid bringing shame on their families. The non-believers do not witness the spectacle.

Following the mysterious death of José Arcadio, there is a strange occurrence as his blood threads its way through the streets:

> As soon as José Arcadio closed the bedroom door the sound of a pistol shot echoed thought the house. A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living-room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendía house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlour, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living- room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch, with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta's chair as she gave an arithmetic lesson to Aureliano José, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Úrsula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread. [pp. 113-4]

This event is surely preternatural, but the verisimilitude of such incidents makes them acceptable to the reader. The minute detail used in this description makes it all the more credible, and reminds us this is a kind of realist text. The narrator even gives the precise number of eggs Úrsula is cracking into a bowl. That blood could run down a slope for a distance is not doubted, but that it could perform feats of turning right angles and climbing over curbs pushes this incident beyond the realm of the natural. The blood also appears to be personified, or at least to have some sort of will, as it hugs the walls to avoid staining the carpets, giving it a bizarrely domesticated air. *Solitude* is a text that excels in such pushing of the boundaries.

There are a number of incidents which, although not preternatural, can be described as freak occurrences. For example, towards the end a child is born with a tail, the dreaded signification of incest:

> Only when they turned him on his stomach did they see that he had something more than other men, and they leaned over to examine him. It was the tail of a pig. [p. 332].

Although this is an extremely rare occurrence, it is not fantastical, and verification can be found in the *British Medical Journal* of 1988, which gives details of a child having a 'tail' removed.[37] Only the idea that it symbolises incestuous relations is entirely false, and even then the tail serves a metonymic function, since incest does have biological consequences.

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[37] See Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 60.

In the following episode, there is a problem in deciding whether this is an illustration of a preternatural event or merely a freak incident possibly caused by bizarre weather conditions. It follows the peaceful death of José Arcadio Buendía:

> A short time later, when the carpenter was taking measurements for the coffin, through the window they saw a light rain of tiny yellow flowers falling. They fell on the town all through the night in a silent storm, and they covered the roofs and blocked the doors and smothered the animals who slept outdoors. So many flowers fell from the sky that in the morning the streets were carpeted with a compact cushion and they had to clear them away with shovels and rakes so that the funeral procession could pass by. [p. 120]

The flowers are appropriate in the sad circumstances, and the way they fill the roads where the coffin passes provides a beautiful visual scene. The old man had suffered the indignity of being tied to a chestnut tree in his senile last years, and the sympathy with which Nature treats his passing is touching as well as remarkable. However, the dualism of beauty and horror is evident here, as the flowers asphyxiate the animals.

Some incidents are extremely difficult to place on this continuum owing to the conflicting cultural codes in the text. There are grey areas between categories at the preternatural end of the continuum. As demonstrated, at times the reader is not sure whether a preternatural event is happening within the world of the text, never mind whether it could happen in the real world. One illustration of this point is the sighting of the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, who was killed by José Arcadio Buendía. Both he and Úrsula, see the ghost at various times, but attribute the sight of it to their guilt: '[t]his just means that we can't stand the weight of our conscience' (p. 25), says José Arcadio, but '[h]e never slept well after that' (p. 26). Two frames of reference are evident here. Firstly, a psychological analysis might reveal the insufferable burden of guilt did indeed cause the bizarre 'sightings' or hallucinations, and there is other evidence that José Arcadio is mentally unstable; the indefatigable Úrsula, on the other hand, is one of the sanest characters in six

generations of Buendías. Although the characters talk about the ghost in terms suggesting they have a psychological explanation, they also take the sightings literally; they think the ghost really is there and so, on some level, within the world of the text, the ghost *is* real, an interpretation the narrator seems to support.

On Melquíades' first visit, he introduces the magnet to the people of Macondo as 'the eighth wonder of the learned alchemists of Macedonia'. These magnets do indeed have magnetic powers as we would expect, but,

> ...everybody was amazed to see pots, pans, tongs and braziers tumble down from their places and beams creak from the desperation of nails and screws trying to emerge. [p. 9]

The magnets appear to be more powerful than we would have imagined. The reader momentarily experiences a feeling of superiority to the impressionable, simple people of Macondo, to whom magnets are a new marvel. Yet, as the episode unfolds, we find ourselves surprised, as the magnets have a far greater capacity for attracting objects than we have ever experienced. Melquíades does not have a scientific explanation for the phenomenon; instead he provides a rather mystical one: he claims '[t]hings have a life of their own', and that it is 'simply a matter of waking up their souls' (p. 9), indicating a blurring of the boundaries between inanimate and animate objects.

An example of hyperbole appears to be found in the proleptic account of the life of Colonel Aureliano Buendía who,

> ...organized thirty-two armed uprisings and he lost them all. He had seventeen male children by seventeen different women and they were exterminated one after the other on a single night before the oldest one had reached the age of thirty-five. He survived fourteen attempts on his life, seventy-three ambushes, and a firing squad. He lived through a dose of strychnine in his coffee that was enough to kill a horse. He refused the Order of Merit, which the President of the Republic awarded him. He rose to be Commander-in-Chief of the revolutionary forces, with jurisdiction and command from one border to the other, and the man most feared by the government, but he never let himself be photographed. [p. 91]

Strangely enough, the interest of this seemingly exaggerated catalogue of disasters lies in its probable truth; the irony is, that whilst it may be perceived as hyperbole, it could actually be true, or if it is not, it could be true within the paradigms which govern the construction of the legendary. Whilst not every one of the seventy-three ambushes is described in the novel, the reader later knows that Aureliano does have seventeen male children, so at least some of this is verifiable. There is ambiguity nonetheless, as not all of these incidents are accounted for in the story, and yet the exactness of the numbers lends a reportage-like credibility to the account. As with the preternatural-versus-natural intrigue in *The Kingdom of This World,* the situation of reader in the text can influence interpretation. On first coming across this condensed version of the Colonel's life, the reader may be very sceptical, but eventually, once the more detailed account has been read, it appears more credible.

Highly poetic language, especially the use of metaphor, can have the effect of evoking the preternatural. Wood argues *Solitude* presents a 'world where the imaginary and the figurative are seriously entertained and not visibly discriminated against'.[38] The reader is presented with difficulties when there is some ambiguity as to whether an event is literally happening or whether the effect is that produced by figures of speech. For example, when the grief-stricken Rebeca is described as having a 'heart turned to ash', the reader is not particularly struck by a metaphor that would not be out of place in a realist novel, but then we are told,

> ...she had found peace in that house where memories materialized through the strength of implacable evocation and walked like human beings through the cloistered rooms. [p. 133]

This gives a much more ambiguous picture, and the reader is unsure of how literally it should be taken. Similarly, Pilar Ternera is described having thought that 'was perfectly visible, as if exposed to the light of noon' (p. 69). When she falls in love with Aureliano José it is evident that 'like all men sent by the cards he reached her

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[38] Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude,* p. 49.

heart when he was already stamped with the mark of death. She saw it in the cards' (p. 130). Appropriately enough, shortly afterwards he is shot dead.

In a sense, all language is figurative because every utterance is constituted by signs. Nevertheless, figures of speech in the traditional sense, are used extensively, and this highly metaphorical language blurs the lines of demarcation between the natural and the preternatural. Consequently, it is not always possible to reduce, categorise and compartmentalise events in these texts. Faris, as we have seen, observes this phenomenon, noting the nature of language, and the capacity of magical realism to obfuscate the boundaries between literal and metaphorical language, describing it as 'verbal magic' occurring 'when a metaphor is made real'.[39] Using the incident from *Solitude* in which José Arcadio's blood trickles through the streets to his mother, Faris suggests this 'literalization' appears to make physical the metaphor that blood is thicker than water. Her example does not work on quite the same level as the others given here, since there is no confusion or doubt about whether the blood actually does run through the streets to Úrsula. However, to use blood as an indicator of family ties is not entirely metaphorical, as blood has a relationship of contiguity to kinship. It could even be described as a kind of umbilical cord. This conflation of metaphor and metonymy demonstrates the disguised complexity of García Márquez's writing.

The next extract reveals the Borgesian worlds-within-worlds phenomenon found at various points. Here, José Arcadio Buendía is in a dream state, but nonetheless, the episode shows the importance of mirrors, repetition, the concept of infinity, and different levels of reality:

> When he was alone, José Arcadio Buendía consoled himself with the dream of the infinite rooms. He dreamed that he was getting out of bed, opening the door and going into an identical room with the same bed with a wrought-iron

[39] Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children', p. 176.

> head, the same wicker chair, and the same small picture of the Virgin of Help on the back wall. From that room he would go into another that was just the same, the door of which would open into another one just the same, and then into another exactly alike, and so on to infinity. He liked to go from room to room, as in a gallery of parallel mirrors, until Prudencio Aguilar would touch him on the shoulder. Then he would go back from room to room, walking in reverse, going back over his trail, and he would find Prudencio Aguilar in the room of reality. [pp. 119-120]

As we have seen, Prudencio, oddly enough, is a ghost, despite his apparent connection with reality. Ironically, the imagery of this dream seems to belie rather than confirm the madness of José Arcadio Buendía, as indeed does the incident in which he declares the earth is round like an orange, an announcement that convinces the rest of the community of his madness. However, one night 'Prudencio Aguilar touched his shoulder in an intermediate room and he stayed there forever, thinking that it was the real room' (p. 120). The implications of being stuck in a dream are themselves mind-bending. However, his madness is suspect, and the constructed, socially determined nature of madness is revealed in the way his family treat him, although there is no intention to be unkind. Shortly afterwards, the reader finds that José Arcadio Buendía is in fact dead.

In order to look more closely at the magical realist structure of feeling in this novel I will analyse the treatment of three areas: solitude, life/death, and party politics. Solitude has a major role to play, and solitude/solidarity form a part of the structure of feeling, since they can be placed in an oppositional relation. However, the ambivalence, or the dualism at the heart of the word, solitude, is also fundamental to the structure of feeling. It has in Spanish a more profound meaning than it tends to have in English translation. This is an aspect Wood considers:

> *Soledad* is an alluring, mournful, much-used Spanish noun, suggesting both a doom and a solace, a flight from love but also from lies, a claim to dignity which is also a submission to neglect.[40]

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[40] Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 34.

Vargas Llosa, in a short paean entitled 'Amadís in America',[41] interprets the 'ominous stigma: Solitude' of the Buendías as an expression of alienation. Solitude is a consequence of the ignorance of one's history, of one's culture and therefore, one's identity, Vargas Llosa suggests. In this novel, he claims, there is an excellent 'portrayal of the moral helplessness' of the people:

> They all fight, love, gamble away their very lives in crazy or admirable ventures. The result is always the same: frustration, unhappiness. They are all, sooner or later, ridiculed, humiliated, beaten in all they undertake. From the founder of the dynasty, who never finds the way to the sea, to the last Buendía, who is lost with Macondo, snatched away by the wind, at the very moment when he discovers the key to wisdom, they are all born and all die, despite their titanic abilities and their Gargantuan achievements, without achieving the most simple and basic of human ambitions: happiness. In Macondo, that land where everything is possible, there is nevertheless no place for solidarity or communication between men. A tenacious sadness, a continual sense of failure and catastrophe, tarnishes all they do, all they dream of. What is happening? In Wonderland, everything obeys secret, invisible, ominous laws which are beyond the Macondianos' control, which manipulate them and decide for them: no-one is free. Even in their bacchanalia, when they eat and drink like Pantagruel or mate like insatiable rabbits, they find neither themselves nor real pleasure: they are simply carrying out a ceremonial ritual whose deeper meaning proves impenetrable to them. Isn't this precisely the tragic destiny which represents, on an individual level, the drama of Latin America? Don't the great stigmas that destroy our lands - submission to a foreign metropolis, the predominance of local castes, ignorance, backwardness - perhaps point to the way that man as a moral being is crippled and stripped of his identity, and to that hypnotic daze of the sleepwalker which degrades American life in all its expressions?[42]

Janes points out that 'solitude' appears 'promiscuously on every page':[43]

> Unitary as a word or concept, "solitude" is never defined in the novel but splinters into many solitudes. There are solitudes of study, work, power, and love, as well as the great solitude of death and the greater solitude of oblivion. Solitary or shared, solitude may signify a narcissistic turning away from others or an abandonment by others. Negative insofar as it implies an absence of solidarity and community with other people, solitude is also a source of serenity, an end to pain, and a necessary (though not sufficient) means to insight.[44]

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[41] 'Amadís in America', trans. Seren Hall, in *García Márquez*, ed. Robert Fiddian (London & New York: Longman, 1995). Originally published as 'El Amadís en América', in *Sobre García Márquez*, ed. Pedro Simón Martínez (Montevideo: Marcha, 1971).

[42] Vargas Llosa, 'Amadís in America', pp. 61-2.

[43] Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 44.

[44] Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 42.

Two further critics who have addressed the theme of solitude are Stephen Minta and Michael Bell. Minta's view is more pessimistic, in regarding solitude, in part, as an inability to love (lust and obsession, however, are in no short supply); Bell deals with solitude and solidarity together suggesting a complex relationship between them. Minta, then, argues the novel is 'about the solitude of a family, a town, a nation, and, ultimately, a whole continent'.[45] He identifies Colonel Aureliano Buendía as the character who best embodies the solitude that pervades the novel. He is generally considered to be based on General Rafael Uribe Uribe, who led the Liberals in the War of a Thousand Days, 1899-1902. As a young man, Aureliano is indifferent to politics, becoming a Liberal only after witnessing a demonstration of the dishonesty of the Conservatives at election time, when his father-in-law opens the ballot boxes and removes some of the papers. Minta's view of the Colonel is that he goes through a process of 'disintegration as a human being'.[46] He looks at the oblivion in which his life is about to end and he sees 'the face of his miserable solitude'; eventually his name is forgotten, despite his enemies naming a street after him. Aureliano, says Minta, 'is dead, overcome by the terrifying nothingness that he has made of life, or that life has made of him'.[47] Bell argues solitude is 'the central motif of Márquez' *oeuvre*'.[48] His analysis of solitude takes into account its oppositional relation to solidarity. He claims the novel works on an emotional level, arguing García Márquez's vision of history is presented in 'the light of deep emotional structures'. Nostalgia haunts the Buendías; it is their 'besetting sin' and is also 'the powerful, but critically self-conscious, emotion of the narrative'.[49] For Bell, it is Melquíades who is the focus of solitude in the story:

> In the double enclosure of the inner room and the incomprehensible parchments, Melquíades focuses the ambivalence of the narrative structure and of the central term 'solitude'. For solitude seems not an entirely bad thing for

[45] Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 148.
[46] Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 161.
[47] Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 162.
[48] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 68.
[49] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 67.

> Márquez; as indeed we might perhaps expect in a culture where the writer's own sister is called Soledad.[50]

In linking solitude and solidarity, Bell claims, '[w]riting is a homeopathic form of solitude which serves an ultimate purpose of solidarity'. Melquiádes uses solitude for purposes of creativity: 'he is the image of the writer as one whose meaning is incomprehensible until the reader has actually lived the experience'.[51]

Aureliano Buendía, one of the characters who best exemplifies solitude, long before he ever becomes a Colonel, shows a sad and solitary character. Even in the womb, we are told he shed tears. Increasing power leaves him increasingly isolated, until he imposes a physical separation between himself and other people:

> ...he decided that no human being, not even Úrsula, could come closer to him than ten feet. In the centre of the chalk circle that his aides would draw wherever he stopped, and which only he could enter, he would decide, with brief orders that had no appeal, the fate of the world. [p. 139]

This chalk circle symbolises his solitude, which becomes all-pervasive as his military career progresses. His reputation is not based on his success as a general, but on his failure: he has organised thirty-two armed uprisings and lost them all, but it is his ability to survive that makes him legendary. He is never injured, except for the gunshot wound he inflicts on himself when the bullet fortuitously goes through his chest and out of his back, missing all internal organs. When he faces the oft-mentioned firing squad, the soldiers 'did not dare carry out the sentence' (p. 109), because of anticipated sanguinary repercussions. His seventeen sons, all by different women, can all be identified as blood relatives of Aureliano simply by their look of solitude. All the women who have visited him in the night 'had left no trace in his feelings' (p. 145); he is described as 'trying to break the hard shell of his solitude' (p. 142); a colleague warns him he is 'rotting alive' (p. 139); Úrsula, his mother, sees he is a man who is 'capable of anything' (p. 133), except love. Only she can

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[50] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 68.
[51] Bell, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 68.

reach through his solitude, but he reaches a point where he realises he does not even feel sympathy for her, even though 'he made one last effort to search in his heart for the place where his affection had rotted away and he could not find it' (p. 145). Becoming a legend in his own lifetime merely adds to his isolation, so that 'the aura of legend that glowed about his presence and of which even Úrsula was aware, changed him into a stranger in the end' (p. 143). After the wars, Aureliano retreats to his workshop, the place where he spent his youth, passing his time meticulously crafting little gold fishes:

> He needed so much concentration to link scales, fit minute rubies into the eyes, laminate gills, and put on fins that there was not the smallest empty moment left for him to fill with his disillusionment of the war. [p. 166]

Yet, this strategy, aimed at filling the awful vacuum in his life, merely confirms the awfulness of the solitude he endures. Finally, he is awarded 'with a peace of the spirit'; he understands 'the secret of a good old age is simply an honourable pact with solitude' (p. 166). One day, going to the door to watch a circus parade:

> He saw a woman dressed in gold sitting on the head of an elephant. He saw a sad dromedary. He saw a bear dressed like a Dutch girl keeping time to the music with a soup spoon and a pan. He saw the clowns doing cartwheels at the end of the parade and once more he saw the face of his miserable solitude when everything had passed by and there was nothing but the bright expanse of the street and the air full of flying ants with a few onlookers peering into the precipice of uncertainty. [p. 218]

The intrusion of the carnivalesque, in the form of a circus parade, merely underlines the depth of his solitude. It also hints at the nonsense which is his life: the absurdity and the meaninglessness. Shortly afterwards, he dies alone, the vultures circling overhead signifying to others that he is dead. Only two generations later he has been forgotten. In an ironic twist, towards the end of the novel, Aureliano, trying to piece together his family tree is told by a priest not to wear himself out over it: '[m]any years ago there used to be a street here with that name and in those days people had the custom of naming their children after streets' (p. 330), again

showing solitude persists and even worsens after death. Once people are out of living memory, it is as though they never existed.

The pervasive, haunting presence of solitude is an expression of a structure of feeling in which alienation results from the experience of postcolonialism. Once indigenous civilisation was vanquished, the Iberian culture, with which it was replaced, sat uneasily in its new environment. Solitude evinces a kind of ambivalence: on the one hand, through the isolation it achieves, it gains a kind of identity, and on the other, it separates the continent off from its blood relatives on the Iberian peninsula and the Latino communities of the United States. This narcissism of the Macondianos is also evident in their incestuous relations. Solitude, or alienation, as it might coarsely be translated, represents the structure of feeling of the postcolonial society. Solitude was the subject of García Márquez's speech upon acceptance of the Nobel Prize. He claimed:

> ...our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, has been the crux of our solitude.[52]

In his use of magical realism, he has addressed the lack of Latin American modes of expression, providing one significant new avenue.

Another manifestation of the postcolonial structure of feeling is found in those monumental subjects, life and death, and if ever there were a novel which invited scrutiny of the grand themes, this is it. For much of the time, death does not appear to represent utter oblivion. For example, José Arcadio Buendía searches for his inspirational friend, Melquíades the gypsy, on one occasion when the troupe of gypsies visits the town. On going to the place where Melquíades usually set up his tent, he finds a different gypsy and asks after him:

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[52] García Márquez, 'The Solitude of Latin America' p. 89.

> The gypsy wrapped him in the frightful climate of his look before he turned into a puddle of pestilential and smoking pitch over which the echo of his reply still floated: 'Melquíades is dead.' [p. 21]

José Arcadio hears this information confirmed by others who tell him the gypsy had 'succumbed to the fever on the beach at Singapore and that his body had been thrown into the deepest part of the Java Sea' (p. 21). The reader is delighted, as is José Arcadio, when Melquíades apparently returns from the dead. We learn '[h]e really had been through death, but had returned because he could not bear the solitude' (p. 47). When he dies again, this time in Macondo, whilst bathing in the river, they find him the next day downstream 'washed up on a bright bend in the river and with a solitary vulture sitting on his stomach' (p. 66). Even after this, he is described as an 'invisible presence' in the house where he 'continued his stealthy shuffling through the rooms' (p. 67), suggesting he continues to exist in some form.

Another character who passes over into death, but reappears in the land of the living is Prudencio Aguilar, who is killed near the start of the story, but returns, appearing to José Arcadio Buendía and Úrsula, unsettling rather than terrifying them. As we have seen, José Arcadio feels the burden of his conscience, and the sightings of the dead man prompt the migration of the family to set up the new settlement. However, Prudencio still drops by occasionally. José Arcadio, on seeing him, is alarmed when he realises that 'the dead also aged' (p. 70). Ironically, Prudencio has been searching for his old rival, not to plague him, but because he is lonely and has grown to love him. Also mentioned by the narrator is 'that other death which exists within death' (p. 70), which Prudencio fears. In old age, José Arcadio goes mad and is tied to the chestnut tree, in a way reminiscent of the enchained Prometheus, who defied the laws of the gods; José Arcadio wants to understand the unknown laws of the universe, and for this he is deemed to have transgressed the acceptable rules of behaviour. Ironically, Prudencio is the only person with whom he can communicate meaningfully.

Death is frequently personified. Melquíades finds 'death followed him everywhere, sniffing at the cuffs of his pants, but never deciding to give him the final clutch of its claws' (p. 12). However, the trope is taken further, and Amaranta sees death as a 'woman dressed in blue with long hair' (p. 227), who even 'on one occasion asked of Amaranta the favour of threading a needle', and instructs her to begin sewing her own shroud. As we have seen, this highly metaphorical language blurs the lines of demarcation between the natural and the preternatural. A similar incident occurs when the mysterious Rebeca arrives at the Buendía house, carrying a canvas sack which makes a continuous rattling noise, represented in the text as 'a *cloc-cloc-cloc* sound' (p. 40). This bag contains the bones of her parents. Some builders who have been enlarging the house wall up the bag as it disturbs them. Later, it is located by the sound it makes and the bones are properly buried in the graveyard.

As these illustrations show, life and death are not the opposing, discrete, absolute states they are assumed to be in many cultures. There is an indeterminacy about life and death in Macondo: ambiguity reigns. It may be argued that the apocalyptic ending, in which the town and its inhabitants are destroyed, represents the finality of death, but even this is contestable, because in the reader's mind the characters come alive every time the book is read. The characters have been immortalised in print. A dangerously literalist position would be to suggest that someone must have survived to turn Melquíades' manuscripts into the novel.

The political parties of Macondo are set up on oppositional lines, which, true to the structure of feeling, also become blurred. Aureliano, on seeing the corruption of the Conservatives, becomes a Liberal, although for a time he cannot understand why anyone would want to fight over 'things that could not be touched with the hand' (p. 85). He hears from his Conservative father-in-law, Don Apolinar Moscote, of the differences between the parties:

> The Liberals, he said, were Freemasons, bad people, wanting to hang priests, to institute civil marriage and divorce, to recognize the rights of illegitimate children as equal to those of legitimate ones, and to cut up the country into a federal system that would take power away from the supreme authority. The Conservatives, on the other hand, who had received their power directly from God, proposed the establishment of public order and family morality. They were the defenders of the faith of Christ, of the principle of authority, and were not prepared to permit the country to be broken down into autonomous entities. [pp. 84-5]

To Aureliano's credit, this biased view does not convert him, as the narrator tells us immediately afterwards that he sympathised with illegitimate children and decided to be a Liberal. However, this polarisation gradually dissolves as the story progresses. For example, the colours of the Liberal and Conservative parties, red and blue respectively, are brought to the reader's attention. The residents of Macondo, required to paint their houses red or blue, according to the party in power, find after numerous changes, that the houses end up being of 'indefinable colouration' (p. 107). This is, of course, whilst indicating the absurdity of the decree itself, also symbolic of the progress of the parties themselves. An equivalent episode occurs in the parties' philosophical stances. After years of civil war, the Liberals, led by Colonel Aureliano Buendía, are persuaded to renounce their key policies to attract supporters:

> They asked first that he renounce the revision of property titles in order to get back the support of the Liberal landowners. They asked, secondly, that he renounce the fight against the clerical influence in order to obtain the support of the Catholic masses. They asked, finally, that he renounce the aim of equal rights for natural and illegitimate children in order to preserve the integrity of the home. [p. 141]

This means, as the Colonel recognises, they are being asked to renounce their principles, and all they are fighting for is power. Another example of the confused beliefs of the Liberals, is illustrated beautifully when Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, who is courting Amaranta, presents her with a prayer book bound in mother-of-pearl. She reflects on the strangeness of this saying, '[t]hey spend their lives fighting against priests and then give prayer books as gifts' (p. 137).

The magical realist structure of feeling analysed thus far illustrates that seemingly stark oppositions, such as life and death, are broken down by the high level of indeterminacy. Also, this level of indeterminacy is served by the large range of examples of transgression operating through the carnivalesque and the grotesque. The carnivalesque is represented largely by the gypsies who visit Macondo periodically, bringing with them their 'vagabond carnival' (p. 38), and all kinds of fascinating artefacts and knickknacks. They are a mysterious band of itinerants; nobody seems to know where they go between their visits to Macondo, or why they come to the town at all. At one point they are barred because they are 'considered the bearers of concupiscence and perversion' (p. 39). However, Melquíades proves this common conception is wrong and proves to be an honourable man.

Some of the grotesque aspects are reminiscent of the picaresque genre which has its roots in early Spanish literature. José Arcadio develops in a particularly grotesque manner. He disappears for some time with the gypsies, and on his return is described as a 'protomale whose volcanic breathing could be heard all over the house' (p. 81); at Catarino's store, a brothel, he demonstrates his tremendous strength in wrestling, and 'exhibited his unusual masculinity on the bar, completely covered with tattoos of words in several languages intertwined in blue and red' (p. 80). In a humorous role reversal, the prostitutes pay *him* to have sex. The descriptions of José Arcadio's sordid and farcical sexual exploits are decidedly grotesque, and indeed García Márquez says the novel is 'on a knife's edge between the sublime and the vulgar'.[53] The sexual act is depicted as teetering between bliss and brutality, ecstasy and debasement, but most of all, on excessive carnality. Úrsula never quite comes to terms with the fact that the boy she raised returns from his travels as a 'lout who could eat half a suckling pig for lunch and whose flatulence withered the flowers' (p. 81). Although there is more than a hint of the

[53] Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava*, p. 71.

Rabelaisian about José Arcadio, his farts are paltry when compared to Pantagruel's who, as we have seen in Chapter Two, made the earth tremble for twenty-seven miles and engendered fifty-three thousand little men.

Aureliano Segundo and his mistress, Petra Cotes have extremely fertile and prosperous lives. They revel in their wealth, throwing decadent parties:

> There was a slaughtering of so many cows, pigs and chickens for the endless parties that the ground in the courtyard turned black and muddy with so much blood. It was an eternal execution ground of bones and innards, a mud pit of left-overs, and they had to keep exploding dynamite bombs all the time so that the buzzards would not pluck out the guests' eyes. [p. 209]

A woman, named Camila Sagastume, known as 'The Elephant', challenges Aureliano Segundo to a gargantuan eating duel which lasts for days: '[o]n awakening, each one had the juice of forty oranges, eight quarts of coffee and thirty raw eggs'. The next day they 'put away two pigs, a bunch of bananas, and four cases of champagne' (p. 210), before Aureliano, who is determined not to concede victory, falls unconscious. There is a gruesome and repugnant aspect to these illustrations of decadence, which is wiped out later by the five year rains.

In contrast, there are exquisitely beautiful passages in the novel, which, however, can also be described as grotesque. The description of the early journey through the jungle is one example:

> ...for more than ten days, they did not see the sun again. The ground became soft and damp, like volcanic ash, and the vegetation was thicker and thicker, and the cries of the birds and the uproar of the monkeys became more and more remote, and the world became eternally sad. The men on the expedition felt overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin, as their boots sank into pools of steaming oil and their machetes destroyed bloody lilies and golden salamanders. For a week, almost without speaking, they went ahead like sleepwalkers through a universe of grief, lighted only by the tenuous reflection of luminous insects, and their lungs were overwhelmed by a suffocating smell of blood. They could not return because the strip that they were opening as they went along would soon close up with a new vegetation that almost seemed to grow before their eyes. [p. 17]

There is an impression of horror in this passage, yet it is also suffused with beauty. This kind of paradox is frequently found in the novel. There is a sense of the vegetation having exceeded its normal limitations and transgressed into something horrific and hostile. Even in this deathly paradise, the men are able to appreciate the strange beauty of the horror that could envelop them forever should they be unable to find their way. The account ironically echoes the conquistadors' journeys, but emphasises that, although they are together, they are overwhelmed by their solitude and their insignificance in the world. Nature exhibits a strong presence. The residents of Macondo spend time and energy fighting against the will of nature, which is hostile and invasive. If the houses are neglected, they quickly become decrepit and uninhabitable. Úrsula wages a constant war against decay. At the end, in another grotesque scene, the opposition between nature and civilisation breaks down as nature is victorious, and the ants carry off the baby, Aureliano, the only one who had been 'engendered with love' (p. 332), and eat him. The unfortunate child is described as 'a dry and bloated bag of skin that all the ants in the world were dragging towards their holes along the stone path in the garden' (p. 334).

Moving on to the postmodern aspects of the novel then, it is obvious that *Solitude* provides the reader with many excellent examples of metafictional writing, repetition, and decentring. Let us deal with metafiction first. When the bookstore owner, the wise Catalonian, travels to Europe, he is vexed because his boxes of books are required to go as freight: '[t]he world must be all fucked up', he says, 'when men travel first class and literature goes as freight' (p. 323). This incident wryly demonstrates the importance the writer places upon literature, but also, the low regard in which it is held by others, who treat it as mere cargo or commodity.

There are affectionate moments in which the reader shares with the narrator in laughing at the gullible, literal-mindedness of the people. For example, when the cinema comes to Macondo, the audience,

> ...became indignant over the living images that the prosperous merchant Bruno Crespi projected in the theatre with the lion-head ticket windows, for a character who had died and was buried in one film and for whose misfortune tears of affliction had been shed would reappear live and transformed into an Arab in the next one. The audience, who had paid two cents apiece to share the difficulties of the actors, would not tolerate that outlandish fraud and they broke up the seats. [p. 185]

Just as the slaves misconstrue Mlle. Floridor's theatrical performance in *The Kingdom of This World*, here the people are at a loss to understand cinematic practice, and show their ignorance of the convention of illusion, which is so important to realist fiction, as well as to cinema.

It is worth devoting some time to a consideration of the highly metafictionalised, climactic ending, which contains within itself an extraordinary, mirror-like depiction of the entire novel. Throughout the story, numerous references are made to the parchments of Melquíades, written in an unfathomable script. When, at the age of twelve, José Arcadio Segundo first decides to take a look at the papers of Melquíades, he finds that although they have been shut up in a room for many years, 'there was not the slightest trace or dust or cobwebs'; even the ink in the inkwell has not dried up, and 'the air seemed fresher than in the rest of the house'. Úrsula goes into the room to clean the floor, but 'there was nothing for her to do' (p. 153). The implication is either that time has somehow stood still, or else the manuscripts have divine protection. This latter interpretation is upheld in the incident in which they certainly are preserved by an inexplicable force when four children take it upon themselves to deliberately destroy them:

> ...as soon as they laid hands on the yellowed sheets an angelic force lifted them off the ground and held them suspended in the air until Aureliano returned and took the parchments away from them. [p. 300]

José Arcadio Segundo was able, after a great deal of time and effort, to,

> ...classify the cryptic letters of the parchments. He was certain that they corresponded to an alphabet of forty-seven to fifty-three characters, which when separated looked like scratching and scribbling, and which in the fine

> hand of Melquíades looked like pieces of clothing put out to dry on a line. [p. 283]

Shortly after this, Melquíades indicates to Aureliano Segundo that he is correct in his supposition that the parchments are written in Sanskrit, and tells him he will be able to decipher them only when they are one hundred years old, giving him time to learn Sanskrit (p. 288).[54] He studies laboriously, but 'abandoned the scrutiny of the parchments precisely when they were beginning to reveal themselves as predictions in coded lines of poetry' (p. 316).

The final pages of *Solitude* provide a unique moment of textual epiphany for the reader. At the very end, it is Aureliano, the last person remaining alive in Macondo, who finds he can decipher Melquíades' parchments, and discovers the exact story he and his family had been living is written down there. It is worth quoting this revelatory ending at length:

> Melquíades had not put events in the order of man's conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes, in such a way that they coexisted in one instant. Fascinated by the discovery, Aureliano read aloud without skipping the enchanted encyclicals that Melquíades himself had made Arcadio listen to and that were in reality the prediction of his execution. [...] At that point, impatient to know his own origin, Aureliano skipped ahead. Then the wind began, warm, incipient, full of voices from the past, the murmurs of ancient geraniums, sighs of disenchantment that preceded the most tenacious nostalgia. He did not notice it because at that moment he was discovering the first indications of his own being in a lascivious grandfather who let himself be frivolously dragged along across a hallucinated plateau in search of a beautiful woman who would not make him happy. Aureliano recognized him, he pursued the hidden paths of his descent, and he found the instant of his own conception among the scorpions and the yellow butterflies in a sunset bathroom where a mechanic satisfied his lust on a woman who was giving herself out of rebellion. He was so absorbed that he did not feel the second surge of wind either as its cyclonic strength tore the doors and windows off their hinges, pulled off the roof of the east wing, and uprooted the foundations. [...] Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he knew only too well, and he began to decipher the instant that he

[54] There is a well-documented mistake in Gregory Rabassa's widely admired translation. In the original text the manuscripts must be one hundred years old before they can be read; in the translation it appears that a person must be aged one hundred before being able to read them.

> was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror. Then he skipped again to anticipate the predictions and ascertain the date and circumstances of his death. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. [pp. 335-6]

The instant when Aureliano finds himself reading the manuscripts *in* the very manuscripts themselves is described by Minta as 'a moment of intersection that is pure present'.[55] Various critics have engaged with this enthralling ending, and comparisons have been drawn with Borges's 'The Aleph'.[56] The world of Macondo, along with the manuscripts is destroyed, and may even be 'exiled' from memory, yet lives on, as Wood indicates, in the imaginative reaches of the mind:

> The novel we read is a brilliant, impossible reconstruction of Melquíades' lost history, rather like the footfalls that sound in Eliot down the passage which we did not take: 'My words echo/Thus, in your mind.'[57]

On the subject of metafiction, clearly the precise nature of the scripts and their relation to the novel itself can never be known. As Lindstrom says, to claim Melquíades is the narrator of the novel, 'destroys the mysterious effect generated by the paradoxical relations between the parchments and the novel'.[58] In any case, we are told that the first line of the manuscripts is: *'[t]he first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants'* (p. 334), whereas the novel begins with the famous sentence: '[m]any years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice' (p. 9). This establishes that the manuscripts and the novel are not

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[55] Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 177.
[56] The Aleph is 'a point in space where all places in the world come together and can be seen from every angle simultaneously'. See George McMurray, '«The Aleph» and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: Two Microscopic Worlds', *Latin American Literary Review*, vol. 13, no. 25, Jan.-June 1985 (pp. 55-65), p. 56. The difficulty presented is that the Aleph cannot be described using language which cannot avoid its linearity.
[57] Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 51.
[58] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, p. 187.

precisely one and the same. The first line of the manuscripts is particularly unsettling, as the present tense is used in reference to the baby, who is *being eaten* by ants, at the time of reading (both our time of reading and Aureliano's). He does not break off and intervene to stop the horror of the child being eaten alive, but instead keeps reading, utterly electrified by the revelations. The opening of the novel contains a skilful mixing of tenses, which becomes one of the hallmarks of this text. It encompasses past, present and future within one sentence, and this construct is one of the means through which García Márquez establishes the mythical quality in the story. It confers a poetic vagueness, which ties in effectively with the kinds of indeterminacy analysed above.

The means by which the manuscripts are saved from the biblical-style hurricane and the complete devastation of Macondo is shrouded in mystery. It is exactly this kind of paradox that makes the ending of this quintessential magical realist novel so appropriate. Lindstrom notes, '[t]he gypsy's parchments contain prophecies, while the novel tells of events already transpired'. The parchments tell of a story which will be exiled from memory, yet the story is alive and well in the novel. She also identifies that the narration in the novel,

> ...proceeds from episode to episode, although the order of the episodes is not necessarily a chronological one. But the gypsy's manuscript has a magic ability to hold a lengthy sequence of narrated events in simultaneity, so that the story of the Buendías in Macondo can be absorbed in one intense moment of reading and thought.[59]

In one sense, a novel does have all its events co-existing in one synchronous moment, initially, in that all the words exist on the pages even whilst they are not being read, but, because of the undeniably linear process of reading, we are unable to experience the whole novel in one instant. However, once the reader has finished reading, s/he does have a memory of the story in which all parts of it coexist simultaneously. Lindstrom argues that a

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[59] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, pp. 187-8.

> ...special quality [is] conferred upon the novel by its seemingly impossible origin. It is as if the reader were only by force of magic enjoying access to a story that should by all rights be not only unreadable but also completely annihilated and obliterated from the memory of humankind.[60]

Minta observes Aureliano's last sentence is a 'sentence of death' as he undergoes a terrible realisation that he is living a foretold story and that he is only a fictional character. His last sentence is the last sentence of the book. He has undergone a shift into a different diegetic level, and has been textualised. Jon Thiem argues:

> Textualization is arguably the paradigmatic topos of magical realism because of the way in which it showcases this mystifying phenomenon. Texts may encompass worlds and worlds may be texts, but the way they come together, clash and fuse in a textualization violates our usual sense of what is possible.[61]

Aureliano experiences a multiple realisation, and ironically, the reader does too, as alarmingly, our realisation runs in parallel with his. Firstly, he understands he is nothing more than a character in a fiction, secondly, that his life was predestined, and thirdly, that he cannot live beyond the end of the story. So, the reader and Aureliano simultaneously discover there is nothing beyond the text. As Janes eloquently describes the experience: 'design obtrudes to shatter the mirror in which we readers have lost ourselves'.[62] The reader is thoroughly disrupted and woken up from a realist reverie by this metafictional ending, which raises complex epistemological issues.

Repetition is simultaneously both a theme and a structuring principle to which there are constant allusions. It has the effect of presenting the reader with cyclical structures as can be seen, for example, when Úrsula is described as having the 'impression that time was going in a circle' (p. 183), when she sees Aureliano Triste's sketch and his plans for the future construction of a railroad, reminding her of her late husband's doomed 'solar warfare' project. When José Arcadio Segundo

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[60] Lindstrom, *Twentieth Century Spanish American Fiction*, p. 188.
[61] Jon Thiem, 'The Textualization of the Reader in Magical Realist Fiction', in *Magical Realism*, eds. Zamora and Faris, p. 244.
[62] Janes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading*, p. 12.

puts all his energies into making the river navigable, she shouts: '[i]t's as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning'. She discovers, once she is elderly and blind, that 'every member of the family, without realizing it, repeated the same path every day, the same actions, and almost repeated the same words at the same hour' (p. 202). This cyclical phenomenon is also illustrated metaphorically in the little gold fish made by Colonel Aureliano Buendía. He retreats into his workshop, forgetting the tense political situation, much to Úrsula's exasperation:

> With her terrible practical sense she could not understand the colonel's business as he exchanged little fishes for gold coins and then converted the coins into little fishes, and so on, with the result that he had to work all the harder with the more he sold in order to satisfy an exasperating vicious circle. [pp. 165-6]

Then, he later decides he will no longer sell them, but 'he kept on making two fishes a day and when he finished twenty-five he would melt them down and start all over again' (p. 216). This strange behaviour can be interpreted as a wry view of capitalism, or a means of escape from the realities of life. Other characters also have means of keeping reality at bay. Amaranta, for example, is reminiscent of Penelope, weaving her shroud interminably, making a poor job of her task so she always has something to do. Appropriately, on the day she finishes her shroud, she dies.

The importance of repetition, and indeed the childish enjoyment gained from an awareness of it, are revealed during the insomnia plague when the people of Macondo stay up all night:

> They would gather together to converse endlessly, to tell over and over for hours on end the same jokes, to complicate to the limits of exasperation the story about the capon, which was an endless game in which the narrator asked if they wanted him to tell them the story about the capon, and when they answered yes, the narrator would say that he had not asked them to say yes, but whether they wanted him to tell them the story about the capon, and when they answered no, the narrator told them, he had not asked them to say no, but whether they wanted him to tell the story about the capon, and when they remained silent the narrator told them that he had not asked them to remain silent but whether they wanted him to tell them the story about the capon, and no one could leave because the narrator would say that he had not asked them

> to leave but whether they wanted him to tell them the story about the capon, and so on and on in a vicious circle that lasted entire nights. [pp. 44-5]

They invent games such as this to fill their solitude, and whilst they enjoy them they are, at moments, aware of the nature of their time-wasting activity.

Names are a constant source of repetition. A family tree is deemed necessary at the start to avoid confusion. Not only are certain names repeated through the generations, but there are accepted characteristics attached to the names of José Arcadio and Aureliano. The twins, José Arcadio Segundo and Aureliano Segundo are confused with each other when they are young, and they add to the confusion by swapping identities deliberately to cause bafflement. Úrsula believes they have permanently exchanged identities, since they do not follow the expected personality patterns for their names. Finally, they are buried, accidentally in each other's graves, ironically suggesting they are now in their rightful places.

The repetitions of life are noticed principally by Úrsula, whose unusual prescience, acquired as she ages, is demonstrated when José Arcadio Segundo shuts himself up to try to decipher Melquíades' parchments. She tries to persuade him to come out of the stinking room in which he has used seventy-two chamberpots:

> When he recognized his great-grandmother's voice he turned his head towards the door, tried to smile, and without knowing it repeated an old phrase of Úrsula's.
>
> 'What did you expect?' he murmured. 'Time passes.'
>
> 'That's how it goes', Úrsula said, 'but not so much.'
>
> When she said it she realized that she was giving the same reply that Colonel Aureliano Buendía had given in his death cell, and once again she shuddered with the evidence that time was not passing, as she had just admitted, but that it was turning in a circle. [p. 272]

This passage illustrates Úrsula's ability to revise her opinions and learn, but in this she is virtually alone. Until the end of her life, she is a linchpin and guide for her family, and to some extent she is a bedrock figure for the reader, as she filters many events through her consciousness, providing a lens for our understanding. It is, significantly, this wise woman who sees the circularity of time; she sees her family's

resemblance to earlier generations; she sees them making the same mistakes as their forebears. Wood views her as 'a sort of tropical Tiresias, who sees not the future but the stagnant present'.[63] Most of the other characters are oblivious to entropy. However, even Úrsula deteriorates, becoming confused in her old age, at one point mistaking, albeit fittingly, the youngest Aureliano for her son. She does, generally, show an awareness of repetition that is sadly lacking in the other characters. Minta observes their poor sense of time:

> They reveal an almost total inability to situate their experiences in any sort of historical framework, and so, in a very real sense, they persistently fail to understand what is happening to them and to their village, losing themselves instead in an illusory timeless world in which all things seem to remain the same.[64]

José Arcadio Buendía cannot endure repetition, and finally, it is his inability to prove scientifically the linearity of time which precipitates his madness. He tries to prove Tuesday is different from Monday and when he is unable, he slides into irretrievable insanity. He asks Aureliano:

> 'What day is today?' Aureliano told him that it was Tuesday. 'I was thinking the same thing,' José Arcadio Buendía said, 'but suddenly I realized that it's Monday, like yesterday. Look at the sky, look at the walls, look at the begonias. Today is Monday too.' [p. 70]

The cyclical structures of magical realist narratives constitute what Williams calls 'evidence of the deadlocks and unresolved problems of the society'. The recurring events in *Solitude* illustrate the pessimism inherent in the structure of feeling, the consciousness of a lack of human progress, of successive generations making the same mistakes over again, and of a non-linear conception of time.

It should be evident from this discussion that repetition not only provides a thematic motif, but is fully integrated, as it also operates as a structuring principle of the narrative. The novel is knitted together impressively: there are no loose ends. Even

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[63] Wood, *García Márquez: One Hundred Years of Solitude*, p. 20.
[64] Minta, *Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 152.

very minor events and details are often mentioned again at a later point, and some information is added ensuring they make sense.

Decentring is also a postmodern characteristic, and Macondo, the 'land that no one had promised them' (p. 26), is so decentred it is not at first even on the maps. Only when someone dies is it marked on the 'motley maps of death' (p. 70), and Melquíades is then able to locate it. To the people of Macondo, it is of course the centre of the universe, but most of them are so unaware of the world beyond, that they are, at first, unable to conceive even that the earth is round. They see fragments of evidence all around them: the galleon full of poppies in the field, the suit of armour containing a calcified skeleton, the information brought by the gypsies, but they never really connect it to their own world, until the damage has been done and the outside world, in the shape of the United Fruit Company, has made Macondo its own. The town starts off as an earthly paradise in an era of equality led by the benevolent, but nonetheless patriarchal, José Arcadio Buendía. When it is founded, the houses are built so 'from all of them one could reach the river and draw water with the same effort, and [...] no house got more sun than another during the hot time of day' (p. 15). As the story progresses, Macondo becomes less isolated, and the residents realise too late they are not at the centre of the universe, and their town is nothing more than an outpost for the exploitative United Fruit Company's neo-colonial enterprises. Finally, of course, Macondo ceases to exist, and is therefore thoroughly decentred. García Márquez has chosen to set his story in a town which could easily be considered insignificant. He has chosen to give a voice to the unconsidered ordinary people.

Finally, issues of postcolonial identity are embedded throughout the novel, and are introduced early, skilfully woven into the story of the plague of insomnia which hits Macondo, causing a general loss of memory amongst the people. The illness is brought by two Guajiro Indians, Visitación and Cataure, who fled from 'a plague of

insomnia that had been scourging their tribe for several years' (p. 38). The insomnia in itself is not significant, but, as Visitación explains, a person with the illness suffers a gradual forgetting of incidents from childhood, followed by the names and notions of things, and finally 'the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past' (p. 43). José Arcadio Buendía is reduced to a desperate and hopeless strategy of labelling everything, but as he proceeds with this project,

> ...studying the infinite possibilities of a loss of memory, he realized that the day might come when things would be recognized by their inscriptions but that no one would remember their use. [p. 46].

Trying to overcome this problem, he labels more thoroughly:

> *This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk.* Thus they went on living in a reality that was slipping away, momentarily captured by words, but which would escape irremediably when they forgot the values of the written letters. [p. 46]

Labelling is a pointless exercise, obviously doomed to failure. The plague of insomnia and forgetfulness can be construed as a symbol of the conquest and the eradication of prehispanic history. However, as the extract above illustrates, it is not only loss of history that is signified by this plague, but also, ultimately, loss of *language*, with all the horror that entails of being outside the symbolic order. Carlos Fuentes notes 'perhaps nowhere is the terror of being thrust outside history or into history as explicitly linked to the act of naming as in the literature of Latin America'.[65] The inhabitants try to overcome the memory-loss through practical measures, the ultimate technology being the memory machine:

> At the beginning of the road into the swamp they put up a sign that said MACONDO and another larger one on the main street that said GOD EXISTS. In all the houses keys to memorizing objects and feelings had been written. But the system demanded so much vigilance and moral strength that many succumbed to the spell of an imaginary reality, one invented by themselves, which was less practical for them but more comforting. Pilar Ternera was the one who contributed most to popularize that mystification

[65] Fuentes, 'Gabriel García Márquez and the Invention of America', p. 7.

> when she conceived the trick of reading the past in cards as she had read the future before [...] Defeated by those practices of consolation, José Arcadio Buendía then decided to build the memory machine that he had desired once in order to remember the marvellous inventions of the gypsies. The artifact was based on the possibility of reviewing every morning, from beginning to end, the totality of knowledge acquired during one's life. He conceived of it as a spinning dictionary that a person placed on the axis could operate by means of a lever, so that in very few hours there would pass before his eyes the notions most necessary for life. [p. 46]

The memory machine is an apparatus capable of performing the functions of history, as history is increasingly perceived as consisting of ideas of the present about the past. Collective loss of memory can lead to a false version of history. The novel raises fundamental questions about what a true version of history is anyway: history is narrated; it is a process of selection and elimination managed by particular people or groups with vested interests. Sometimes, these interests are unconsciously cloaked in ideology, and at other times, they are open. The novel suggests history is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct, especially in countries which do not have freedom of the press and freedom of speech. Significantly, it is Melquíades, the gypsy and *writer*, who brings the cure for insomnia.

Whilst *Solitude* does revel in an atmosphere suffused by myth, it is possible to ascertain that there is, in parts, a high degree of historical accuracy, which is hidden behind the mythopoeic style. Macondo itself appears, for much of the time, to be in a temporal (and spatial) vacuum, and without the intrusions from the outside world it would be very difficult to establish the dates and duration of events. There is a vagueness about many incidents, the ages of characters are very rarely mentioned, and the time which has elapsed at particular points in the story is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to determine. The way the outside world impinges on the town gives the reader some idea about the development of history outside Macondo. Many of these historical clues are technological, as for example, in the arrival of the telegraphic office. Transport, especially the introduction of trains to the area, provides another historical gauge. The details are in the text, but are not

foregrounded, so the reader undertakes a kind of literary carbon-dating to obtain information needed to provide a timeline. The novel appears to cover a period from some time in the first half of the nineteenth century to about 1920. Mena recognises that the novel problematises history and stresses the importance of the imagination in the formation of historical knowledge.[66] She, amongst others, identifies different historical levels on which the novel works, discerning that the text questions the very notion of history. She claims there are three levels on which the novel deals with history: the history of the Western world, the history of Spanish America, and the history of Colombia. Vargas Llosa describes a series of concentric circles:

> ...the first of which would be a family with characteristics more or less extravagant, the second the tiny town of Aracataca with its myths and problems, the third Colombia, the fourth Latin America and the last one, humanity.[67]

Merrell describes the 'multidimensional microcosm' which can be located:

> The novel can be construed as symbolic of Colombia (the socio-political level), Latin America (the mythico-cultural level), Christianity (the mystico-religious level), the world (the historical/archetypal levels), or the universe (the cyclical/entropic levels).[68]

The ways in which the novel envisions history, time and space, provide some of the reasons for its success. It entwines the issues of identity and history, recognising they are interrelated. The novel is set in a particular time and a real place, yet it also contains a critique of history and the social construction of historical knowledge. One of the ways novels can be subversive is by overtly camouflaging historical issues with fictionality through the changing of names of people and places, or through more metaphorical, even allegorical methodologies. This is partly how satire functions. The advantage of this writing, is that it can, to a large extent, evade

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[66] Lucila Inés Mena, *La función de la historia en «Cien años de soledad»* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1979).
[67] Vargas Llosa, 'García Márquez: From Aracataca to Macondo', p. 18.
[68] Floyd Merrell, 'José Arcadio Buendía's Scientific Paradigms: Man in Search of Himself', in *Gabriel García Márquez*, ed. Harold Bloom, p. 21.

state censorship.[69] By creating an organic melange of historical issues and magical events, García Márquez manages effectively to disguise some of the serious political impact of the novel. That it works on a number of levels adds to its richness and complexity, and the oppositions of local and global issues become a part of the structure of feeling which is then blurred by the very fact that the novel deals simultaneously with both the global and the local, as Merrell shows above in describing the 'multidimensional microcosm' which is *Solitude*.

In conclusion, then, the oppositions in this novel are not as racially based as those in *The Kingdom of This World*, yet there is undoubtedly racial and cultural antagonism in the society portrayed, often owing to ingrained social inequalities. For example, the only Native Americans mentioned are servants, despite their royal blood. A much more noticeable opposition based upon cultural notions of superiority and inferiority relates to colonial structures. There is also a local/universal opposition which is a very distinctive characteristic. There is a very clear economic opposition between the people of Macondo and the gringos who exploit them, and there is an important opposition between solitude and solidarity. In the civil conflicts in which Colonel Aureliano Buendía has such a prominent part, the Liberals and Conservatives are the two camps at loggerheads for so many years. The men and women are often presented in traditional gender roles, even to the point, in a couple of cases, of being grotesque stereotypes. Unlike *The Kingdom of This World*, the oppositions are collapsed a good deal more thoroughly and earlier on. García Márquez breaks down these tired Cartesian dualisms, but nonetheless, they remain at the level of a palimpsest: magical realism's indeterminacy writes over the worn out oppositions of the colonial mentality. Rowe's observation of 'a sadness within

[69] García Márquez has been by no means exempt from censorship. His first published edition of *La mala hora* (1962) had minor alterations made to it by editors. When it was reprinted in Mexico in 1966 García Márquez returned the text to its original form stating he had 'allowed himself to restore the idiomatic mistakes and stylistic barbarisms, in the name of his sovereign and arbitrary will'. See McNerney, *Understanding Gabriel García Márquez*, p. 120.

the constant exuberance'[70] points to the way in which this novel feasts on paradox. In its very tragicomic nature our attention is drawn to the complex enigma represented here. Tragedy and comedy are so often thought to be opposing genres, and yet *Solitude* is inflected with both, not alternately, but simultaneously. In the same way, the local and the global are represented simultaneously. Life in Macondo is absurd, perplexing, mysterious, dangerous and beautiful at the same time.

The ingenious structure of the novel provides an implicit postmodern commentary on itself. Its circularity marks it out as a postmodern and self-reflexive text. It shows an awareness of all the many issues pertinent to postcolonial societies, and manages to deal inventively with many of them. Certainly, discussion on *Solitude* will never be brought to a conclusion, as the text provides the proverbial embarrassment of riches, and is prodigious in its originality, despite a seemingly lucid style. It is simultaneously a simple and complex magical realist *tour de force*.

'The incredible and sad tale of Innocent Eréndira and her heartless grandmother'

The rich tapestry that is just one story, 'The incredible and sad tale of Innocent Eréndira and her heartless grandmother,' is not as well-known, nor is there much critical writing associated with it. The tale presents us with a sharp opposition between the oppressed girl and her oppressor, the grandmother, but as the story approaches its end, this oppositionality breaks down. The whole story is an excellent example of the presentation of a destabilisation of many kinds of

[70] Rowe, 'Gabriel García Márquez', p. 193.

boundaries; even the genre is in doubt, prompting Christopher Little to ask, '[i]s it a story, as the subtitle of the collection suggests? Or is it a novella? A love story? A movie melodrama? A fairy tale? A myth? Or a medieval romance?'.[71] Undoubtedly, the narrative does not neatly fit any of these paradigms, but this is no failing on the part of the author, for genres are deliberately problematised. The story poses questions relating to identity and the human condition. Concepts hitherto viewed as oppositional, discrete, absolute conditions are challenged, and boundaries separating male/female, human/animal, natural/supernatural are contested. The questioning and the resulting destabilization of the boundaries in these oppositional pairs is a central feature.

The entire fabric of this strange narrative is woven with the dual threads of the carnivalesque and the abject. Its title has the air of a fairy-tale, and as recent transgressive feminist and psychoanalytical readings have shown, fairy-tales contain more than meets the eye, and often have at their heart some abject experience. The story challenges and subverts the traditional fairy-tale, but the very fact that it engages with this genre, whether seriously or as a pastiche, compromises its realism. Despite this, it exhibits sufficient features to be considered as magical realism. Although it does not follow a conventional, unidimensional fairy-tale format, there are other factors which resonate with that genre. The narrative is in the third person, but it does slide twice into the first person as if to convince the reader this is a real story, as the first person narrator tells us he once saw Eréndira:

> It was around that time that I came to know them, their moment of greatest splendour, but I wouldn't look into the details of their lives until many years later when Rafael Escalona, in a song, revealed the terrible ending of the drama and I thought it would be good to tell the tale. [pp. 34-5]

The narrator reveals little about himself except to say he used to travel about selling encyclopaedias and medical books, but his intrusion into the story also

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[71] Christopher Little, '*Eréndira* in the Middle Ages: the medievalness of Gabriel García Márquez', in *García Márquez*, ed. Fiddian, p. 204.

communicates to the reader the fact that Eréndira's story has passed into folklore, and that it has an exciting ending. On an intertextual level, Eréndira is interesting as she has already made her debut in *Solitude*, where she has a cameo role, and although unnamed, she is described as 'an adolescent mulatto girl with a forlorn look' (p. 49), and is easily recognisable. Aureliano spends an unsuccessful night with the prostitute, falling in love with her, but, on returning in the morning to declare his love and propose marriage, he finds the whole party has moved on.

The story is set mainly in the featureless, rather generic, desert, and the characters give the impression of being outside society, but associated with those inside. This is how the two principal characters are described at the beginning:

> The grandmother, naked and huge in the marble tub, looked like a handsome white whale. The granddaughter had just turned fourteen and was languid, soft-boned and too meek for her age. With a parsimony that had something like sacred rigour about it, she was bathing her grandmother with water in which purifying herbs and aromatic leaves had been boiled, the latter clinging to the succulent back, the flowing metal-coloured hair, and the powerful shoulders which were so mercilessly tattooed as to put sailors to shame. [p. 7]

The figure which emerges in this depiction of the grandmother brings to mind Bakhtin's discussion of the grotesque body in the work of Rabelais. At one point she is described as having 'astral buttocks' (p. 22), and when she rolls over in bed the movement is 'seismic' (p. 41). The parts of her body mentioned draw attention to her physicality and resist the classical image of the body as a whole. It is blended with objects and animals, blurring its boundaries. She is constantly described in highly figurative language which effectively pushes her to the limits of humanness. This is highly appropriate as she proves, as hinted in the title of the story, to be a heartless and callous woman who subjects her granddaughter, Eréndira, to a life of prostitution. Reminiscent of a whale, her back is said to be 'succulent', a word normally used to describe the flavour of food, especially meat, again stressing her animal quality and her abject side. Her hair is metallic, a non-human quality, and her extensive tattoos suggest an ambiguity of gender. She transgresses both the human

and female boundaries. The purifying herbs are loaded with irony, as is her instruction to Eréndira to water the graves. Eréndira dresses and makes up her grandmother, a process which takes more than two hours and produces the effect of a 'larger than life-size doll' (pp. 7-8), again detracting from her human status. Her unnatural character is emphasised by the fact that she likes sitting in an 'artificial garden with suffocating flowers' (p. 8). She experiences states of delirium and speaks in a bizarre fashion in her sleep:

> 'It's going on twenty years since it rained last,' she said. 'It was such a terrible storm that the rain was all mixed in with sea water, and the next morning the house was full of fish and snails and your grandfather Amadís, may he rest in peace, saw a glowing manta ray floating through the air.' [p. 19]

Whether the grandmother speaks the truth nobody knows. At times she does appear to be nostalgic for a grand and beautiful past, but the reader suspects it never quite existed as she recalls. Her house is 'furnished with an excessive and somewhat demented taste' (p. 7). Here, in her sleep, she appears to be remembering when Eréndira was born:

> 'You looked like a lizard wrapped in cotton. Amadís, your father, who was young and handsome, was so happy that afternoon that he sent for twenty carts loaded with flowers and arrived strewing them along the street until the whole village was gold with flowers like the sea.' [p. 21]

The effect of her carnivalesque, hyperbolic ramblings is to produce a sinister atmosphere of mystery and excess, and indeed, David Lodge asks, 'for what is dream but the carnival of the unconscious?'[72]

Eréndira, treated like a slave by her monstrous grandmother, is so overworked that she falls asleep whilst performing her arduous cleaning duties which involve, for example, winding up the clocks for six hours. One day she leaves a candle too close to a curtain causing a fire to spread so ruining the house and all its contents. The grandmother's calm response is: '[l]ife won't be long enough for you to pay me

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[72] David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 40.

back for this mishap' (p. 11), and she then transgresses the rules of her familial role, turning Eréndira into a prostitute in order that she can pay her debt, setting a course which begins when she allows an old widower to rape her virginal granddaughter in return for two hundred and twenty pesos and some provisions.

The grandmother builds up an amazing, travelling spectacle, a colourful, carnivalesque convoy of vehicles and Indian servants, plus an assortment of other people who appear from time to time in the story, such as the photographer and the musician, and they trek endlessly across the desert stopping at various settlements. The grandmother is transported regally in a litter carried by Indian bearers. A tent bought from a bankrupt circus is erected. Ulises, first an admirer and later a lover of Eréndira, on first entering is struck by the interior. The grandmother's bed has a 'viceregal splendour' (p. 29), a statue of an angel stands beside the funerary trunk of her dead relatives, and a pewter bathtub with lion's feet, all contribute to the air of corruption and decadence. The entourage increases, and as all these people require wages, it becomes harder and harder for Eréndira to pay back the debt.

Eréndira is offered up to the men, to whom she seems to have a superhuman attractiveness. They queue for a few minutes with her. In her deathly appearance she seems to have transgressed the boundaries of life. She resembles a corpse as the grandmother 'made up her face in the style of sepulchral beauty that had been the vogue in her youth' (p. 14). In her 'posthumous make-up' (p. 15) she sounds like a ridiculous parody of the excesses of artificial femininity to the reader, but proves irresistible to a passing postman who when asked if he likes 'it' says, '[i]t doesn't look bad to someone who's been on a diet' (p. 15). Here, Eréndira is obviously being objectified by both her grandmother and the man. He coarsely implies she is meat to be eaten and so her humanity is denied. The abject elements of the story become evident in the conveyor-belt sexual excesses which Eréndira has to endure on soiled sheets, almost to breaking point:

> Eréndira was unable to repress the trembling in her body, and she was in a sorry shape, all dirty with soldier sweat.
>
> 'Grandmother,' she sobbed, 'I'm dying.'
>
> The grandmother felt her forehead and when she saw she had no fever, she tried to console her.
>
> 'There are only ten soldiers left,' she said. [p. 18]

Whilst no character is depicted metamorphosing to animal form in the story, animal imagery figures prominently. There is a woman 'who had been changed into a spider for having disobeyed her parents, who would let herself be touched for fifty cents so that people would see there was no trick' (p. 35). The sceptical reader suspects trickery, but the human-animal indeterminacy of the woman is all part of her carnivalesque, freak-show attraction. An enormous number of animals appears in the story. The animals mentioned are not always present; some are referred to in figures of speech. For example, at the end of the story Eréndira manages to make her escape and she runs into the wind like a deer. Others are used as adjectives: the young groom is described as having 'donkey teeth'; when Ulises finally attacks the grandmother she tries 'to strangle him with her powerful bear arms' (p. 44). Ulises makes the sound of an owl as a sign to Eréndira; a dog chain is used to secure her after an escape attempt; the men queuing 'looked like a snake with human vertebrae'; (p. 35) living sponges were said to have 'walked about the houses moaning like patients in a hospital and making the children cry so that they could drink the tears' (p. 39); when Eréndira is captured she is wrapped in mosquito netting and carried off 'wrapped like a large, fragile fish caught in a lunar net' (p. 22). Other animals which appear or are mentioned include an ostrich, a pack of hounds, mules, swans, a donkey, goats, a squirrel, snails, a manta ray, birds, a lizard, an ox, cows, a pig, pigeons, a serpent, a bat, a cat, parrots, a macaw, a rat, an elephant and a peacock. Animals function as archetypal symbols, and the references to them accentuate the animalistic behaviour of the characters, opening in the reader's mind a space of enquiry about the boundaries of human behaviour. The dividing lines between the animal and the human worlds are indistinct.

The hero of the story, Ulises, whose allusive name itself carries the epic, dynamic, and intertextual weight of mythology, is described as having an 'unreal aura' because of the glow of his beauty. He looks like a 'furtive angel', and when the grandmother asks what happened to his wings, he replies, intriguingly, that the one who had wings was his grandfather. On seeing him for the first time, Eréndira 'rubbed her head with the towel in order to prove that it wasn't an illusion' (p. 19). Again, the story poses questions about the confines or even the construction of the human condition. At the end of the tale, he could be read as either guardian angel or murderous human. One day Ulises has the ability to turn glasses different colours simply by touching them, and his mother interprets this as a sign that he is in love. The reader tends to acknowledge the validity of this strange belief system, as in all the cases where characters have, what may in the West be considered to be superstitious, irrational beliefs, they are proved to be correct. For example, Ulises is in love; the grandmother dreams of a white peacock, which Eréndira knows to be a warning of death, and at the end she is dead; the photographer is warned '[d]eath is on the loose tonight' (p. 32), and he is killed too.

Ulises and Eréndira finally plot to kill the grandmother in order to run off together, taking with them diamonds concealed inside oranges and the gold from Eréndira's earnings. Incidentally, no information is given as to how the diamonds come to be inside the oranges, so whether they are there naturally, or hidden there for the purposes of smuggling the reader does not know, but may guess. Eréndira is for the most part an overly passive person, and does not have the stomach for a violent act. The one exception is the time she tries to use an old pistol to shoot her pursuers, but Ulises informs her it belonged to Sir Francis Drake, and is useless, insinuating that artefacts brought by colonists are useless generally. In the end, Ulises, who is in love with Eréndira, commits the murder. He is incompetent at first, and in the form of a birthday cake gives the grandmother 'enough arsenic to exterminate a whole

generation of rats' (p. 41), but this has not the slightest effect upon her. Following this the grandmother's hair falls out in a peculiarly grotesque scene:

> Eréndira began to comb her grandmother's hair, but as she drew the comb through the tangles a clump of hair remained between the teeth. She showed it to her grandmother in alarm. The grandmother examined it, pulled on another clump with her fingers, and another bush of hair was left in her hand. She threw it on the ground, tried again and pulled out a larger lock. Then she began to pull her hair with both hands, dying with laughter, throwing the handfuls into the air with an incomprehensible jubilation until her head looked like a peeled coconut. [p. 42]

Afterwards, she wears a 'wig of radiant feathers' (p. 42), which again accentuates her animal qualities and makes as even greater spectacle of her appearance.

Ulises continues in his endeavours to kill her, causing an explosion. He places explosives in the piano which, conveniently, she is playing at the time it detonates, but she survives and suspects nothing: '[i]t's the work of the evil one', she says, '[p]ianos don't explode just like that' (p. 43). The contrariety between the reality of the situation as witnessed by the privileged reader, and the grandmother's perception is farcical and horrendous at the same time. However, the whole story plays on this gap or difference, as the grandmother with her dreams of grandeur obviously feels she is a dignified, regal person, as exemplified in the throne-like chair in which she sits, in the ceremonial washing and pampering, and in the bishop's crosier which she carries, and yet every description of her undercuts this.

The scenes of attempted murder are comic, but the scene of the actual murder is decidedly grotesque. Ulises stabs her three times, then,

> Huge, monolithic, roaring with pain and rage, the grandmother grabbed Ulises' body. Her arms, her legs, even her hairless skull were green with blood. Her enormous bellows-breathing, upset by the first rattles of death, filled the whole area. [p. 44]

The bizarre, viridescent blood comes unexpectedly and so adds to the horror of the scene and is a symbol of her unnaturalness. In any event, colours are frequently

given strange treatment in magical realism, possibly because they provide a concise and fairly simple means of defamiliarising the quotidian. The extraordinary juxtaposition of the inept comic scenes with the final horrific slaughter is very effective, as it is a juxtaposition of the ambiguous carnivalesque with the abject.

At the end, Eréndira runs off into the distance, a free spirit, running *into* the wind suggesting she can face it head on, instead of being tossed about by it as she has been in the past. On previous occasions, the ubiquitous wind has appeared as a malevolent force, even as a character. For example, her tragedy began when 'the wind of her misfortune came into the bedroom like a pack of hounds and knocked the candle over against the curtain' (p. 10); the photographer says he will go '[w]herever the wind takes me' (p. 23); birds are 'plucked by the wind' (p. 34). It appears to have power over people and animals, suggesting forces exist in the world greater than us, beyond our comprehension.

Various institutions are subjected to carnivalesque and abject treatment. The missionaries are satirised, for example, in the episode involving the mission's kidnapping of Eréndira from her grandmother. She is given 'a bucket of whitewash and a broom so she could whitewash the stairs every time someone went up or down' (p. 24), clearly a comment on the uselessness of the nuns' lives, the menial nature of her status, and the metaphorical implications of whitewashing. Eréndira sees some strange sights whilst in the mission, including,

> ...a nun chase a pig through the courtyard, slide along holding the runaway animal by the ears, and roll in a mud puddle without letting go until two novices in leather aprons helped her get it under control and one of them cut its throat with a butcher knife as they all became covered with blood and mire. [p. 25]

The nuns' actions go against the reader's expectations of seemly behaviour, making the incident both abject and carnivalesque, simultaneously associating the nuns with filth and degradation. Booker observes that pigs and rats are symbolic of the base

and abject.[73] The nuns are also defamiliarized, and the boundary between male and female is problematised, when they are likened to 'tanned stevedores'. The mutual incomprehension of the two belief systems represented by the Indians and the mission forms a backcloth to the story out of which arise opportunities for both sadness and humour. The pregnant Indian brides have been bribed into marriage, and it is also revealed that the mission pays people to take communion. At the wedding ceremony the brides hear, presumably uncomprehendingly, 'the punishment of the Epistle of Saint Paul hammered out in Latin' (p. 26). In terms of morality and integrity, both sides emerge rather badly, the missionaries because they use, by their own standards, 'trickery' and immoral means to obtain conversions, whilst on the other hand, even the most crafty of the Indian women can be 'convinced by a pair of flashy earrings' (p. 26). The mayor who shoots at the clouds trying to perforate them and bring rain, Senator Onésimo Sánchez who writes a letter vouching for the grandmother's morality, and the commandant who cannot read the letter, are obviously lampooned. The institution of marriage is mocked. For example, Ulises' father speaks Dutch, and his mother speaks the Guajiro Indian language, and they appear to communicate through their son. The Indian women are reluctant to marry because, 'men, sleeping in their hammocks with legs spread, felt they had the right to demand much heavier work from legitimate wives than from concubines' (p. 25). These incidents reveal the rich ironies which are so much a part of satire and which connect the concepts of the grotesque, the abject and the carnivalesque with transgression. The society in the story is corrupt, fragmented, patriarchal, and cruel; oppressed people oppress others in their turn. Even the heroine, Eréndira deceives her lover, Ulises, and uses him for her own ends.

Physical boundaries and limitations are at issue; nothing is circumscribed. At the beginning, before the catastrophe, the two central characters live in a house

[73] Booker, *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature*, p. 238.

described as an 'enormous mansion of moonlike concrete lost in the solitude of the desert' (p. 7). The desert is cruel; an ostrich is 'the only feathered creature who could survive the torment of that accursed climate' (p. 8); even 'the goats committed suicide from desolation' (p. 8); the nuns are described as 'dedicated to fighting not against the devil but against the desert' (p. 24), in order to keep it at bay. There are some limited cultural reference points, but generally the desert has a rather surreal and hostile presence, and seems to be without limits to Eréndira who has never seen the sea until the end of the story, at which point it may well be read as a symbol of her freedom. The apparent lack of physical boundaries coupled with the malevolent climate and the wind, produces a kind of terror to which even the grandmother is not immune, as we see when she mixes her memories up and struggles to repress her raving. She claims the desert does not belong to anyone, and seems imply there are no societal norms, so anything is permissible, and this is perhaps how she mentally justifies her heartless treatment of Eréndira. The grandmother seems to have a confused awareness of time and the boundaries between past, present and future, as witnessed in her night-time delirium, when she sometimes 'mixed up her nostalgia with clairvoyance of the future' (p. 37). The missionaries who challenge her pronounce that the desert belongs to God, and one of them, pointing to a crack in the earth, asserts they shall not be allowed to cross this line. This is symbolic of the boundaries set by institutions in society; it is indiscriminate and purposeless, and in any case, the life the missionaries have in mind for Eréndira is little better. Although the ending resists closure owing to its ambiguity, Eréndira is truly free for the first time in her life, and the reader is inclined to view this departure as a happy ending, especially *if* the clairvoyance of the grandmother has any substance. She predicts Eréndira will be a noble lady, 'free and happy', and that she 'won't be left to the mercy of men' (p. 37). Ambivalence is part of the carnivalesque, part of its dualistic nature, and this is evident in certain phrases in the story. For example, whilst trapped in the mission, 'Eréndira was living in her shadows and discovering other forms of *beauty and horror*' (p. 25); the

grandmother watches 'the *miserable and merry* crowd that was going to the festival' (p. 26); feeling the '*bitterness* of *fond* memories' (p. 9). [my italics]

The grotesque, comic presentation of the imperious grandmother has the effect of knocking her off her pedestal and demolishing the dignity she thinks she possesses, and as Bakhtin says, 'all comic creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity'.[74] She can be read as a parodic personification of imperialism: her servants, her gilded piano, her Venetian glassware, her statues and throne all indicate her love of the debauchery and materialism of Western aristocratic life. The reader feels completely alienated from her because she is so ghastly in every sense, and as she never focalises we never see her point of view, and never come to know or understand how she can allow her granddaughter to suffer the cruel excesses of both patriarchal and matriarchal tyranny. However, Eréndira does not focalise either, so the reader is not given privileged information about her motivation, about why she chooses to return to her cruel grandmother from the mission, and the narrator tells us little about what makes either of them function psychologically. However, this narrative strategy does have the advantage of producing a surprising ending in which, despite all her hardships and exploitation, Eréndira gets the upper hand, tricking her lover into doing the murderous dirty work and then running off as free as the wind. She liberates herself from her oppression, and the fact that she is never heard of again, whilst on the one hand having slightly sinister overtones, does at least give us the chance to see Eréndira freed from the suffocating boundaries of her world.

The story invites a political reading, one which launches it into a whole new genre: that of allegory. At least two critics have placed an allegorical interpretation upon the text. Allegory is a slippery phenomenon because it is dependent on the reader's construction of meaning. Various signs indicate this reading is justified, however,

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[74] Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 23.

although it will always be semantically ambivalent. Such an interpretation is supported by Little, who describes the tale as 'an allegory of exploitation';[75] and Arnold M. Penuel who refers to the 'combination of details, allusions and parallels' which provide evidence for his reading of the story as 'similar to a parable'.[76] These readings view the grandmother as representing imperialist Spain, and Eréndira as colonised Latin America, who finally gains independence from her exploitation. This gives the story its grounding in history, which is crucial in magical realism. I concede it is not highly metafictive, the only self-referentiality stemming from its allegorical and parodic aspects. Placing the story into the wider context of magical realism, it is evident the analysis of transgression in this text is highly constructive as it opens up a complex, polyphonic wealth of readings.

[75] Little, '*Eréndira* in the Middle Ages', p. 207.
[76] Arnold M. Penuel, *Intertextuality in García Márquez* (York, South Carolina: Spanish Literature Publications, 1994), pp. 88-9.

6

Isabel Allende's

The House of the Spirits

The magical realist style frequently adopts a patriarchal tone, and overlooks the role of women in society, as we have seen, particularly in *The Kingdom of This World.* Isabel Allende attempts to redress the balance by exploring women's colonisation and repression by patriarchy, and the means they use to resist their oppression. The ideologies by which they are inscribed are also damaging in other parts of society, as they tend to affect those who are weakest: the poorest, the peasants, the workers, and the most afflicted.

Unsurprisingly, Isabel Allende, as the daughter of Salvador Allende, the former president of Chile, takes a great interest in politics. She was born in 1942 in Lima, Peru, of Chilean parents, who had a disastrous marriage. Following the departure of

her father, she lived at her grandparents' house in Chile, and has stated that she never saw her father again until she was required to identify his body many years later in a morgue. Her mother then married a diplomat, whom his step-children called Tio Ramon, and his profession provided opportunities for the family to live in Bolivia, Europe and the Lebanon. Allende returned to Chile at the age of fifteen. Like García Márquez and Carpentier, she was a journalist before turning to fiction writing. She worked from the age of seventeen until the overthrow of the Allende government, when, owing to the disorder and persecution that followed, she fled to Venezuela with her husband, Miguel Frías, whom she had married in 1962, and their two children, later moving to the United States. Following an illness, her daughter, Paula died. With her second husband, William Gordon, whom she married in 1988, she now lives in California.

Allende's first novel, *La casa de los espíritus* (*The House of the Spirits*, 1985), was first published in Spain in 1982. Initially, it was censored in Chile. She writes:

> The book entered Chile like a pirate, hidden in the suitcases of brave travelers or sent by mail without covers and cut into two or three pieces so that it could not be identified. The few copies that entered the country this way multiplied by magic art.[1]

Months later, the censorship was dropped as the government attempted to improve its reputation. *De amor y de sombra* (1984; *Of Love and Shadows*, 1988), *Eva Luna* (1987; *Eva Luna*, 1988), *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (*The Stories of Eva Luna*, 1994), and *El plan infinito* (1991; *The Infinite Plan*, 1994) followed. During the last months of her daughter's life in 1992, whilst she nursed her, Allende wrote an autobiographical 'letter' to her entitled simply *Paula* (1994). Although she remains a popular author, and has turned her hand to other kinds of writing, none of her works has caused as much of a stir as *The House of the Spirits* which does

[1] Isabel Allende, 'The Spirits Were Willing', trans. Jo Anne Engelbert, in *Lives on the Line: The Testimony of Contemporary Latin American Authors*, ed. Doris Meyer (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 242.

represent the rather more populist end of the magical realist market. Allende peppers her books with passionate romances, targeting a specific, largely female readership, but to her credit, her writing provides a vehicle of disclosure, bringing to widespread attention the trials and horrors of her native country, which still preoccupy the world today.

Allende says 'I think that the greatest influences on my writing are the books I read when I was a child — books that gave me the love of adventure and risk, strong characters and strong plots'.[2] She admired two 'great books of adventure — *A Thousand and One Nights* and the Bible, which I read with a total lack of religious inclination'. Carpentier and García Márquez are amongst the writers she acknowledges as influences in her adult life. Like the latter, she credits the oral storytelling abilities of the women in her family with inspirational force. Another characteristic they share is a strain of anti-intellectualism. She mocks academic criticism, revealing her bemusement at some of the academic papers she has read:

> I began to receive academic papers from American universities about the symbols in my books, or the metaphors, or the colors, or the names. I'm always very scared by them. I just received three different papers on Barabbas, the dog. One of them says that he symbolizes the innocence of Clara because he accompanies her during her youth, and when she falls in love, symbolically, the dog dies in a pool of blood. That means the sexual act, it seems. The second paper says that the dog represents repression — the militarists — and the third paper says that he is the male part of Clara, the hidden, dark, big beast in her. Well, really Barabbas was just the dog I had at home. And he was killed as it was told in the book. But of course it sounds much better to answer that Barabbas symbolizes the innocence of Clara, so that's the explanation I give when somebody asks.[3]

Whilst not for a moment doubting the literal truth of the sentence: '[w]ell, really Barabbas was just the dog I had at home', it is a naïve response, and like those observed in interviews with García Márquez, it does not allow for the reader's participation in the construction of meaning. The word 'really' suggests Allende

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[2] Allende, 'Writing as an Act of Hope', pp. 156-7.
[3] Allende, 'Writing as an Act of Hope,' p. 44.

thinks she has the key to the meaning because she is the author.[4] An equivalent, albeit fictional, situation arises in *The House of the Spirits* when a portrait of Clara is described as depicting her 'resting in a rocking chair that hangs suspended just above the floor', but the narrator steps in to advise us that, despite the catalogue's reference to the '[i]nfluence of Chagall', the fact is: '[t]he picture captures precisely the reality the painter witnessed in Clara's house' (p. 306). Allende has inadvertently returned to a correspondence theory of representation that was shown to be problematic by the realists of the nineteenth century. Her insistence on truth to reality is charmingly old-fashioned, and illustrates the difficulties writers encounter when trying to inscribe new literary forms, such as magical realism, without renouncing the claim to truth that classic realism inherently upheld. Allende condemns some literary experimentation, pillorying writers who are praised by critics for 'all kinds of literary experiments, some of them quite unbearable'.[5]

As *The House of the Spirits* revisits the traumas of recent Chilean history, I will provide a brief outline. Chile became independent from Spain in 1818 and increased in size following wars with Peru and Bolivia between 1879 and 1883; it also experienced a bloody civil war in 1891. During the twentieth century, it suffered military rule between 1924-1932, and has tended to have a greater number of political parties in a state of flux than its neighbours, and has seen a number of complicated coalitions (*concertaciónes*) formed. In colonial times, Chile had not played a large part in the economy of the Spanish empire, but in the nineteenth century became successful in exporting mined products, such as silver, copper and nitrates, but was always vulnerable to price fluctuations, especially in copper, which in 1956 amounted to half its export value.[6] The twentieth century has seen periods

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[4] In any case, surely, any interpretation of Barrabás would have to take account of the fact that his slaughter, by a butcher on Clara's wedding day, prefigures the violence and bloodshed to come.
[5] Allende, 'Writing as an Act of Hope', p. 53
[6] See Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York & Oxford: OUP, 1977), p. 118.

of both democracy and dictatorship, none more famous, or infamous, than the Salvador Allende and Augusto Pinochet regimes. Allende, a Marxist, was democratically elected president in 1970, representing the alliance of left of centre parties known as *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity), although his mandate was not strong.[7] Following a difficult time in office, during which he was frustrated in many of his efforts at agrarian and economic reform by recalcitrant conservatives and foreign impedance, a bloody military *golpe de estado,* led by General Pinochet, overthrew the elected socialist government. Allende would not flee the country, and when the Presidential palace in Santiago came under rocket and air attack in September 1973, he allegedly committed suicide. Pinochet led the subsequent dictatorship, only grudgingly surrendering Chile to democracy in 1990, when Christian Democrat, Patricio Aylwin, was elected president.

The military *coup* is still highly controversial, despite a plethora of documentation and analysis. However, the reasons for its occurrence are both domestic and foreign. At home, there were divisions in the *Unidad Popular* coalition. There was a great deal of trenchant anti-Allende rhetoric from right-wing parties, especially *Patria y Libertad* (Fatherland and Liberty). Many studies of the Allende presidency and its aftermath have been carried out, and differing attitudes towards the legitimacy of the role of the United States are expressed, but there is no question that, mandated by President Nixon, who feared a communist 'domino effect' in Latin America, the United States did instigate an economic blockade during the Allende years to discredit and destabilise the government. The effect of this intervention was to promote sedition in Chile, whether this was the intention or not. Large corporations in the United States were concerned about their profits in South America, especially those with interests in the copper mines which had been nationalised, and they brought their powerful voices to the attention of the

[7] Allende's share of the vote was 36.3%; his nearest rival, Jorge Alessandri, was not far behind with 34.9%. See Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, p. 135.

government. Chile's right-wing opposition parties, extremists prepared to use violence, and anti-Allende media were provided with financial support. Undoubtedly, the months following the overthrow were marked by widespread repression and numerous human rights abuses. The organisation, DINA (Directorate for National Intelligence), was established and its role included kidnapping and incarcerating people in detention centres where they were tortured or killed. The leaders of the former government were imprisoned, some leftist supporters were detained in the National Stadium in Santiago and were murdered; censorship was imposed, as well as a curfew, and pro-Allende parties and trade unions were declared illegal. The military junta, which consisted of commanders of the armed forces and the national police, quickly decreed a 'state of siege' permitting detentions and summary executions without due process of law. Appeals were forbidden, but even had they been allowed, it is unlikely they would have helped, since the judiciary was solidly pro-junta. Clearly, the disappearances were not random, but were part of a systematic attempt to rid the Pinochet regime of its opponents. The list of missing and murdered people includes a high proportion of members of left-wing political parties.[8] Many left Chile by appealing for sanctuary at various European embassies. No one asked for asylum at the United States embassy, but it did receive 140 requests for visas, and granted a mere twenty-five, arguing that the rest did not show evidence of 'well-founded fear of persecution'.[9] A figure of 3,000 is often quoted as the number of people who were killed or 'disappeared' in the period following Pinochet's seizing of power. Chile has had mixed fortunes over the next seventeen years before being returned to democracy.

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[8] See Lois Hecht Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism and the Search for Development* (Oxford & Colorado: Westview Press Ltd., 1993), p. 125.

[9] Paul E. Sigmund, *The United States and Democracy in Chile* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 90.

Textual Analysis

Allende's most well-known novel, *The House of the Spirits,* charts the lives of four female generations of the upper-class del Valle family, starting with Nívea, then Clara, Blanca and Alba, covering the period from the turn of the century to approximately 1975. The story appears to be set in Chile, although it is not explicitly named as such. A series of convincing parallels with Chile's turbulent history, together with the dramatic story of Allende's own family, reveals to the reader that this is a legitimate frame of reference. The political situation initially forms a backdrop, but as the story progresses, it moves increasingly into the foreground. The most prominent male is the tyrannical patriarch, landowner and senator, Esteban Trueba, husband of Clara, and father and grandfather of Blanca and Alba respectively. In piecing together the story, Alba, the principal narrator, emphasises the constructed nature of history; she uses the notebooks of Clara, which 'bear witness to life', along with her own memories and first-person interpolations from Esteban himself from his perspective in his later years. The story is based mainly in the house of the title, the home of the reasonably prosperous del Valle family. Nívea is one the country's first liberal feminists; her husband, Severo, is a church-going atheist and opportunist Liberal with an eye on a political career. There are many children in the family, but the story quickly establishes Clara as the central female character, and we witness her peculiar qualities as she develops from childhood into adulthood. She has special abilities which may described as preternatural. She is also extraordinary in other ways, for example, becoming mute for several years.

The family suffers a tragedy when Rosa, an elder sister of Clara, dies after swallowing poison which political opponents had intended for her father. This is the earliest sign of the deadly political skulduggery that comes to prominence in the later part of the story, when the family's, and by extension the country's,

tribulations become oppressive and terrifying as society is plunged into dictatorship and brutality. Clara, who is not in love, nevertheless marries the former fiancé of Rosa, namely, Esteban Trueba, and they have a hacienda in the country where they spend the summers. Férula, Esteban's sister comes to live with them, but after becoming over-attached to Clara, is thrown out by her brother, who perceives her as a threat to their marriage. The novel portrays the growing political awareness among the workers of the hacienda, spearheaded by the charismatic Pedro Tercero, the lover of Blanca, Clara and Esteban's wayward daughter. The paternalistic and inflexible Esteban finds himself at loggerheads with his workers. Blanca becomes pregnant by Pedro Tercero, and when her father discovers his daughter's lover is a mere peasant, he attacks him with an axe, but manages only to slice off three fingers. Blanca, having been misinformed that her lover is dead, is pushed into marrying a narcissistic Frenchman, with aristocratic pretensions, but when she discovers the sordid truth about his photographic studio, she leaves, returning to the family home for the birth of her daughter, Alba. In the latter part of the novel, Alba, a feisty and idealistic girl, becomes the central character, particularly after the death of Clara. When she goes to university, she finds herself in a spiralling and dramatically worsening political scenario. She picks up the political mantle and ends up being faced in prison with the barbarous torture of Esteban García, whom her grandfather had, in earlier times, treated cruelly by refusing to acknowledge him as his grandson or give him any benefits, because he was illegitimate, but who had also, ironically, endorsed his application to join the police, thinking he could be a useful ally. Esteban, who becomes a powerful senator during the course of the story, finally gains an insight into the nature of power abuse, but not before it is too late, and his family have suffered horribly. Through a terrible apparition, he discovers his socialist son, Jaime, an assiduous and compassionate doctor, who had devoted his life to helping the poor, has been murdered for associating with the president. Alba, who has been raped and tortured, and who has also had three fingers removed, finds the strength to survive, and the novel ends on a surprisingly

positive note. However, Alba's clearly stated intention is to ensure their history is saved from obscurity, so their story is told to subsequent generations who will not have to reconstruct the consciousness gained so painfully by the del Valle women.

Allende's novel is written in a more straightforward style than the other texts analysed here. Pellucid and unadorned, her prose even tends in places to predictability. *The House of the Spirits* has been marketed, at least in part, as belonging to the women's romance genre, and has enticed a more populist readership, possibly attracted by paratextual features, such as the glitzy cover on one English edition (Black Swan 1985).

I will deal first with the magical realist structure of feeling in the novel, before going on to suggest that the magic serves a more specific function than in the other narratives analysed above. Economic relations in *The House of the Spirits* are postcolonial rather than colonial. Nonetheless, a number of oppositions is established, echoing powerfully earlier colonial paradigms. The prominent one in the early part of the story is between the peasant workers and Esteban Trueba, the central male character. Following his emotional devastation after the death of his beloved Rosa, he takes over the running of a neglected and dilapidated hacienda, named Tres Marías, turning it, over a period of several years, into a prosperous enterprise. When he first visits the place he is horrified at the peasants' way of life and decides to 'bring a bit of civilization to this outpost' (p. 76). His puissance is such that the peasants dare not oppugn him openly, apart from Esteban García who starts off as an informer who enjoys poking out the eyes of chickens, and ends as the execrable torturer of Alba. Trueba's paternalistic attitude towards the Native American workers on the hacienda mirrors exactly that of the earlier colonists, insofar as he models himself on them. During the early months, for example:

> ...he kept his promise to himself of always bathing and changing his clothes for dinner, as he had heard the British colonizers did in the most distant hamlets of Africa and Asia, so as not to lose their dignity and authority. [p. 72]

Despite his good intentions, his recidivist tendencies emerge and, appropriately enough, he becomes a 'barbarian', embarking on a period of brutality with the rape of Pancha García, a local Indian girl whom he employs on the hacienda.

Whilst Esteban Trueba is not a conquistador in the true sense of the word, he is depicted in a role commensurate with one. According to Trueba's dialogue, the hacienda is situated in a rural 'no-man's-land', a 'wasteland', also described as 'this godforsaken place'. (p. 83). The peasants 'were still living exactly as they had in colonial times' (p. 87). He thinks in terms of, and uses the discourse of, domination, supported with the ideology of conquest; he justifies himself to no one and uses violence and manipulation to succeed. He is reminiscent of those colonisers, whom Edward Said observes, were convinced of their superiority, and were 'impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination'.[10] For example, Trueba effectively promotes the continuation of a system of feudal servitude, arguing:

> They're like children, they can't handle responsibility. How could *they* know what's best for them? Without me they'd be lost — if you don't believe me, just look at what happens every time I turn my back. Everything goes to pieces and they start acting like a bunch of donkeys. They're very ignorant. [p. 82]

In dehumanising the people by describing them as animals, Trueba can justify dominating them; similarly, adopting an attitude to colonised peoples demonstrated in Rudyard Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden' (1899), namely the view that they are 'half devil and half child', he implies they need protection.[11] The peasants must also be subjected to physical abuse, as the pugnacious Trueba explains his

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[10] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 8.

[11] The paternalistic terminology of imperialism, including 'protectorate', designating a later type of colony, is examined by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson in their introduction to *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and textuality* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994). In the same volume, Jo-Ann Wallace's paper, 'De-Scribing *The Water Babies*: "The child" in post-colonial theory,' argues that the 'idea of "the child" is a *necessary precondition* of imperialism', p. 176.

philosophy: '[y]ou have to use a strong hand on these poor devils — that's the only language they understand. The minute you get soft, they lose their respect' (p. 82). Nor do the people have the right to make decisions:

> They don't know how to clean their asses and they want the right to vote! How are they supposed to know about politics when they don't even know where they live? [p. 82]

When, as an elderly man, Esteban looks back on his life, in a section of first person narrative quite early on in the novel, he is still harbouring delusions of magnanimity and probity: '[n]o one's going to convince me that I wasn't a good *patrón*', adding, 'I was like a father to them' (p. 68). He finishes his account with:

> If I had it to do over again, there are a few mistakes I wouldn't make, but in general there's nothing I regret. Yes, I've been a good *patrón*; there's no doubt about it. [p. 71]

The reader cannot know which 'mistakes' he would not make a second time. Either he is 'in denial', or has simply and irrevocably internalised and lived the outmoded language and ideology of empire. He is, however, a character with whom the reader has some limited sympathy at the end, as he has witnessed the troubles which his politics have wrought on his own family, and despite his desire to exculpate himself, he cuts a comparatively sad, feeble figure of an old, broken man whose sophistry shows something of the confused opsimath, but it is too late.

Male/female oppositional relations are strongly established, especially in the first half of the novel. Pancha García, for example, raped by Esteban, comes to live with him as servant and concubine, but when signs of pregnancy appear he is repulsed:

> He began to see her as an enormous container that held a formless, gelatinous mass that he was unable to view as his own child. Pancha left the main house and returned to her parents' hut, where no one asked her any questions. [p. 80]

Esteban's attitude towards Pancha, and other women claiming to have borne his children, is one of utter contempt. He suspects them of mendacity, concerning the parentage of their children, preferring to think they are not his. On the occasions

when a woman comes to his door to present him with an infant, he would give her money with instructions not to bother him again, and if she did, 'he would send her flying with his whip, so that she would be cured of any wish to wiggle her tail at the first man she saw and then come accusing *him*' (p. 84). He continues,

> ...sowing the entire region with his bastard offspring, reaping hatred, and storing up sins that barely nicked him because he had hardened his soul and silenced his conscience with the excuse of progress. [p. 81]

The local people are powerless in the face of Trueba's reprehensible actions. They try to fight back, but are unsuccessful:

> Twice the bullet-riddled bodies of peasants from other haciendas were discovered. There was not the shadow of a doubt in anybody's mind that the guilty one was from Tres Marías, but the rural police simply recorded that bit of information in their record book with the tortured hand of the semi-literate, adding that the victims had been caught committing a theft. The matter never went any further. [p. 81]

The House of the Spirits has a smaller range of types of preternatural events than *Solitude*. As its title suggests, it is more concerned with matters related to the spirit world. Clara, the clairvoyant who has the greatest degree of involvement with the preternatural, has telekinetic powers, and plays the piano with the lid down (p. 96), although what she would really like to do is move the piano itself round the room. She has other powers, such as clairvoyance and the ability to interpret dreams; she also has premonitions, at times making correct predictions. Even after her death, her presence pervades the house. The reader is given the impression that Clara's remarkable prescience is a genuine gift, although many of the incidents in which she is involved are ambiguous, as there is frequently only sparse evidence.

At times, there is a strong suggestion of the preternatural at work, or occasions when a character believes this to be so, but the reader is not convinced. This includes events related by the narrator diegetically and briefly, or those which are hearsay or folkloric. For example, whilst still a child, Clara exhibits an ability to

interpret dreams, as the gardener discovers when he entertains her with an account of a dream he has had. She tells him he will make a great deal of money and, shortly afterwards, he does. She also can, to an extent, forecast events, the most significant of these being the premonition of her parents' deaths. They are killed in a car crash, and her husband tries to keep this from her as she is about to give birth:

> But his good intentions were shattered by the strength of Clara's premonitions. That night she dreamt that her parents were walking through a field of onions and that Nívea had no head, so she knew exactly what had happened without needing to read about it or hear it on the radio. [p. 143]

There is, however, frequently some detail in the narrative which mitigates against a preternatural explanation, keeping the reader in a state of uncertainty. The prediction does at first appear extraordinary, but becomes less so once it is borne in mind that Señora del Valle, Clara's mother, had often said: '[o]ne of these days we're going to kill ourselves in this damned machine' (p. 144). Added to the fact that the old car was 'perfect, to tell the truth, except that its brakes never worked very well' (p. 145), it is hardly surprising it was involved in a serious accident.

There are fewer examples of hyperbole in this novel. One illustration involves the presence of Trueba. Alba provides fresh flowers for the house, but 'the flowers never lasted until nightfall because Esteban Trueba's thundering voice and slashing cane were even powerful enough to frighten nature' (p. 308). We are told:

> At the sound of his footsteps, household pets scattered and the plants withered. Blanca was raising a Brazilian rubber tree, a shy, squalid little bush whose one attraction was its price: it was sold by the leaf. Whenever Trueba was heard arriving, whoever was closest ran to hide the rubber tree out on the terrace, because as soon as the old man entered the room, the plant lowered its leaves and began to exude a whitish fluid, like tears of milk, from its stem. [p. 308]

Although Trueba can, at times, be a terrifying character, this hyperbolic depiction merely serves to make him seem humorous, and to make the reader warm to him. It has a similar function to the descriptions later in the novel, with his silver cane, wild

mane of hair and his raven-like, mourning attire which, true to his refractory character, he wears until his death.

Esteban Trueba's shrinkage presents an unusual kind of indeterminacy. He becomes a powerful character in the first half of the novel, a man who stamps his mark on everyone and everything around him. He works himself into the ground so he can marry Rosa, but she dies, ruining his plans. He is constantly untiring, and reacts against the poverty and squalor in which he sees his mother die, vowing never to be reduced to those circumstances. He is an intransigent and intrepid man who acquires an even greater will to succeed whenever he faces obstacles. However, he confronts some painful truths towards the end of his life, realising that the ends do not always justify the means. Once his family are victims, he can finally see what they could appreciate years before. As a young man he is strong, healthy and masculine. As an old man he looks like a peculiar crow in his widow's weeds. One day, he notices he is shrinking:

> His shrinking was so infinitesimal, so slow and so sly, that no one other than himself had noticed it. He had to buy shoes one size smaller, shorten his trousers, and have a tuck taken in his shirtsleeves. One day he put on the black hat he had not worn all summer and it covered his ears completely, which led him to deduce that if his brain was shrinking, his ideas were also probably withering away. [p. 282]

The reason that this illustrates indeterminacy is that no other character believes he is shrinking. The gringo doctors he visits 'concluded that it was all in his mind', and thought he 'had dreamt that he was once six feet tall'. Very much in character, Esteban takes comfort from the fact that 'all great politicians in history had been small, from Napoleon to Hitler' (p. 282). Of course, there could be a very rational explanation for his shrinkage, if indeed he is shrinking, namely, osteoporosis; he did once have many bones broken during an earthquake at Tres Marías.

Towards the end of Trueba's life, he realises all he really cares about is Alba, his granddaughter: '[h]is ideas were not as clear as they had been and the line between what was good and what was bad had blurred' (pp. 453-4). Alba is the person most responsible for his gradual transformation from intolerant ideologue to broken, but conscious, man. She is also marked with a kind of indeterminacy: whilst still a school girl, she was 'completely ignorant of the boundary between the human and the divine, the possible and the impossible' (p. 343).

As the novel progresses, ideological differences between the left and right-wings become more deeply entrenched, and the different factions become gradually more desperate to succeed, so the left-wing revolutionaries, symbolised by Miguel, resort to collecting a cache of weapons, in case they have to adopt armed struggle when democracy fails. Some of the weapons are stolen from Senator Trueba's hoard by his granddaughter. The names of political parties are not given; all we know is that there are right-wing parties and left-wing ones, some of which are revolutionary. The opposition between the workers and the landowners has already been mentioned. The Allende government aimed to bring about agrarian reform and thereby improve the lives of the poorer people of Chile. This reform involved the expropriation of large estates, such as that portrayed as Tres Marías. It was not a new policy, and had been started in 1964, by the Christian Democratic government under Eduardo Frei Montalva. According to Javier Martínez and Alvaro Díaz, under the governments of Frei and Allende, over 5,000 estates were expropriated, covering sixty per cent of arable land. They claim, '[i]t can be said without exaggeration that by 1973 there was not a single *latifundio* remaining in the country'.[12] By the end of the novel, the country is plunged into frightening chaos and confusion. Many of those who supported the *coup* were under the impression that a newly elected government would be in place in a very short time, but they

[12] Javier Martínez and Alvaro Díaz, *Chile: The Great Transformation* (Washington & Geneva: Brookings/UNRISD, 1996), pp. 61-2.

were disappointed and unable, through fear of reprisals, to voice their condemnation publicly. There is an indeterminacy in this widespread disappointment at the possible longevity of the junta, which unifies former political enemies.

The House of the Spirits contains many metafictional references. The passage alluding to the deliberate altering of history, by those with the power to do so, reveals Allende's concern that abuses are common and easily effected:

> With a stroke of the pen the military changed world history, erasing every incident, ideology, and historical figure of which the regime disapproved. They adjusted the maps because there was no reason why the North should be placed on top, so far away from their beloved fatherland, when it could be placed on the bottom, where it would appear in a more favourable light... [pp. 435-6]

The novel contains an implicit plea for the defeat of this conscious falsification. One way this can be achieved is through the use of notebooks and journals; Alba is thought to have survived isolation in the 'doghouse' because she started to write notebooks first mentally, and then physically. It provides a kind of therapy for Clara too. The novel underlines the importance of books as a civilising influence. The most loving and virtuous male character is Jaime, whose room is repeatedly described as a 'tunnel of books'. On one occasion, during an earthquake, he is literally buried under his books. He allows Alba to read what she likes, believing the child will only show an interest in books she is mature enough to read. When the family come under suspicion towards the end, Jaime's books are burnt in a pyre outside by police, symbolising the death of learning and knowledge, and the junta's fear of ideas. The magic books of Great-Uncle Marcos, which had provided such inspiration for Clara, also end up in this blaze. These books have been mentioned a number of times. At first their titles are not specified, but later, they are found to be literary classics. Literature is charged with promoting magical consequences. The enchantment it produces is priceless, and books are given as tokens of love from one character to another, and stories are passed on from one generation to the next. Those who do not have access to books, such as Esteban García, are found to be

lacking in feeling for others. On one occasion he is to be found psychopathically 'driving a nail through the eyes of a chicken' (p. 220), something he also attempts to do to the dead Pedro García, before Blanca stops him. That he has been nurtured with tales of hate and revenge from his bitter grandmother, Pancha García, shows the art of storytelling should be practised with a sense of responsibility.

Also relating to the influence of literature, are the characters, Pedro Tercero García and 'The Poet'. Pedro Tercero takes many risks in promoting his revolutionary ideas about trade unions, agrarian reform, suffrage and rights. Frustrated at the ignorance of the peasants and the prospect of trying to raise their political consciousness, his solution comes in the form of an idea from old Pedro García, and he adapts the oral tradition of storytelling to spread his word among the people. He writes a song about foxes and hens which encodes double meanings; it has an innocent veneer of childishness and simplicity, and an allegorical, subtextual, political interpretation. These songs become well-known and are a good deal more successful than his political pamphlets. This singer can be paralleled with Victor Jara, the Chilean singer and songwriter, who spoke out against repression and was eventually murdered. The unnamed Poet supports the socialists and achieves great popular success. His funeral is held towards the end of the novel. This figure is generally held to be a portrayal of Pablo Neruda (1904-73), Chile's greatest poet.

Through metafictional devices, magical realism stresses the importance of writing as a mechanism by which people can cling on to knowledge in the face of competing ideologies. *The House of the Spirits* illustrates this very effectively in its structure. Even the most cursory analysis reveals a cyclical narrative structure. It begins:

> *Barrabás came to us by sea,* the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy. She was already in the habit of writing down important matters, and afterward, when she was mute, she also recorded trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own.

And ends:

> My Grandmother wrote in her notebooks that bore witness to life for fifty years. Smuggled out by certain friendly spirits, they miraculously escaped the infamous pyre in which so many other family papers perished. I have them here at my feet, bound with colored ribbons, divided according to events and not in chronological order, just as she arranged them before she left. Clara wrote them so they would help me now to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own. The first is an ordinary school copybook with twenty pages, written in a child's delicate calligraphy. It begins like this: *Barrabás came to us by sea...*

The novel's opening and closing sentences betray an overt circularity, and also draw attention to textuality, and the importance of the written word, to local history, and personal voices. Significantly, the notebooks are not in chronological order, as chronology may not be the most important structuring or organisational principle.

There are several examples of history repeating itself. The bitterness and rivalry between rich and poor produces cyclical and ongoing conflict. The wrongdoing of one person inflicted on another is later repeated by a relative of the victim, and perpetrated on his or her enemy. The best example of this is the embittered Esteban García, who grows up nursing resentment against the whole family because Trueba, having raped his grandmother, then failed to acknowledge or support his offspring. Esteban García knows he is of the same blood as the privileged Alba, but has lived in poverty as a peasant all his life, and devotes himself to seeking revenge.

Finally on the subject of repetition, in what may be construed as an affectionate gibe at *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* with its diagram of the family tree, the reader is told Clara does not like to repeat names down the generations because 'it created confusion in her notebooks' (p. 301).

The magic in *The House of the Spirits,* whilst it does exhibit a strong resemblance to that in the other texts, especially in the way indeterminacy is promoted, can be identified as bearing an additional significance. Allende depicts female characters

who have, in varying degrees, an ability to connect with the preternatural world. This raises questions about the subtext of the novel, namely the possible implication that women are more intuitive, sensitive and prone to experiences beyond mere rationality than men. As far back as the Middle Ages the supernatural was thought to be caused by hysteria.[13] An etymologically interesting word, hysteria derives from the Greek for uterus, *hystera,* showing clearly the emphasis on a connection between women and irrationality. The term hysteria is not foregrounded in the novel, but as is apparent in the current controversial research of Elaine Showalter, hysteria is just one way in which women's psychic conflicts can manifest themselves.[14] Magic is Allende's symbolic way of representing this positively.

As we have seen, the range of preternatural incidents is narrower than in other magical realist texts. The principal means by which magic manifests itself is through Clara's clairvoyance, in all its permutations. She reads dreams, predicts the future, recognises people's intentions and moves objects by means of telekinesis. Her prescience emerges at an early age, and at six she correctly predicts the riding accident of Luis, her brother. As the novel progresses, the preternatural gradually fades, and some critics, such as P. Gabrielle Foreman, have argued Allende abandons it as 'magical realism gives way in the end to political realism'.[15] This view suggests political realism (whatever that is) is preferable to magical realism, and that the latter is, by implication, not political. This is surely a misreading, given magical realism is amongst the most highly politicised of recent writing. Political issues do not have to be worn solely as content on the sleeve; they can be present with greater subtlety in the symbols and structures of texts. Allende reveals an implicit understanding, through the use of magic, that the personal is the political.

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[13] See Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth Century Prose* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 8.
[14] Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador; New York: Colombia University Press, 1997).
[15] P. Gabrielle Foreman, 'Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call', in *Magical Realism,* eds. Zamora and Faris, p. 286.

Patricia Hart has coined the term 'magical feminism' to describe Allende's mode of fiction, defining it as: 'magical realism employed in a femino-centric work, or one that is especially insightful into the status or condition of women in the context described in the work'.[16] She and others claim Allende uses magic to demonstrate a truth about the female condition for feminist purposes. Examining Clara's clairvoyance, she convincingly concludes that her capabilities do not produce beneficial results, but nor are they harmful. Often, Clara is unable to protect her family from political or natural disaster, either because they ignore her predictions, or because her clairvoyance fails at crucial times. For example, Clara, as a child,

> ...predicted her father's hernia; all the earthquakes and other natural disturbances; the one and only time snow fell in the capital, freezing to death the poor people in their shantytowns and the rosebushes in the gardens of the rich; and the identity of the murderer of schoolgirls long before the police discovered the second corpse; but no one believed her... [p. 96]

Although she correctly predicts a death in the family, she is unable to say whose death it will be, or how it will be caused. Had she known her father's political opponents would anonymously send a poisoned decanter of brandy, the tragic death of the unfortunate Rosa could have been averted. Hart recounts a number of similar instances, noting that Clara's ability has 'slight practical application'.[17] Not only is the 'relative uselessness' implied,[18] it is directly stated when the mysterious clairvoyant, Luisa Mora, comes to tell Alba:

> 'Death is at your heels. Your Grandmother Clara is doing all she can to protect you in the Hereafter, but she sent me to tell you that your spiritual protectors are powerless when it comes to major cataclysms.' [p. 416]

This raises the question of what use magic can possibly be if it cannot benefit or protect those who have special powers. Hart exposes Clara's clairvoyance to various metaphorical readings, suggesting it could represent sensitivity, intuition, or

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[16] Patricia Hart, *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende* (London: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 29-30.
[17] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 42.
[18] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 44.

passivity. She favours clairvoyance as a metaphor for passivity, as this is consistent with the 'submergence' of magic towards the end. Certainly, the women become progressively less passive and more politically active through the generations. Alba, for example, defies her grandfather, risking her life by smuggling refugees into embassies, so they escape persecution after the *coup*.

As in *Solitude*, magic is frequently debunked through the juxtaposition of the preternatural with the mundane. For instance, Clara invites friends to the house 'to summon spirits and exchange recipes and premonitions' (p. 150); during the Second World War, Clara has only a vague idea of events in Europe, but she supports the Allies by knitting socks for the soldiers — a rather mundane form of assistance from a talented clairvoyant. This indicates a degree of ironic and comical distancing in the tone of the narrative, although the magic is there, in that it has a reality in the world of the text; it is not imaginary. Hart contends, 'Allende may be, consciously or unconsciously, questioning the very morality of continuing to use magical realism as a dominant literary mode in Latin America',[19] suggesting magical realism may be the 'opiate of the oppressed'.[20] Although Hart's analysis has much to recommend it, a rather different, albeit related, interpretation can be placed upon the role of magic in *The House of the Spirit*. She is surely mistaken when she writes:

> Like miniatures, the magical touches produce a sense of pleasure when examined close up but they do not alter the overall picture of a novel any more than a miniature can have much impact on the overall decoration of a room.[21]

Similarly, Foreman claims, 'Allende seems to employ a feminized magical realism as a technique to pull the reader into a political-historical novel',[22] implying the magic is no more than a syrup that sweetens the bitter pill of worthy, but unpalatable, political history. However, the magical dimension is never a form of embellishment,

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[19] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 96.
[20] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 32.
[21] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 156.
[22] Foreman, 'Past-On Stories', p. 295.

nor is it a trivial enticement to the reader, but is an integral part of the story. The magic does not evaporate because Allende has abandoned magical realism as a literary technique, but because, in her novel, magic represents the 'wild zone' to which some women have access when they are marginalised and powerless in society. Their psychic abilities do not enable the women to make great political changes, rather they are sustained in times of difficulty by the world of spirits; it provides them with a power base. Magic diminishes in the story when it no longer serves a useful social function for the women.

In her essay, 'Feminist criticism in the wilderness',[23] Elaine Showalter engages with the model developed by Shirley and Edwin Ardener which, in the form of a Venn diagram, shows overlapping spheres of men and women, or dominant and muted groups, respectively. This cultural model can assist in interpreting *The House of the Spirits,* since it posits the existence of a crescent of female experience unknown to men — the 'wild zone'— which is represented by magic in the novel. Magic can be viewed either as a mechanism for escaping madness, agoraphobia and paralysis, or it can be symptomatic of these conditions, an alternative to suffering and illness caused by the conflicts present in these women's lives. In this case, it provides an escape route, albeit a limited one. Some women have less effective methods of release. Rosa the beautiful, for example, invents a 'nightmarish zoology' (p. 16), which she endlessly embroiders on a tablecloth, depicting:

> ...creatures that were half bird and half mammal, covered with iridescent feathers and endowed with horns and hooves, and so fat and with such stubby wings that they defied the laws of biology and aerodynamics. [p. 15]

Blanca has a similar outlet creating clay figures. In this way they are both able to release their energies in inventing fantastical menageries, showing a desire to represent creatures that transgress the boundaries of the natural world. Alba also

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[23] 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986).

paints an extensive fresco on her bedroom wall depicting 'a Venusian flora and an impossible fauna' (p. 310), but she, unlike her older relatives, becomes educated and politically aware. Blanca and Rosa have neither the knowledge nor the education to allow them to channel their energies in any other way.

As the novel progresses, the female characters with the magical powers fade and Alba writes of the magical world which 'no longer exists'. Foreman observes:

> By the novel's close, Alba has little *living* access to her magical matrilineage. Only the memory of the magical survives, but this memory helps Alba to survive the penetration of the patrilineal political sphere.[24]

In Foreman's view, 'the magic in Allende's world is swept away by the political cataclysm she describes'. The magic is depressed, not by any political cataclysm, but by the feminist consciousness, emancipation and political commitment of a new generation represented by Alba and her fellow prisoner, Ana Díaz.

This 'wild zone' is rejected, to an extent, by Blanca and almost completely by Alba, as it signifies a withdrawal from the patriarchal world of business and politics, and withdrawal denotes submissiveness and inaction. Whilst it provides sanctuary, comfort, female solidarity and subversiveness, in the final analysis, it is ineffective at promoting change in the wider society. The limited nature of women's resistance is seen when Clara is struck across the face by her husband, Esteban. She vows, in a classic symbolic act of female defiance, never to speak to him again. Silence can be very powerfully semanticised, and Hélène Cixous makes the observation: 'silence is the mark of hysteria'.[25] Showalter considers that women can risk 'self-destruction through psychic overload' or 'ego death' from a state of super 'receptive sensibility', noting that George Eliot observed this as 'the roar on the other side of

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[24] Foreman, 'Past-On Stories', p. 295.
[25] Quoted by Logan in *Nerves and Narratives*, p. 9.

silence'.[26] Esteban becomes exasperated, realising he has lost Clara, but she does not leave him, so her muteness, whether willed or not, is hardly the ultimate in feminine rebellion. Although she now refuses to acknowledge the dominant patriarchal discourse, she is in danger of silencing herself out of existence. Despite her magnetic personality and charm, she is politically resigned and, as Hart observes, has strongly deterministic beliefs. Repeatedly, we see that where Clara is re-active, Alba is pro-active; where Clara has an external locus of control, Alba has an internal locus of control; Clara offers passive resistance, Alba offers active resistance, and Blanca, the middle generation, hovers between the two. Allende recognises this, at some level, and consequently, the magic gradually fades.

By focusing on two characters, and comparing Clara, who has access to magic, and Férula, who has not, the beneficial effect that magic exerts becomes evident. Férula, Esteban's sister, dedicates much of her life to nursing her bedridden mother. She is described as follows:

> She was still a beautiful woman, with rich curves and the oval face of a Roman madonna, but already the ugliness of resignation could be glimpsed through her pale, peach-toned skin and her eyes full of shadows. Férula had accepted the role of her mother's nurse. She slept in the room that adjoined her mother's, ready at any moment to run in and administer her potions, hold her bedpan, or straighten her pillows. She was a tormented soul. [...] She moved thickly and awkwardly and had the same sour character as her brother, but life and the fact that she was a woman forced her to overcome it and to clamp down on the bit. [p. 57]

Those last few words, 'clamp down on the bit', speak volumes about her repression. She resents Esteban, whose 'freedom to come and go stung her like a reproach' (p. 59). Whilst they are living under the same roof an intimate friendship develops between the two women. Clara is aware of Férula's strong affections, but oblivious to the subliminal sexual nature of her attachment. Esteban has a blazing row with Férula, claiming she is coming between him and his wife with her 'lesbian

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[26] See Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 251.

arts' (p. 157). The violence of his language serves to indicate his complete lack of understanding of his sister. If anyone could be accused of driving Clara crazy, it would be Esteban himself. Clara is the only friend Férula has ever had and, when they banish her from the house, they never see her alive again. Years later, when she dies, they find her lying on her bed:

> Festooned like an Austrian queen, she wore a moth-eaten velvet dress and petticoats of yellow taffeta. On her head, firmly jammed down around her ears, shone the incredible curly wig of an opera star. [p. 178]

Her bedroom looks like 'the dressing room of a struggling theater company' (p. 177). Férula's exotic costumes provide an outlet for her repressed desires. She does not have magic as a retreat, as Clara does. Nor has she a supportive network of family and friends. Her flamboyant clothes are an ineffective use of subversive energy, except significantly, as a form of self-preservation. Appearing to them as a ghost, the assembled family hear 'the metallic clang of the keys at Férula's waist' (p.175), symbolising her physical, emotional and spiritual incarceration.

Despite an appearance of passivity, Clara is able to get her own way a good deal. As a child, she is given to throwing tantrums to manipulate her parents. When her father tries to get rid of her newly adopted dog, Barrabás, she says: '[h]e's mine Papa. If you take him away, I'll stop breathing and I promise you I'll die' (p. 31). Barbara Loach notes that even when young Clara, 'demonstrates that she will not be confined to the parameters of acceptable language for females',[27] citing the incident of her impertinent interjection in church during a fire-and-brimstone sermon: '[p]sst! Father Restrepo! If that story about hell is a lie, we're all fucked, aren't we' (p. 17). Clara is traumatised when, at nine years of age, she witnesses the autopsy carried out on her older sister. She thinks she has brought about Rosa's demise, having predicted a death in the family, suggesting she is deluded into thinking her power is greater than is actually the case. She then enters her first

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[27] Barbara Loach, *Power and Women's Writing in Chile* (Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 1994), p. 169.

period of silence and is mute for nine years. There is other evidence of Clara's over-active imagination: on peeping through the kitchen window to witness the autopsy, what she sees, according to Hart, is 'a fantastic tableau constructed from a blend of reality and her childish imagination'.[28] She sees the family doctor 'transformed into a dark, fat vampire' (p. 53). Similarly, listening to the wonderful tales of her well-travelled Uncle Marcos, she can

> ...feel in her own skin the burning sting of snakebites, see reptiles slide across the carpet between the legs of the jacaranda room-divider, and hear the shrieks of macaws behind the drawing-room drapes. [p. 29]

Her vivid imagination gives Clara an ability to experience a transgression into a different 'diegetic level'.[29] Yet, on reaching adulthood, she settles for a traditional, domesticated life. On marrying Esteban, she is resigned to a loveless marriage.

According to Pam Morris, '[w]oman as other is the location of all that is desired and feared, all that is mysterious, magical, unrestricted and all that must be controlled and mastered'.[30] Esteban's thoughts reveal this ideology exactly but, despite his egotistical and despotic nature, he understands the limitations of his power in their relationship:

> He realized that Clara did not belong to him and that if she continued living in a world of apparitions, three-legged tables that moved of their own volition, and cards that spelled out the future, she probably never would. [...] He wanted far more than her body; he wanted control of that undefined and luminous material that lay within her... [p. 118]

Through her magic Clara resists being 'controlled and mastered' and, thereby, avoids becoming merely a possession of her husband. Esteban can never be part of the world of the spirits. Later on in their married life, he observes:

> His wife had grown increasingly remote, strange and inaccessible. There was no way for him to reach her, not even with presents. [...] He wanted Clara to think of nothing but him, and could not bear for her to have a life outside that

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[28] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 41.
[29] For a discussion of narrative or 'diegetic levels' see Ommundsen, *Metafictions?*, p. 8.
[30] Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 19.

> did not include him. He wanted her to tell him everything and to own nothing he had not given her with his own two hands. He wanted her to be completely dependent.
>
> But reality was different. Clara seemed to be flying in an airplane, like her Uncle Marcos, unmoored from land, seeking God through Tibetan sciences, consulting spirits with a three-legged table that gave little jolts — two for yes, three for no — deciphering messages from other worlds that could even give her the forecast for rain. [p. 152]

He can try to intimidate her with fits of temper and violence but, in a sense, she is able to control him. Even after her death, Esteban feels her comforting presence in the house and 'yet he tried not to venture into the enchanted realm that belonged to his wife' (p. 449). He tolerates magic in the domestic sphere, but considers 'magic, like cooking [...] was a particularly feminine affair' and, as it is a 'feminine affair', it is relegated to a low status. Like many aspects of women's lives, it is trivialised. Magic is also associated with innocence. Nana tells Nívea, 'many children fly like birds, guess other people's dreams, and speak with ghosts, but they all out-grow it when they lose their innocence' (p. 19). However, there are two male characters who have qualities bordering on the magical. Pedro Segundo is able to lead a plague of ants off the farm; Uncle Marcos had applied himself to 'cabalistic study', although with 'far more effort and far less effect' than Clara. That these men have limited access to magic lends weight to an anti-essentialist argument, suggesting magic is not a product purely of female biology or psychology, but is a product of a muted or marginalised group.

Clara has the support network provided by magic; she has a psychological release from the oppression of her macho husband and the wider patriarchal society, and a level of peace and inner contentment of which Férula cannot even dream. Since she has no source of esteem in the male dominated society of her time, Clara has little option but to locate an alternative avenue of experience, and in so doing sets in motion a process of eroding the monologism of her society; she dislocates and disrupts the symbolic and social order. Clara is articulating and demarcating her own reality, rather than accepting the male-centred version. Despite her religious

zealousness, Férula's faith brings her no joy. She has no access to the magical, and actively disapproves of Clara's magic (p. 150); she lacks fulfilment, becomes embittered, and finds herself ensnared in a patriarchal trap.

The 'wild zone', however, is a double-edged concept. As Hart observes, Allende 'plants small seeds of ambivalence about the value of Clara's gift'.[31] Certainly, Allende is ambivalent because the 'wild zone' is a refuge, a support and a site of resistance, but where possible, it is better to cope without it. A feeling of identity through resistance and empowerment is generated, but it is not power in the sense the men know, and may be more akin to the power of mystique or enigma. Clara does not have the status of prophet or seer. Often, when people seek out her help, it is for small matters. It does not have the status of even sibylline power, as there is no trace of evil in the spirits with which she communes. It is a form of counter-power but, ultimately, it hovers between a female utopia and a prison-house. This feminist reading shows that magic, in the way it is treated in this novel, represents a woman's epistemology. Women realise at some level that, in excluding themselves from a masculine sphere, they collude in their subjection, as they internalise and channel their energies into perpetuating the mythology relating to womanhood.

Literally, magic can be viewed as part of an actual female reality, but to delimit it in such a way leads to crude essentialism. Metaphorically, magic can be seen as a cultural construct, as the 'wild zone', a form of psychological protection serving a similar function to the bonds or informal networks which women forge between themselves to preserve their sanity in times of repression. To see the novel on these different levels, whatever the metaphorical interpretation, produces a layered, polyvocal reading. Magical realism, as appropriated by Allende, does not find a voice for women, since they find a means of articulating themselves through the

[31] Hart, *Narrative Magic*, p. 40.

'malestream' means adopted by Alba.[32] Towards the end, Alba is suffering, imprisoned in a tiny, claustrophobic cell known as the doghouse; she is considering giving up her struggle to live, when her dead grandmother appears to her, telling her that the point is not to die, but to live and write her testimony. Alba makes the decision to survive since, as Showalter says, it is in certain periods 'self-annihilation that is the hallmark of female aestheticism'. Alba does not succumb, like certain women of earlier eras, to the idea that suicide is a 'grotesquely fantasized female weapon, a way of cheating men out of dominance'.[33] The discovery of her pregnancy provides an ambivalent moment at the end: she is life-affirming as she carries a new life. Yet, the knowledge that her child may be that of a rapist must surely cast a long shadow over events, even though Allende implies that Alba, because of her raised political and feminist consciousness, has the ability to overcome her terrors and put the past behind her. To die would be to comply with the stereotype of the weak woman.

The magical, as it is used in *The House of the Spirits*, does provide an insight into the experimental and cryptic ways in which women dramatise the conflicts inherent in their lives. Yet, Allende shows how women can be more than the Other; they can be the Other-Worldly, drawing strength from the experience of suppression and the 'internalization of otherness' experienced by all women.[34] Magical realism, as a literary strategy used by Allende, dramatises the painful contradictions inherent in postcolonial, patriarchal society. Magic, as part of lived experience, is shown to become an inadequate and, at best, ambivalent force in the lives of women. To say they gain in confidence is insufficient: they acquire nothing less than a new subject position and a sense of self, but know there will always be that trace in their collective consciousness: magic will continue to exist in their matrilineal memory.

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[32] Loach uses this term in *Power and Women's Writing in Chile*, p. 34.
[33] Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 250.
[34] This phrase is used by Loach in her summary and discussion of Josephine Donovan's work in *Power and Women's Writing in Chile*, p. 37.

Undoubtedly, Clara is the most attractive and fascinating character, suggesting perhaps that, even in contemporary feminist circles, women writers and readers cannot wholly rise above the ideology within which they live and breathe. Clara has an aura, in the widest sense of the term, and once women become like men they lose this, and we both celebrate and mourn for what Freud's contemporary, Weir Mitchell, referred to as our 'mysteria'.[35]

Allende uses magic in *The House of the Spirits* in a more focused and seemingly calculated manner than either Carpentier or García Márquez. She creates vivid and memorable characters who are able to relate to a spirit world which is increasingly peripheral, but helpful and protective. The functionality of the magic in this novel tends to mark it out from the other novels.

[35] See Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986).

Conclusion

As Chapter One shows, there are many different definitions of magical realism and, as Young says, '[t]o reconstitute the definition of magical realism and rehabilitate it as a useful critical term is an arduous task that has yet to be undertaken satisfactorily'.[1] I have elected not to define it fixedly because, as a genre, it is very slippery, and tends to resist narrow definitions, but since it is impossible not to provide some qualifications, so its *characteristic tendencies* are outlined in Chapter Three. Instead of concentrating on the problem of definition, the thrust of this thesis has been to deconstruct magical realism's aesthetic, and to understand and demonstrate its sociological significance, rather than to reconstitute it as a useful critical term. The most significant aspect of the critical survey conducted in Chapter One is that many of the formulations point to antinomy, contradiction, oxymoron, disjunction, or as I have preferred to call it, oppositionality. It is from this observation that the consideration of structures of feeling stemmed.

[1] Young, *El reino de este mundo*, pp. 47-8.

In offering a possible literary ancestry in Chapter Two, I illustrate the tremendous importance literary history has for magical realist fiction. The novels have a bi-cultural and multifarious literary heritage. Texts, such as the chronicles of discovery, are used in a spirit of ironic appropriation, as writers address crucial issues of identity, both the emergent postcolonial identity, and the colonial palimpsest which continues to affect the hereditary social memory. The Latin American texts show a growing spirit of confidence and self-definition, which the magical realists build upon in later years.

Postcolonial history is textual and, as Chapter Two shows, there is a wealth of textual documentation of all kinds: treaties, letters, journals and maps. Despite the superficial heterogeneity of the novels analysed in this study, they have an inherent cohesiveness as a result of their literary ancestry. In a tremendously disparate range of writing, the contours of magical realism are there because their genetic material dates back to the chronicles of the Spanish and the religions, myths and legends of the precolonial and colonial eras. Magical realism can be described as the literary manifestation of the *Mestizo.*

Despite its perennial problematical nature, the critical term, magical realism, can be invested with a more significant meaning than has hitherto been the case. Through a close engagement with the texts, I have argued it is a cultural apprehension of reality that Central and Latin American writers have evolved whilst striving for independence from European literary styles and all the ideological and political implications which they implicitly sustain. Not only has classic realism exhausted its range of devices, but writers who have a different story to tell understandably want to narrate it differently. It is evident in the latter part of the twentieth century, that magical realism is a literature which embodies a new epistemology, one which transgresses the rules of classic realism, is able to take account of contradiction and, significantly, this writing generally comes from postcolonial cultures who have been

coming to terms with the contradictions in their societies, many of which have resulted from the enduring legacy of colonialism.

As Chapter Three demonstrates, realism has a close relationship to its socio-economic context. Magical realism, in exactly the same way, is a product and expression of the mood of its time. It is a reaction against, but also a development from, the naïveté of realism, with its uncomplicated monosemesis and its pedagogic, but congenial, moralising tone. It is valid, as I have shown, to argue the case for magical realism as a possibly *unconscious mediation* of undercurrents of cultural contradiction found in Latin and Central America. Many of the writers using magical realism have their cultural baggage of postcolonialism, with all its contradictions, its moot advantages and disadvantages, and are effectively followed about by the shadow of their colonial fathers and their neo-colonial neighbours, the United States. In addition, the upheaval and dislocation from the past which accompanies colonialism also impacts upon contemporary political situations, often meaning that the writers develop a voice with an anti-establishment inflection. It is essential to acknowledge that the novels in this study all engage with and problematise history. Given their cyclical structures, they could be taken to embody political pessimism or quietism. However, power is seen not to be monolithic: in all the texts, the characters are able to see beyond the dominant ideologies of their immediate situations, even if they are not always capable of bringing about change. So, for example, Ti Noel sees the opportunities to overthrow his slave masters; he recognises the repetitions in the power paradigms when he is made to build the fortress for Henri Christophe. All the four female generations of the del Valle family have some awareness of their circumstances, whether it be through the apparatuses of the ideological state, namely of the family, their class, religion, or the repressive state containment of the prison cell. Whilst it is certainly true that many inhabitants of Macondo are blinkered, José Arcadio Segundo is fully aware of the cover-up of the massacre of the striking workers, as he has lived through the experience and

recognises the fear and intimidation felt by those who also should know; Úrsula is a kind of seer who takes the opportunity to try to end tyranny as when she wrests control of the town herself; Melquíades has written the history of the Buendías in advance of its occurrence; Aureliano, the only character who remains alive near the end, experiences a blinding revelation of the truth and horror of his bizarre situation. In the short story, Eréndira becomes aware of her exploitation, moving from the unconscious, somnambulistic state she inhabits, to the feisty fugitive, who runs into the wind and the unknown. These stories all suggest that a monolithic idea of power is resisted. The writers under scrutiny here represent an oppositional culture, of which Said observes: '[t]he culture of opposition and resistance suggests a theoretical alternative and a practical method for reconceiving human experience in non-imperialist terms'.[2] This is exactly what these magical realist novels represent — a postcolonial attempt to assert difference from the former colonies, to form identities, to find voices with which to communicate their lived experience. They are reconstitutional as well as oppositional.

The concept of the structure of feeling plays an important part in this investigation. This analytical term, formulated by Williams, has fallen into abeyance, and I would like to resurrect it as a useful means of discussing the complex interrelationships between literature and the society from which it originates. I have argued that magical realism embodies a structure of feeling which represents postcolonial experience. It is found in the novels, regardless of the intentions of the authors, and is located through sociologically-informed, literary-critical analysis. The structure of feeling becomes apparent over time and expresses a central element of experience that has not been articulated hitherto; it is found in both the content and structures of the narratives. In the case of the magical realist structure of feeling, there are two integral elements: firstly, the oppositional arrangement of the story, and secondly,

[2] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 333.

the sweeping away of this starkness, achieved through the promotion of a high level of indeterminacy. The magic element helps in achieving indeterminacy, although some of this effect is due to the relation of events, and other elements are embedded in literary devices, such as metaphor. The result is the blurring of boundaries between previously discrete categories or states, and a breakdown of binary thinking, which is viewed as an essentially European, colonial imposition. The oppositionality, however, can never be completely destroyed as it remains in the hereditary social memory as a palimpsestic presence. Magical realism is, therefore, only partially successful in decolonising the mind.

Magical realism is also a strand of postmodernism. Its concern for metafictive devices, together with structural and motif repetitions, produce a literary playfulness enabling it to situate comfortably amongst other postmodern artefacts. It tackles huge issues of identity and history through its use both of structures of feeling and postmodern devices. Through its questioning of the 'real', its rejection of the division between high and low culture, its foregrounding of irony and the constructedness of the story, it reinforces the postmodern perspective.

The four texts analysed are diverse, but all demonstrate the above concerns and characteristics. The magical realism is not identical in each of them. In *The Kingdom of This World* it is evident in a nascent form. An arena is presented in which a number of colonial and postcolonial battles are played out. It is an earnest, but not altogether successful attempt, by a white Cuban author to illustrate the life of an African slave in Haiti. It has all the characteristic tendencies of magical realism, although it lacks a high level of metafictiveness. Thoroughly historically grounded, it is a narrative that presents the structure of feeling embodied in racial oppositions, in Voodoo and magical indeterminacy. Magic tends to protect and inspire the slaves. *Solitude* is the most complete and well-integrated example of magical realism. It provides numerous illustrations of the structure of feeling. Whilst

it is historically based, it also achieves the feat of encompassing both local and global issues. It is postmodern and contains metafictive elements, which although they are not all-pervasive, do come into prominence from time to time, and especially at he end, in order to effect a sense of overwhelming closure. Here, there is a wider range of magical incidents, and they are much more organically integrated into this story. Magic does not serve such an obvious function in García Márquez's work. 'Innocent Eréndira' is a far less complex story, but nonetheless, the magical realist structure of feeling is clearly there in the oppositional grandmother and granddaughter, allegorically representing coloniser and colonised. The indeterminacy is found in the bleak landscape, in the lawlessness of the society, in the transgression of familial roles, in the space of enquiry implicitly opened into human/animal boundaries, and in grotesque elements and hyperbole. The story has only touches of magic, but these are sufficient to interfuse it with a magical realist aura. *The House of the Spirits* is slightly different in that, although the structure of feeling is found, the magic is closely associated with the female characters and is deployed in a more narrowly consistent way, serving the function of the 'wild zone', to protect and provide sanctuary for the oppressed women of the story.

The influence of Latin American magical realism on other cultures is becoming greater as writers recognise the value of it, and the relevance of its structure of feeling to their situations. African magical realism has appeared, for example, in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). Its influence can be seen in feminist writers such as Angela Carter, partly because its oppositional style, as we have seen with Allende's work, appeals to certain types of feminism. Its hybridity is evident in the Anglo-Indian, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Rushdie writes of the fact that 'we are inescapably international writers at a time when the novel has never been a more international form'.[3] Many current fiction writers, including

[3] Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', p. 20.

those who are not in any sense from the periphery, are seduced by the mystery and the popularity of magical realism. The postmodern strand identified in magical realism is almost an inevitability, given the international and cosmopolitan nature of writers and writing today. Whether the term 'postmodern' is used, and whether the writers themselves embrace it, nonetheless, the perception of history, the view of knowledge, the scepticism about progress, the distrust of realism, all constitute a broadly postmodern outlook. It is this vision which magical realism embraces, and which facilitates the novels in crossing language and cultural boundaries so successfully. Both of these fictions are distinctively Latin American, and yet they are also part of a wider, global aesthetic appreciation.

As the first chapter demonstrates, the term magical realism encompasses a range of problems, but the largest of them must be the positionality implied by the use of the phrase. The criticality of positioning oneself is demonstrated perfectly in the study of *The Kingdom of This World,* when Carpentier unconsciously reveals that the omniscient narrator is white. Magic is something *other* to what one generally experiences, it is something out of the ordinary run of events, and outside the laws of nature. Exactly the same applies to the 'marvellous'. They both contain within their very being the notion of alterity. The term, undeniably, does denote a Western eye-view of non-Western literature. This is its central weakness. What Western critics tend to see in the novels is magic; what Latin Americans see is their cultural experience encoded into literature. This is because the medium is the message. Magical realism, enacting as it does a structure of feeling, serves a maieutic purpose and brings to full consciousness concepts only latent in the minds of the people. It also may be said to have a kind of 'negative capability', that is a capacity to present the world full of doubts and uncertainties without, as Keats said, 'any irritable reaching after fact and reason' which we are so keen to do in the West.

Fuentes's description of his amazing sense of anagnorisis upon reading *Solitude* prompted me to think further about the experience he feels was so crucial. I prefer to describe magical realism as representing a kind of communion, a sharing of a postcolonial mental stratum that is deeply held and firmly rooted. The religious connotation is deliberate, because, whilst the writers are not proselytising, and often in places deride Christianity harshly, the sense of a spiritual and a mysterious side of life is conveyed strongly in their works. Magical realism has become an entelechy, as it gives form to experience, and represents the essential nature of societal creativity in literature in a postcolonial setting.

Finally, Suzanne Césaire draws an analogy when arguing the case for surrealism as a kind of unconscious practice of the social self: 'the *hysteric* does not realize that he is *imitating* a sickness, but the doctor, who treats him and relieves his morbid symptoms, does know'.[4] Whilst the reference to sickness is far from ideal, and to take this too far would be reductionist and deterministic, the word 'symptom' is one which is highly applicable to magical realist writing, and although I acknowledge that analogies do not provide any indisputable proof, they do throw a correlative light on my theoretical formulation of magical realism. However, returning to the humility demanded by Achebe which I mentioned in my introduction, it must be said, this thesis does not mean to suggest that whole centuries and whole continents can be summed up in a few novels. And of course, critics and doctors do not always diagnose properly, as we saw with Freud and Dora.

[4] Suzanne Césaire, 'A Civilization's Discontent', in *Refusal of the Shadow*, ed. Richardson, p. 99.

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