Chapter Four
The Magical Postmodernist Imagination

One of the main distinctions between modernism and postmodernism is that the latter does not seek "transcendental timeless meaning" (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 19). Since myths are considered sources of anhistorical truth, and function like ideologies that incontestably provide structure and stability to the world, we can safely assume that postmodernism has moved away from myth. My aim is to show that it has veered towards magic. In the previous chapter, I examined how the modernist literary imagination, seeking to provide structure to the fractured present, tended towards mythic structures, archetypes, and symbols. In this chapter, I show that postmodernism's emphasis on the notion of the construct aligns it more closely to magic. In particular, I argue that the literary mode of magical realism is an instance of the dominance of the trope of magic in the postmodernist imagination.

As has been explored in the previous chapters, myths appear to have similar themes and functions across cultures, evinced in the existence and perpetuation of archetypes. Myths are usually also considered sacred and have divine actors. On the other hand, magic is not a clearly defined institution, and its reputation varies—from helpful to inefficacious to evil—from one cultural context to the next. In dominantly rational-scientific societies, people associated with magic are automatically deemed beyond the pale of the "rational." Magic has come to connote aberrational belief systems that belong primarily to those not at the center (the ex-centric): the colonized, the tribal, the pre-modern, the female, and the insane. The association of
magic with "irrationality" is an angle most fruitfully exploited by postmodernism, given postmodernism's great suspicion of the "center," and its preoccupation with the limitations of rationality.

Magic is capable of facilitating traffic between ontologically separate worlds, and it regularly violates the established (rational) rules of space and time. This fluid, intermingled aspect of magic is also reflected in Gebser's model of consciousness, wherein the magical worldview exhibits unity not only within the self (that is, the mind and body are not distinct from one another), but also between internal and external reality, between the self and the group, and between the group and nature. Magical consciousness views everything on a horizontal, equal plane, while mythical consciousness begins to organize the world along a vertical axis of hierarchies. In the magical worldview, boundaries between the internal and external, the living and the dead, the ego and the other are non-existent. In postmodernism, these boundaries are recognized but not respected. This aspect of fluidity is essential to postmodernism.

I am not suggesting that postmodernism is a return to the magical state of consciousness. Rather, I am proposing that its ethos can be translated as magical. From inside the prevalent rational-mental structure, the postmodernist mind reprises the magical worldview: reality is already experienced as split and discrete, but magical unity helps to destabilize normative boundaries that create ontologically different worlds. This affects postmodernist literary writing too, where it is not uncommon for authors to breach the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, fantasy and history, the novel and the documentary, and so on.
I also do not claim that postmodernism, in its entirety, is only a revisiting of magical consciousness. That would be an oversimplification. There are aspects of postmodernism that directly grapple with the extremes of the mental-rational structure but do not automatically turn to magical consciousness for resolution. For instance, postmodernism reflects upon, among other things, the conflict between the buying power of art houses and the hallowed status conferred upon art; and on the paradox of the art object being at once exclusive and mass-produced. In voicing such conflicts, it is not turning towards the magical.

"Postmodernism" is the term used for the new artistic movement that began around 1945 and intensified in the 1960s and 70s. It received most of its intellectual input from Europe. Postmodernism is considered by some to be a radical break from its predecessor (modernism), and by others, to be merely an intensification and radicalization of modernism's concerns. Although postmodernism does not have a specific manifesto, it is identified with the following themes: contradiction, randomness, excess (Lodge); self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity (McHale); discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, dissolution of character, erasure of boundaries, the destabilization of the reader (D'haen); a cultural activity that is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political (Hutcheon); pluralist, anti-reason, skeptical, resistant, interrogative, transgressive, highly self-conscious and intertextual (Butler). Linda Hutcheon points out an additional—and essential—aspect of postmodernism: it is not an "either/or" movement but a "both/and" one. In other words, it incorporates precisely what it wishes to contest, installs that which needs to be subverted, and centralizes that
which has to be decentralized (Poetics of Postmodernism 3). It uses “paradoxical doubled positioning to critique the inside from both the outside and the inside” (69). Therefore, postmodernism is not in the business of rejecting and omitting as it is in that of undermining and de-constructing.

We have already established that myths are based on polarities, and these polarities are often invested with value and placed in a hierarchical system of preferences (day over night, man over woman, mind over body). Over time, such hierarchical systems become naturalized. Postmodernism questions such naturalized hierarchies, and the role they play in forming our notions of identity, normality, and the truth. Even as it recognizes these binaries, postmodernism subverts them by exposing the constructed nature of values. At least in theory, it tries hard to avoid merely reversing the binary, and thereby, reinstituting the margin as the new center. Its premise is to constantly highlight the “discourses” through which significance, meaning and identity are constructed. Once an idea is accepted as having no more than discursive reality, it can no longer have a sacred, fixed, and permanent meaning. Besides, it is in the nature of discursive meaning to be “open, unfinished...‘future’” (Still 7). I have mentioned earlier that magic disregards binaries. The postmodernist destabilization of these binaries is a reflection of the magical imagination. In other words, the mental-rational worldview naturalizes binaries, and magic, in dismissing

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The notion of “discourse” indicates “a historically evolved set of interlocking and mutually supporting statements, which are used to define and describe a subject matter” especially of disciplines like law, medicine, and jurisprudence (Butler, Postmodernism 44). Discourses also set up the political, moral and social authority within a society and therefore hold the power to exclude those that are “deviants.” Discursive perspectives cannot be escaped; they are imbibed without conscious thought or will. They pervade all social phenomena, and the more dominant a discursive construct is, the more natural it appears to be (46-47). Postmodernism sets itself the task of exposing the hold of discourses rather than of offering alternatives to them. After all, the idea of an alternative only strengthens the illusion that we might, if we so wish, opt out of a discursively generated reality.
binaries, is profoundly inimical to the rational worldview. In the rational context, magic is inherently destabilizing.

Writing, reformulated as “text,” is another instance of postmodernist magical fluidity. The text, through its inherent connectedness to language as a whole, and to other texts, unsettles the binary opposition between that which lies within the confines of a book and that which is outside of it. The text is “open;” its borders distend far beyond the extent of the book. Roland Barthes suggests that the text exists as a part of a “network,” which is a “tissue, a woven fabric” of language (Image-Music-Text 159, 161). That is, a text exists only in a web of “intertextuality.” Barthes posits that a text has plural meanings that are “irreducible” insofar as there is an infinite play of signifiers in an infinite structure of signs and codes, and this play distracts and deters the process of congealing or finalizing meaning. Barthes avers that “[t]he Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing: thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination” (158-59). This implies that the notion of a text as belonging to the past or the present is an untenable one (Royle 78). According to Jacques Derrida, iteration and repetition are the bases of the signs that make up a text; a text is readable only because it refers to words or symbols of the past. At the same time, a text can never be solely of the past because it is never a finished and closed entity. A text is always open, “haunted” by that which is absent, and built up only of traces and traces of traces. Furthermore, Derrida claims that everything is potentially a text. As he puts it in Of Grammatology—“[t]here is nothing outside of the text” (158). Most importantly, the

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*Iterability* means that “[a] sequence of sounds can function as a signifier only if it is repeatable, if it can be recognized as the ‘same’ in different circumstances” (Culler 102).
phenomenon of "network" cannot be imagined as limited (Positions 38). Derrida implies that our meanings are inconclusive because they cannot terminate at a stable signified outside language; they can only circulate endlessly within language itself.

From Mythic Truth to Multiple Truths

Modernist art movements like Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism, and Fauvism—movements that supply radically new ways of seeing the world—have provided inspiration to postmodernist art as well. The thematic similarities between the two movements—postmodernism and modernism—include fragmentation, self-reflexivity, loss of faith in traditional values, and a deep concern with history (even if modernism is interested in handpicking elements and creating new traditions, often with the intention of building up national histories, while postmodernism is interested in interrogating the very assumptions and beliefs that go into producing such histories).

The differences between the two are also aplenty. Modernism remains true to the finished art object, and does not put on display the artifice or the construction of art. Postmodernism, on the other hand, highlights the motivations underlying the status of an object and the modes of construction of that art object. While modernism is deeply disappointed with the real world and sees art as the source of civilizational salvation, postmodernism deliberates over the specific (cultural, social, political) contexts that make people accept an object as art. Moreover, postmodernism treats art and language as simply cultural and social constructs that must be treated with liberal amounts of suspicion. Postmodernism is also marked by a rise in theory, a
celebration of critical self-consciousness, and a dismissal of the universalist humanist concerns that modernists displayed. That is, Modernists like Eliot and Joyce have usually been seen as profoundly humanistic . . . in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral values, even in the face of their realization of the inevitable absence of such universals. Postmodernism differs from this, not in its humanistic contradictions, but in the provisionality of its response to them: it refuses to posit any structure . . . such as art or myth—which, for such modernists, would have been consolatory. (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism 6)

A myth is essentially a master narrative: it offers absolute truths and final answers across space, time, and context. Postmodernism is greatly suspicious of anything that makes such claims of universal truth. Hence, when postmodernist texts use myths, they do so in the vein of parody because they are committed to the idea that “there is no consolation of form or consensual belief” (50). Postmodernism promotes the view that things lack inherent and overarching truth value that can be discovered by reaching back to some pristine origins. Truth, in fact, could be defined as whatever satisfies the rules of the discourse (Berman 200). Therefore, truths are

84 Challenging positivism and humanism (both universalizing paradigms) is not a particularly postmodernist exercise. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx and Freud have been part of this de-humanizing tradition, and have inspired Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Baudrillard and others. These thinkers maintain that there is absolutely nothing that is universal, natural, given, eternal, or unchangeable (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism 8).

85 Morris Berman’s discussion of the revival of magical consciousness—that he calls “paradox”—in the twentieth century, revolves around Wittgenstein’s notion of language games, Thomas Kuhn’s formulations in his Structure of Scientific Revolutions, and the principles of Gestalt psychology. While Berman admits that deconstruction and Wittgenstein’s philosophy appear to be similar, he asserts that the two are very different. Even though both foster cultural relativism (truths are acceptable only
plural, relative, transient, and only contextually relevant. Postmodernism also occurs in the age of the dissemination of information. In a world where events are brought to a global audience through heavily mediated sources, it is impossible to decipher the truth. The awareness of this fact causes one to wonder not only about what is true, but also if truth outside of representation is even possible. The negation of certainty is the driving force of postmodernism.

If truths are multiple, then history can certainly not be regarded as final and authoritative. Rather, it is reduced to "historiography," an account that exists in language, is a narrative, is open to multiple versions, and is created through the belief system and context of a historian. That is, history is essentially what the historian deemed worthy of being recollected and recorded. This recollection is often dictated by the discourse in which a history (and not the history) is being articulated (Barthes, "The Discourse of History" 17). The problem lies not so much in history being a construct as in it masquerading as a comprehensive account, and as the source of absolute, objective, truth.

If reality is so heavily mediated, then by extension, realism—the fictional genre that simulates the historical mode—is not a viable option in fiction. Moreover, postmodernists would argue that realist language is guilty of naturalizing power structures. For these reasons, fictional narratives are no longer able to offer

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within a community and this renders them unfit for comparison or translation), negate essence for aspect, and dismiss pure truth, Berman also sees a vital difference between deconstruction and Wittgenstein's philosophy, post-*Tractatus*. Deconstruction as well as Wittgenstein's philosophical thought are in the process of reviving "paradox," but where Wittgenstein's grief gives way to true horizontality, postmodernism is only pure nihilism dressed up as "radical chic" (Berman 191). For Berman, horizontality has a benevolent quality of egalitarianism, a sentiment he feels is sorely missing from postmodernism.
authoritative slices of reality, and the narrator/author cannot entertain pretensions of possessing omnipotent control over the landscape of the novel. Instead, a typical postmodernist novel will either persist in being open-ended, or in being all too accommodating of multiple, mutually-exclusive possibilities within the same fictional world. A postmodernist novel may narrate actual historical events, but it is likely to also insert obvious distortions that compel the reader into accepting that history is, after all, constructed through language. Postmodernist fiction revels in demonstrating how characters and narrators not only construct their subjectivities through words but are themselves just that: words (Waugh 26).86

Postmodernist Skepticism of Structure

The notion that there is one universal, all-encompassing truth that exists beyond language is dismissed by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. He defines postmodernism primarily as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). Metanarratives or master or grand narratives such as Marxism, Kantianism, Hegelianism, and science offer the promise of liberation: they confer authority on certain privileged emancipatory goals, they depict history as a triumphant progress, and suggest that all the systems of knowledge possess a secret unity that is waiting to be discovered. Lyotard observes that the postmodern mind sees every -ism as suspect and recognizes that a grand narrative is simply a story written in a particular context.

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86 Waugh suggests that James Joyce nearly accepts this credo of postmodernism as he ardently explores the role of language in the creation of reality. He shows "reality" to be a consequence of "style" and recognizes that even epiphanies are connected to a self-reflexive response to language itself. However, there is never an "overtly self-referential voice" that clearly establishes the "problematic relationship of language and reality" (25). Such a relationship, which recognizes and systematically voices the problem between style and content is necessary for postmodernist metafiction.
but masquerading as the absolute truth. Metanarratives function like archetypes: given their totalizing tendency, they subsume within their overarching rubric a number of petit or minor stories and homogenize them. Such homogenization is unacceptable to postmodernism. Instead, it privileges little or minor narratives because these minor voices mirror the inherent diversity and the naturally existing disorder in human society. Lyotard asserts that postmodernism “refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (xxv). Truth, history, facts—these are spuriously legitimized by metanarratives. For postmodernists, such master narratives are supplanted by discourses, which signify the provisionality, positionality, and heterogeneity of social reality against any unifying thematic or formal coherence. The distrust of metanarratives knocks down privileged “transcendental signifiers” like reality, god, and the human mind. It also upends conceptual binaries like body/mind, speech/writing, and literal/metaphorical. From a “decentered” perspective, it facilitates the existence of multiple truths, realities, and worlds. In effect, in the postmodernist ethos, “historical plurality replaces atemporal eternal essence” (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism 58).

The political dimension of this incredulity cannot be overlooked either: it brings into focus the narratives at the periphery, the voices of the heretofore marginalized and subordinated, and the claims of those rendered powerless by the legitimizing power of the metanarrative. However, it must be kept in mind that postmodernism, by itself, is not necessarily an egalitarian movement even though its politics are geared towards examining power structures and thereby undermining
voices that are invested with power. For the most part, it is willing to expose discourses that consolidate hierarchies but it does not think it is possible to abolish power structures. What it does, however, is level the playing field for those petit narratives that have always been excluded from the mainstream. This aspect of postmodernism bodes well for the "liberation" of the ethically and culturally oppressed communities that have so far possessed no voice.

Such de-centering spills into postmodernist fiction as well. Characters become highly aware of their statuses as creations in language, and narrators turn into unreliable story tellers. Most importantly, history's status as a construction through discourses of power and in language is brought to the fore in much postmodernist fiction. Such fiction also gives rise to the question: what happens to the common reader who has a sense of what is factually true or of that which is a historical actuality supported with ample evidence? Butler suggests that postmodernist skepticism, especially of history, does not mean that historians are free to make up things as they go along. For instance, Holocaust deniers are not accepted even in the most ardent of postmodernist circles. Novelists are not wholly free to concoct historical events. What they are expected to do, rather, is to expose, through fictional subversion, the narratives and discourses that constitute history. Essentially, the postmodernist novelist is expected to be "more sceptically aware, more relativist about, more attentive to, the theoretical assumptions which support the narratives produced by all historians..." (Postmodernism 35). In such a schema, it is the correspondence between language and reality that is highlighted, and the notion that
there is no such thing as unmediated reality is brought to the fore. The postmodernist ethos believes that

[there are] all kinds of orders and systems in our world—and that we create them all. . . . They do not exist "out there", fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history. This does not make them any the less necessary or desirable. It does, however, . . . condition their "truth" value. The local, the limited, the temporary, the provisional are what define postmodern "truth" . . . (Hutcheon, Poetics of Postmodernism 43)

The Project of (De)construction

It follows from Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives that if there is no final truth to be discovered, then everything is a construct; the corollary of this would be that that which is a construct can be deconstructed. Such a belief implies that there is no pre-given, sacrosanct center. If any center can be imagined, however fleetingly, it cannot be done without simultaneously also keeping in mind the peripheral. Conversely, in order to define the local or the regional, the center needs to be provisionally fixed. However, the position of centrality alters according to the context. It is from this sense of relativism that deconstruction arises. There are no logical, ethical, or political commonplaces that cannot be subverted. This constant shifting gives rise to deconstruction.

Derrida would claim that deconstruction is not a school or a method per se, but something that happens when, for instance, the conflicting readings of a text are
reflections of the conflict within the text itself. To deconstruct a discourse, for instance, is to show how the discourse undermines the philosophy it asserts or the hierarchical oppositions it supports. For example, conventional belief accepts that cause precedes effect. Yet, as Nietzsche argues, it is the effect (feeling pain, for instance) that creates the need for a cause to be found (a pin that caused the pain) (Culler 86). The recognition of binaries or oppositions is crucial to deconstruction. Derrida points out how traditional Western philosophy encourages oppositions and reinforces a "violent hierarchy" between the elements of a binary (Positions 39).

Traditionally, of the binary, one term dominates, and this dominant term is marked by its "presence." Presence has authority, and its status structures (but also limits) our thinking.

Oppositions such as presence/absence, speech/writing, philosophy/literature, literal/metaphorical, central/marginal, are deconstructed, but not in order to create a "monism" in which only the heretofore secondary term (absence, writing, literature, metaphor, and the marginal) remains. Rather, deconstruction tries to show that the opposition is a metaphysical and ideological imposition, and one must try to expose the presuppositions that underlie it, as well as the metaphysical values invested in these oppositions. At the same time, it does not aim to simply neutralize the binary. Rather, its focus is on the act of exposing the constructed status of the binary (38).87

87 By questioning hierarchical oppositions, deconstruction also critiques supposedly scientific "metalanguages" (Culler 199). A metalanguage is a set of terms or concepts that is used to analyze a domain but is regarded as external to that domain, and therefore not affected by the objects it describes. One of the aims of deconstruction is to study how the supposedly external, hence neutral, metalanguage is affected by the very phenomenon it is trying to structure.
One binary that Derrida emphasizes is speech and writing. Traditionally, philosophy has always devalued writing in favor of speech. Writing is considered to be secondary, and only the means to deliver or express the message which lies beyond words. Words, their changing connotations, their relationships to other words, and their connection to signifiers, must not affect true philosophical thought. The fear that the medium (language) will alter the content of the thought or that the recipient will get caught up in decoding the intricacies of language leads philosophy to posit that writing is only the representation of speech. Derrida argues that this "phonocentrism" is inevitably associated with the "logocentrism" of metaphysics—"the orientation of philosophy toward an order of meaning—thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word—conceived as existing in itself, as foundation" (Culler 92). That is, philosophical thought has always been predicated upon "presence."

Logocentrism thus assumes the "priority" or "higher presence" of one term and "conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption" (93). Deconstruction tries to show that presence itself is not a given but a product. It cannot be understood or spoken of without also bringing absence into the picture. In addition, absence cannot be defined in terms of presence or as presence's negation.

Derrida points out that in the Western tradition, speech is primary and writing is its artificial and derivative representation (Culler 100). Speech is in direct contact with meaning, whereas writing consists of "physical marks" that are not necessarily directly related to the thoughts that have produced. Derrida argues that it is speech which should be understood as a form of writing (101). If writing is considered to be a mere recording of speech—and one that can be repeated even in the absence of the signifying intention that motivates speech—then this iterability should be a condition of any sign. Even speech functions on the same idea.
This can be understood through the example of the temporal "present."

Derrida asserts that the present is only available in terms of the traces of its past and its future. In other words, the present exists not as an absolute category but only as a product of the relations between the past and the future. Through the notion of traces, Derrida posits that meaning-making is a process of differing and deferring (Of Grammatology 23). The combination of these terms is "différence," which means that a concept can be explained only through a chain of other concepts or words (Positions 38). Différence can be defined thus:

[It is] the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the a of différence indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity, that which cannot be governed by or distributed between the terms of this opposition) production of the intervals without which the "full" terms would not signify, would not function. (24)

What the "play" of différence points out is that it is impossible, at any moment, that "a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself" (23). That is, it is impossible for an element to function as a sign without referring to elements which are not present. Derrida explains that even those events that are believed to determine structures are themselves determined by prior structures. That is,

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89 Play is the "disruption of presence." In the chain of references, and differences, play is "must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence." Furthermore, "Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around." ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 292).
structures are products, and always based on some prior differentiation. There is nothing like a pure origin, and nothing is exempt from différence.

Such deferral and differing also plays out in meaning-making. Meaning is context bound, but the context itself is boundless (Culler 123). That is, the meaning of an utterance in speech or writing cannot be determined outside of the context, while the context itself is always open to further description. Besides, the attempt to codify context "can always be grafted onto the context it sought to describe, yielding a new context which escapes the previous formulation" (124). Since context cannot be limited, it is impossible to posit the full determination of meaning based on contexts. In this way, deconstruction puts into place a general "displacement" of meaning (86).

Derrida also denies that historical contexts can determine meaning. Deconstruction holds that discourse, meaning, and reading are historical processes, and are produced in the "processes of contextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization" (128). Language is "historically" constituted as a fabric of differences. History is a general text, with no boundaries, and can only be understood through discourse. Discourse itself is historical and meaning is historically determined (129). Meaning cannot be defined univocally as the author’s or speaker’s intention or the reader’s interpretation. Rather than attempt to decipher a truth or origin, deconstructive interpretation affirms "play" (131). Meaning is best understood as infinite implication (133). Such a notion of "play," boundless context, and endless text, brings us back to the idea of magical flux.

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80 Patricia Waugh traces the deconstruction of oppositions through broad movements in literary fiction. She points out that the social structure was emphasized in eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction through family, marriage, birth or death, and the individual was almost always integrated into
The Ontological Concerns of Postmodernist Poetics

Brian McHale traces the move from modernism to postmodernism via Jakobson's principle of the "dominant"—the "focusing component of a work of art" within a poetic hierarchy that governs, structures and transforms the other elements in a piece of art. The dominant exerts its sway over all the aspects of the art object. An evolution in poetics is signaled by a change in dominant. It must be kept in mind that a change in the dominant in literary history is a matter of balance rather than of exclusion. The dominant directs the bulk of the art-work's concerns but does not create water-tight, impermeable segregations. McHale uses the conceptual tool of the dominant to argue that the shift from modernism to postmodernism is essentially a shift in poetics from epistemological to ontological concerns.

Through examples of fiction, McHale shows how the dominant has altered. Questions such as: "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable?"
are asked by modernists (9). The primary concerns articulated by an epistemological orientation are the circulation and accessibility of knowledge, and the presence of this knowledge in different minds. McHale cites *Absalom, Absalom!* as the epistemological-modernist text par excellence, where the detective fiction genre is at its apogee, and the epistemological difficulties of the characters are passed on to the readers. However, this novel is at the cusp of postmodernism when Quentin and Shreve's fragmented knowledge crosses over to pure speculation and deliberate fictionalizing. They renounce their scrupulous quest to discover what has happened and suddenly begin positing, with brazen assurance, what must have happened. This is where "intractable epistemological uncertainty" turns into "ontological plurality or instability" (11). However, the novel reverts to epistemological questions once Quentin and Shreve's fictionalizing episode concludes.

The shift from modernism to postmodernism is also a transfer from modes of knowing to modes of "being," from the description of the (single, legitimate) universe, to the proliferation of multiple universes where each is as legitimate as the next. In this postmodernist, "post-cognitive," ontological phase, questions such as the following are foregrounded:

- What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text.

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92 Wendy Faris also uses Quentin and Shreve's moment of invention, and their opening up of an imaginary realm within the fictional world, to distinguish between magical realism and realism (166). It is the obvious intent to "invent" that separates magical realism from realism.
and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?;

How is a projected world structured?" (10)

It is evident that even the most complex modernist fiction, such as that of Faulkner and Joyce, almost always produced a historically plausible—and potentially verifiable—world, so that the quest in the novel could be completed by an informed and alert reader. The chronology in their fiction is generally linear, and even when it is scrambled, it is possible to rearrange the narrative fragments as in a jigsaw puzzle. The modernists exhibit formal control and regard the contradictions of history as amenable to resolution. Postmodernist texts highlight the confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, disturb any semblance of reality (and realism), question the available narratives of history, science and rationality, and lay bare the art of the novel. Postmodernist texts are also very aware of the intertextual nature of the text, of the historical and social context of the text's production and consumption, and of the text's amenability to plural interpretations.

It can be inferred from McHale's notion of the ontological dominant that postmodernism expects its readers to think of fiction as being beyond questions of true and false. Through the "ontological perspective," readers see fictional worlds as even capable of violating the rules of logic. Characters and events can be outrageously transformed in an ontologically pluralist world. Positions become relative and unstable. The boundaries of fiction and the real world are rendered porous, and boundaries between the various kinds of fictional worlds (fantastical, real, historical) erode as they are nestled within one text. It is not uncommon to find these varied worlds intruding into the worlds of other texts. Both the matter and manner of
construction are interrogated, and postmodernist novels lead us to question the nature of representation outside the world of the novel as well. Therefore, in a truly ontological imagination, even social reality is seen as a loosely held collection of sub-universes of meanings, positions, roles, and discourses. Inevitably, the overtly constructed nature of fictional worlds leads us to question the construction of the "real" world as well (90). The germane inquiry is not whether truth obtains, but how truth is made, and for whom it is true.

Postmodernist fiction is not obscure in style (as, for instance, *Finnegans Wake* is), but it expresses uncertainty at the level of narrative. Stories become labyrinthine, with inconclusive or multiple endings. Identities are contradicted within the same text. The imposition of a complex but artificial mathematical order upon experience is seen in Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy* and Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

Discontinuities in the form of metafictional asides to the reader, representative blank spaces in the text, fiction mixed with news reports, and non sequiturs are common. Metaphor and metonymy are carried to extremes through parody or burlesque. For instance, Alain Robbe-Grillet's fiction betrays a perpetual imprisonment in
rationalism, and a turning towards magic and the magical worldview. I have also outlined that postmodernism rejects the assurances of mythic imagination, and instead places its faith in networks, webs, and discourses—all metaphors of the magical flux. I have already established that magical identity does not maintain ontological separations; rather, it creates fluidity between those aspects that appear cut off from each other in a rational worldview. A magical identity does not recognize distinctions between the self and the other. Another key feature of the magical consciousness is the absence of binaries. Postmodernism rejects all aspects of reality and fiction that rest on the normative hierarchies in binaries. However, rather than erroneously set up new binaries, the postmodernist project keeps existing hierarchies, value systems, truth, history, and identity in a flux, never letting them settle into final forms that give final meanings. Hence, by subverting stability, collapsing binaries, and exposing the constructed nature of history and meaning, postmodernism reverts to an aspect present in the unconscious make-up of human beings that preceded the genesis of structures (mythic consciousness). This aspect appears monstrous, irrational, and magical to the modern-rational imagination.

In this section, I explore the literary phenomenon of magical realism, and show how many of its concerns overlap certain central aspects of postmodernist fiction. If, as Lyotard suggests, the adversary of postmodernist fiction is accepted language and conventional modes of representation, and if postmodernism's project is to put forward "the unpresentable in the presentation itself" (81), then magical realism is certainly postmodernist. Magical realism sets the stage using realist and historical co-ordinates, and then reconfigures this setting with the "unpresentable," which includes
the magical, the uncanny, the supernatural, and the abnormal. Received history is undermined through radically different and un-natural retellings of events. Such tactics highlight not only the fickle nature of memory, and the writing of history, but also the fact that both memory and history are created in language and have discursive underpinnings. By using magic, magical realism alters the very nature of realism; it forces the reader to acknowledge that reality within the fictional world cannot be fully captured through realism, and reality outside the fictional world cannot be properly understood through rationality. Anne Hegerfeldt goes so far as to assert that magical realism is the fictional counterpart to anthropological and sociological studies, "tracing the various strategies by which individuals and communities try—and always have tried—to make sense of the world..." (64).

Magical realism (sometimes also cited as "magic realism," and "magic(al) realism") is a literary mode\textsuperscript{96} whose coinage comes from Europe. However, in its most well-known avatar, it was used to legitimize and bring under one rubric all Latin-American fiction. In the early stages then, magical realism was geographically, rather than thematically, defined. During that phase, its use was restricted to Latin American fiction, however undermining such an act of labeling is for a heterogeneous body of fiction. By the 1980s, magical realism had been appropriated by the postcolonial project, by postmodernist fiction, and to some extent, by feminist

\textsuperscript{96} Whether magical realism can be considered an independent genre is debated. The term's application to authors is also questionable. Hence, in using the term "mode," Bényei makes a case for the myriad ways in which magical realism is interpreted and used. The term "literary mode" is vague: it "is narrow enough not to define the phenomenon as a genre, and broad enough to go beyond the identification of narrowly interpreted ‘stylistic’ features. A mode of writing implies ‘a kind of writing (in the sense of interpretation) of existence’ where the peculiarities of the mode (on microscopic as well as macroscopic levels) inform a particular modality of interpretation of existence in the most general sense." (150). That is, Bényei is connecting the mode of writing with the mode of existence itself.
writing. While the locations of magical realism have spread, and it has become international, Tamás Bényei suggests that the basic premise of this literary mode remains the same: it is "a mode of writing that responds to a particular cultural situation (marginalisation, multiculturalism, displacement, and so forth)" (150)—a trait it shares with much of postmodernist fiction.

Magical realism has also been referred to as an oxymoron (Bowers 3), but this figure of speech must be used carefully in this context. An oxymoron implies two contradictory terms being collapsed into one. While it is true that magical realism operates on the binary of the real and the un-real, and the two exist in a fused state, this totalized synthesis of opposites exists only in the fictional world. The reader, on the other hand, is always aware of the disruptive nature of magic in magical realism. In being disruptive, magic highlights the constricting nature of a realist fictional world (Slemon 418).

Magical realism's political aims of magical realism abut those of postcolonial fiction: both question colonial or "official" historiography that tends to discredit local beliefs under the guise of (Western) rationality. It is also similar to historiographic metafiction, as both also expose that the process of history-making is

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97 That magic is a source of disruption is clearly reflected in the mode being called "magical realist" and not realist magic. Realist magic would bring magic down to the level of realism, while magical realist indicates that reality is taken to the level of the magical. Thus, it is not magic that is transformed, but transforms reality.

98 Remembering and forgetting are an important aspect of magical realism, as they are for historiography. Often, memories are handpicked or re-formed in certain discourses. The dominant discourse gets to establish official history, and what is omitted in this version of history is assumed to have never happened. Gabriel García Márquez observes in *The Fragrance of Guava* that "Latin American history is also made up of immense useless enterprises and great dramas which are condemned to oblivion in advance. We also suffer from the plague of loss of memory. With the passage of time, nobody remembers that the massacre of the banana company workers actually took place" (Mendoza 73, emphasis added). The banana company massacre is an event that features in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as does the communal forgetting of the same.
through the selective memories of power centers. Magical realist worlds are usually constructed around "real" political and historical concerns, and they also raise questions about the way we understand, interpret, and represent the world. In being "historically" rooted, magical realism eschews any affinity with its cousin—fantasy—which is often escapist in intent.

The "realism" part of magical realism continues from the European literary trend of mimesis that makes fiction appear as if it were holding a mirror to the real world. Realism is essential to magical realism because the reader must be able to identify with the setting of the novel. If it does not wish to be escapist, fiction needs to have real or identifiable counterparts to its characters and events. Magical realist fiction is usually situated in known cities or countries, or in locales that serve as metaphors for them. Such fiction is also set in a particular and identifiable time in history, and often, "real" historical events mark the timeline of the fictional world.

On the other hand, the "magic" in magical realism arises from several sources. A commonly accepted source is the "marvelous," stemming from the landscape and quotidian aspects of the everyday reality of a culture. Alejo Carpentier argues that this is the only source of magic in Latin American fiction. Such a view places magic back in the realm of the mimetic: reality itself is magical. Carpentier is making the case that the individual and the community (in Latin America) are always already steeped in this magical reality. Such an assertion would imply that all of Latin America is culturally homogenous, irrespective of whether any sections of its populace have had exposure to Western ways of thinking. Seen from this perspective, magical realism is really only realism, and what is magical appears so only to readers
who have particular expectations from a novel. Such an argument restricts the validity of magical realism to a geographical context, and to a culture that, on the whole, can be defined only in opposition to Western societies.

What I am proposing is very different from Carpentier’s view. Whether magic is imbued in nature is not a prime concern of the specific literary mode of magical realism. Of course, there are communities whose worldview is governed by belief in magic. Belief in the dissemination and activity of magic by the characters involved is also vital to the creation and sustenance of magical realist worlds because this belief supplies validity to these fictional worlds. However, I am proposing that magic is not a trope that arises out of the Latin American landscape or ethos. Rather, it is a phenomenological projection of the artist’s consciousness. Like Gebser’s magical structure of consciousness, magical reality is projected upon the fictional world. That is, magical realism is a writer’s subjective experience, articulation, and configuration of his or her reality rather than a cultural given. Such an approach not only allows the writer greater freedom to manipulate magic as a literary trope, but also allows him or her to articulate social and political concerns that are subjectively relevant. This also implies that magical realism is not akin to the entertaining trickery of magicians. Instead, it articulates a real-world concern but simultaneously also pushes the limits of truth, history, and the imagination.

I have argued earlier that the revival of a past structure of consciousness by the literary imagination is always in close conjunction with the great awareness of the

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99 Magical realism creates possible worlds. However, “in order for them to be possible, they must be believed in, imagined, wished for etc., by some human agent” who is willing to propose, construct, and sustain those worlds (McHale 34).
mental-rational worldview. Once the paucity of the rational imagination is apprehended, the artist (anywhere in the world, from within any discourse) is compelled to seek, from the various manifestations of latent structures of consciousness, an appropriate and fulfilling way of understanding, describing, and filling in the world. In order to create a fuller reality, the artist imbues his or her fictional world with magic. Magic is magical precisely because it does not operate on laws and logical connections that govern our perception of the real world. Through the creation of such magical fictional worlds, the writer uses magic to render porous the boundaries that create watertight compartments. Humans and nature, the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate—these are categories that appear to rational consciousness as ontologically distinct from each other. The flux of magic disturbs these distinctions, and allows the fictional world access into those aspects that are firmly kept out by realism. In addition, this magical fluidity also revives what Berman calls horizontal egalitarianism, and through this horizontality, magical realist fiction combats the naturalized hierarchies that sustain modern reality.

Therefore, what I am proposing is that magical realism is not a geographically—but an internationally—relevant literary mode. It aims to show that the realist part of the fictional world is no more normal or acceptable than the magical. In doing so, it destabilizes normative truth, history, dimensions of linear time and space, and traditional notions of subjectivity. Like postmodernist theorists who provoke their readers to think about their own subjectivities and their place in the

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100 Lois Parkinson Zamora notes that both postmodernism and magical realism promote the idea that selfhood is collective: "subjectivity is not singular but several," it is "not merely individual and existential" but also "cumulative, [and] participatory" (Zamora 498). That is, an individual cannot be
real world, magical realism desires to shake readers into realizing that reality is not what they assume it to be. In other words, it is the experience of the fictional world that alters the perception of the real world; not the other way around.

The kind of magic that magical realism employs is unexpected, monstrous, and disruptive for a reader who exists in an otherwise rationally ordered, normative world. In being so deliberately rooted in socio-political reality, this mode insists that what appear to be phantasmagoric excesses should be accepted as a normal part of the world. Magic here is akin to the Derridian concept of the "arrivant." The arrivant is unpredictable and questions our perception of the border or threshold. The arrivant is unnamed, unseen, and unrecognizable (since we have not encountered it before), and while it is intrusive, we (the readers) must extend hospitality to it, welcome it into our fold, and allow it to be free. In other words, the concept of the arrivant—the unnamed and the unanticipated—questions the limits we set on what is normal, and how we conceive of/arrive at normality. Once we have accepted the arrivant,¹⁰¹ we will see it as normal rather than as abnormal or unnatural (Royle 110). Similarly, magic in magical realism is accepted as normal rather than abnormal in the fictional world.

Unlike in gothic fiction (discussed below), where the element of magic remains isolated, magical realist fiction is a move towards the appropriation, assimilation, and

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¹⁰¹ Through the metaphor of the arrivant, Derrida also states that the future is "monstrous." By monstrous, he means the qualities of being unpredictable and incalculable. To be open to the future is to be open to the monstrous arrivant, and to not merely accept it but also to "domesticate" it, and allow it to alter our "habits" ("Passages—from Traumatism to Promise" 387).
normalization of magic as the element of the arrivant. In the process, magic reciprocally reorganizes realism and preconceived notions about reality.

This is the movement of culture. Texts and discourses that provoke at the outset reactions of rejection, that are denounced precisely as anomalies or monstrosities are often texts that, before being in turn appropriated, assimilated, acculturated, transform the nature of the field of reception, transform the nature of social and cultural experience, historical experience. (Derrida, "Passages—from Traumatism to Promise" 387)

The concept of the arrivant is pertinent to my argument because it articulates the idea that magic, although deliberately injected into an otherwise realist world, is a part of this world, and the ways in which it appears necessitates its normalization. The first step of this assimilation is from the characters and narrators who display no discomfiture with magic: for them, there is nothing out of the ordinary going on. The reader, on the other hand, recognizes the extra-ordinary, and is forced to question her assumptions about normality inside and outside the fictional world. Once this magical reality affects the readers' perceptions of the composition of their own reality, scientific and rational presumptions break down, and we realize that reality is not "knowable, predictable, [or] controllable" (Zamora 498).

Magical Realism's Roots in Rationality

The connection between rationality and magic goes back many centuries. I pointed it out in the second chapter that magic has always been deemed to be inferior
to rationality. It is, therefore, very surprising that magical realism originated as an art movement to mark a shift from the fantastic excesses of surrealism to a highly sober rationalism (presaging the conflict between the sites of magic and reason).

Franz Roh, a German art critic, first used *Magischer Realismus* or "Magic Realism" \(^{102}\) in 1925 to signify a post WWI turn in European art—specifically painting—from high Expressionism to a more sober, more realistic mode. Also called Post-Expressionism \(^{103}\) and "New Objectivity" (by Gustav Hartlaub), this movement did not have an absolutely new and distinct style of its own. Rather, it was a composition of many styles and formal aspects popular at the time (Guenther 33). Its primary agenda, though, was to distance itself from the Expressionists, who professed great interest in extra-terrestrial representations, in fantastic (often outlandish) depictions of the world, and who displayed feverish, messianic tendencies. Magic Realism, instead, aimed to deliver, through intuition, the "interior figure, of the exterior world" (Roh 24). \(^{104}\) The Post-Expressionists’ “reengagement” with reality caused them to turn towards less fanciful and calmer descriptions of reality, and gave precedence to empirical, mundane objects “bathed in the clarity of a new day” (17).

\(^{102}\) The term, however, was not actually coined by Roh. As Irene Guenther points out, it was already used by Novalis in the 18th century to distinguish between “magical idealist” and “magical realist” realms of philosophy (Guenther 35).

\(^{103}\) Among the salient features of Post-Expressionism—as enumerated by Roh—are sober subjects, clarity of expression, stasis, quietude, a thorough description of even minor details issuing in the construction of a microcosm or an effective miniature, the effacement of the process of painting, the disappearance of sketch-lines, and an external purification of the ordinary object (Guenther 35-36).

\(^{104}\) Such a formulation must not be mistaken for a project based on Freudian psychoanalysis because Post-Expressionists focused on “the material object and the actual existence of things in the world, as opposed to the more cerebral and psychological reality explored by the surrealists” (Bowers 12). Surrealists, greatly influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, express on canvas the inner workings of the individual psyche, the imagination, and the mind, because they believed that conscious experiences were not adequate to explain one’s reality fully. Magical realist painting, on the other hand, focuses on the external reality of objects and not on the subconscious.
That is to say, the movement attempted to still the fervid waters of the Expressionist imagination in order to experience what it claimed was magic inherent in ordinary, material objects of the world. For Arturo Uslar Pietri, as for Roh, magic realism indicated the wonder and magic in a steadfastly realist world (Leal 120).

Seen from this perspective, the magical essence of mundane reality is not evil or playful or outrageous but pristinely "rational." Magic is a result of heightened and stark clarity, "an authentic rationalism, which venerates as a 'miracle' the 'world's rational organization'" (Guenther 35). Magic does not need to be infused or artificially created—it already exists in the given order of the world and it needs to be made visible on the canvas. In Roh's view, "mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it" (16). In other words, the realist fails to see what is already present in the world, and the Expressionist only contorts it to excess. Artists such as Giorgio de Chirico and Otto Dix firmly believed that the reality of ordinary, mundane things is already magical and has a certain "spirit." This spirit of things can be accessed only when reality is not imitated or created but "reconstructed." Roh outlines this movement thus:

In making what was formerly accepted as obvious into a "problem" for the first time, we enter a much deeper realm, even though some of the results may seem inadequate to us. This calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces, means that the ground in which the most diverse ideas in the world can take root has been reconquered—albeit in new ways... Now when a piece of imitated "reality" hangs on the wall it only makes sense if it
starts from and then (consciously or unconsciously) transcends the representation of a window, that is, if it constitutes a magical gaze opening onto a piece of mildly transfigured “reality” (produced artificially). (20)

At this juncture, an inherent paradox in Roh’s formulation appears quite clearly. While on the one hand, he claims that real objects have a latent magical quality, on the other, he puts the onus of manifesting that quality on an act of transfiguration and artifice. Even as the act of painting must capture reality, this reality is also “mildly transfigured” by the artist. The tension between Roh’s ontological and phenomenological conceptualizations of magic (i.e., as inherently existing versus interpretively produced) has lain at the heart of magical realism ever since.

While Roh’s critique of magical realist art became popular all over Europe, magical realism’s most radical transposition was to Latin America by Alejo Carpentier, although it is likely that the term “magic realism” was used in the Latin American context first by Uslar Pietri in his book, The Literature and Men of Venezuela in 1948 (Leal 120). Carpentier, who had participated in the French surrealist movement, came across the term in the 1930s, and renamed it in 1949 as *lo real maravilloso Americano*, which was interpreted and translated as both American “marvellous realism” and “marvellous reality” (Bowers 2). Carpentier dismissed Roh’s interpretation and deprecated the use of the term for denoting a trend in European painting when it rightfully belonged to the Latin American world—its reality and its literature (“The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” 102). He adapted the

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105 In the 1950s, the Spanish term *realismo mágico* gained currency, and began to be circulated internationally as “magical realism” (Bowers 2).
term and justified it as the most appropriate label for the entire body of Latin American fiction from all the ages. The marvelous real, he says, is a truthful account of indigenous oral and written traditions of the continent. Unlike European "surrealism" which is a "tiresome pretension of creating the marvelous" (Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America" 84), marvelous American reality is ontologically different from the West.

Magical realism] does not imply a conscious assault on conventionally depicted reality but, rather, an amplification of perceived reality required by and inherent in Latin American nature and culture. . . . the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, and politics—not by manifesto. (Zamora and Faris 75) Therefore, it is the untamable landscape and cultural heterogeneity of Latin America that gives rise to genuine magical realism. In other words, the American marvelous real is mimetic, representative of reality, and hence a variation on realism itself.

According to Carpentier, (European) surrealists profess to be steeped in magical existence, are not truly magical realist since they can only present a "manufactured mystery," "invoked in disbelief" and therefore never amounting to

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106 Carpentier does, however, concede that there are some other cultures such as China, Iran, and India, whose writers can justly stake a claim to the genre of genuine marvelous real writing. He notes the prevalence of baroque, an element of artistic spirit that is contiguous to the marvelous real, in ancient Iranian literature (Firdousi's Book of Kings); in the Spanish works of Quevedo, Calderón, Góngora, and Cervantes; in Aristo's Orlando Furioso; in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream; in Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel; and in Goethe, Novalis, Lautréamont and Proust ("Baroque and the Marvelous Real"). Angel Flores adds to this list works by Kafka, Gogol, the Grimm brothers, and to a lesser extent, Poe and Melville (Flores 111).
"anything more than a literary ruse" ("Baroque" 104; "Marvelous Real" 86). Magic in such "academic" exercises can only be borrowed from elsewhere or created artificially and sustained through clichéd formulae.

So then, what makes Latin America the only legitimate site for magical realism? Carpentier claims that "Latin Americans drag a legacy of thirty centuries behind them, but in spite of a record of absurd deeds and many sins, we must recognize that our style is reaffirmed throughout our history, even though at times this style can beget veritable monsters" (83). The history he speaks of is the indigenous art of the Americas, a fertile ground for the marvelous because of its "polychromatic images, its interweaving and merging elements, the richness of its language" ("Baroque" 99). However, even more significantly, the marvelous real derives from the fact that Latin America is "a continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, mestizaje" (98) and it is this "mestizaje" or fecund racial mixing that sharpens the quintessentially Latin American "awareness of being Other" (100).

In spite of Carpentier's argument that the reality of Latin America is magical, he cannot decide if magical realism arises purely from (the Latin American) culture or from the creative (and therefore artificial) efforts of the Latin American writer: "[i]f our duty is to depict this world, we must uncover and interpret it ourselves. Our

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107 García Márquez also points out that the fecund mixing of races and cultures is the reason for Latin America's unique reality. He includes in his catalogue of genetic influences the Caribbean people, the Spanish, the indigenous Indians, the Indochinese, the Andalusians, the Galicians, and other races (Mendoza 51).

108 Brian McHale finds that the same features that endear magical realism to Latin America also render the continent particularly fertile for postmodernism: "Latin America is a mosaic of dissimilar and, on the face of it, incompatible cultures, languages, world-views, landscapes, ecological zones. Its condition is, we might even say, intrinsically postmodernist" (52). In addition, Latin America's special status rests not only on its difference from Europe and North America but also on the inherent multiplicity that obtains within itself.
reality will appear new to our own eyes" ("Baroque" 106). Furthermore, he suggests that "an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state" is necessary for the marvelous to be discovered ("Marvelous Real" 86). In other words, in Carpentier's view, the heightened state of marvelous realism is genuine if it rises from the very cultural ethos of a location; it must not be a borrowing or a contrivance made in order to prove a point, political, academic, or otherwise. Yet, Carpentier fails to make clear whether magical realism is a reflection of the ontology of Latin America or if it is an exercise in creative interpretation through "an unaccustomed insight." 

109 This ambiguity that Alejo Carpentier created is sustained by some theorists in different ways. For instance, Roberto González Echevarria proposes two distinct trends in magical realism: the "ontological" and the "epistemological." The ontological variety of magical realist fiction, according to González Echevarria, arises when "magical realist ideas can originate from a particular cultural context where they are compatible with the belief systems of that culture" (Bowers 91). That is, Carpentier's idea that the marvelous resides in the landscape or culture of Latin America gives rise to the ontological variety. While González Echevarria's formulation goes beyond Latin America, it still restricts magical realism to writers who are mirroring their reality rather than creating it. On the other hand, epistemological magical realism takes inspiration "from sources which do not necessarily coincide with the cultural context of the fiction, or for that matter, of the writer" (91). There is a clear disconnect between the writer and the writing. The marvelous in the epistemological variety is either an artificially created affect, or is borrowed from another culture by the writer. To that extent, it is an inferior adaptation of the ontological variety.

Jeanne Delbaere-Garant and Jean Weisgerber devise a similar bifurcation—folkloric or mythic magical realism (akin to the ontological), and scholarly magical realism (akin to the epistemological). In the former, the magical arises from a particular folk tradition that the writer is culturally a part of; in the latter, the writer adopts a cultural context in order to create an effective magical-realist narrative. Weisgerber argues that the "marvelous" in scholarly magical realism arises from an observer's vision, where magical realism constructs a speculative universe (Faris 165). Mythic magical realism springs from a geographic and cultural situation, such as in the case of Latin America. It is ontological insofar as the land itself, its history, and its people are marvelous.

Wendy Faris points out that such a bifurcation is problematic because it is often quite difficult to distinguish between these two strains (165). It is very commonly found that the same magical realist text will have elements that directly reference the writer's culture and those that are his or her idiosyncratic creations.
Such an equivocation gives rise to another question: to whom is the marvelous real accessible? Does the encounter with the marvelous real require a specific artistic vision or a nationality? Can writers from outside Latin America sense and capture this magical reality? Isn't the very concept of the “marvelous” only possible as a reaction to the (opposing) rational point of view? The only way to make sense of Carpentier's insistence that magic emanates from the landscape is to see his argument as a metaphor for the structures of consciousness. One could argue that differences in the degree to which the rational-scientific structure dominates the cultural perspective of a people make different realities available to them. In the case of Carpentier's Latin America, magical and mythical histories are more accessible and the rational structure has not become so overwhelming that these histories require special effort to revive. In contrast, in Western societies, magical realism appears to be more of an artifice. This is because the Enlightenment cemented the position of reason so firmly that magical and mythical structures can be extracted only with great difficulty.

I have already noted that magical, mythical, and rational consciousness structures are common to all human societies. It is only a question of which is preponderant at a particular time in the cultural history of a community.

Developing further the notion of the marvelous real, Carpentier also suggests that the spirit of this literature is in sync with the spirit of the baroque in European and international art. In "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," he states that the

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A similar argument is also made by Renato Oliva in "Re-Dreaming the World: Ben Okri's Shamanic Realism." Oliva suggests that Carpentier's Latin America and Okri's Africa are cultures open to a "magic-myth world view" (172). In such cultures, people find themselves in daily contact with that which could be defined as marvelous real, and where mythologies are preserved in communal memory. In these cases, the definition of reality is also less rigid than the Western world, and magic is part of the reality of the community.
baroque is not an artistic style that was invented in the seventeenth century. The baroque—a human constant—has been present "sporadically at times, and at times as the main characteristic of a culture" (94). Carpentier claims that the marvelous real of Latin America is essentially baroque, right from its very inception in the indigenous artistic traditions of the Americas because both thrive on the same mix of elements, the same kind of excesses, the interweaving of languages and races, and the existence of a plane of great and irrevocable synthesis. On the other hand, the European brand of baroque, manifesting in "European magical realism," operates on the fundamental disconnect between the magic and its cultural context of production. Carpentier argues that a culture that celebrates only rationality can use magic to create a sense of mystery but not to genuinely reflect the cultural beliefs of the land or its history. It can be surmised that Carpentier not only argues that magic must be culturally inherited and kept alive, but also that magical realism magnifies the voice of the non-rational, non-Western subject.

While Carpentier's assertions on magical realism are intended to release Latin American art from European hegemony, Angel Flores argues that magical realism is most definitively "a continuation of the romantic realist tradition of Spanish language literature and its European counterparts" (Bowers 16). In Flores's opinion Latin American literature's realist element comes from the European colonization of the continent while the magical is born out of the landscape and culture indigenous to its people. Such a contention is likely to raise the question of whether an "indigenous" culture is at all capable of a Westernized "rational" outlook or only of what appears an exoticized worldview to the non-native spectator.
Besides, we may wonder: is marvelous reality accessible only to the indigenous? It is with this question in mind, and with ample textual evidence that magical realism has flourished even in the West, that I propose that we must answer in the negative. It is not the landscape that emanates magic, but the artist of who creatively projects upon the world his or her vision of magic and creates ontologically variant worlds that alter the reader’s sense of realism (and eventually, reality). Magical realism, in other words, is a project that seeks not to unify fragments of reality but to expose the limits that a spectator sets on his or her worldview, and the aspects of lived experience that he or she has been conditioned to overlook.

All these factors point to magical realism’s being the result of the writer’s projection upon his or her world. This would also indicate that magic can be used, through the literary imagination, by writers of any gender, race, and community. Rather than sully the reputation of Carpentier’s “genuine” magical realism, such interest in the mode only adds to the political and social dimensions of magical realism. Writers have used magical realism to question the validity of science, the limitation of language, the circumscribed vision of rationality, official historical accounts, and the norms of identity, and memory. Therefore, writers use magical realism to reveal such realities that otherwise remain beyond the limits of ordinary imagination. Therefore, magical realism is best conceived of as a mode of fiction that amplifies the realities of the marginalized and ex-centric from within any context. In such a scenario, it can be truly validated as an international literary movement.
Features of Magical Realism

It is easier to understand the uniqueness of magical realism once it can be distinguished from those literary modes or genres that are closely related to it and those that it may superficially resemble. The element of the super- or un-natural is not unique to magical realism. Rather, it is the treatment and the place of the supernatural within the text and the expectation of the reader vis-à-vis the un-natural that makes all the difference. Magical realism, for instance, is distinct from science fiction. The latter merely features worlds that are technologically more advanced than our own, not worlds that violate the laws of physics as we know them. Besides, in the science fiction world, its laws apply uniformly. In addition, the world of science fiction is clearly distinct—and often immensely distant, spatially, and temporally—from our own. Even in cases where the story is set on the Earth, the interaction between human beings and aliens only highlights the encounter between the known and the unknown, not between the rational and the irrational.

Magical realism is also distinct from the various kinds of fantasy fictions such as horror stories, fairy tales, and gothic romances. Magical realist worlds are unlikely to be peopled with goblins, ogres, witches, and monsters that appear in fairytales. The purpose of such "fantastical" characters is to embody evil and evoke horror. At the other end of the spectrum are helpful fairies and godmothers. These beings are possessed with magic; their task is to help the protagonist (often a hapless heroine). In other words, the fairy tale world is conveniently split between the good and the bad. Moreover, fairytales usually operate upon more or less standard plots, reach similar ends, use stock characters and—all in all—enforce certain restrictions on the
imagination. Since their readership consists mostly of children,\textsuperscript{111} the ending is usually reassuring: all matters get resolved, good triumphs over evil, and everyone lives happily ever after.\textsuperscript{112} Fairy tales also tend to take place in kingdoms or forests far away, and almost all of them happen "once upon a time." Again, these are signs that the world of the fairy tale is greatly removed—spatially and temporally—from that of the reader. Magical realist worlds are not located in Middle Earth or in enchanted forests and the action does not take place in an undefined time—such as in the widely read \textit{Lord of the Rings} series (1954-55) by J. R. R. Tolkien. A portal like Platform 9 & \frac{3}{4}, a shopping street like Diagon Alley, or the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry—inaccessible to the non-magic folk or "Muggles" from J. K. Rowling's \textit{The Harry Potter} series (1997-2007)—will not qualify as magical realist either but can certainly be called magical fiction.

While Gebser points out that magical consciousness is made manifest in dream-world experiences in a predominantly rational structure, I would like to point out that fiction depicting dream experiences or even written under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs (Carlos Castaneda's writings or Coleridge's pleasure dome of Xanadu in "Kubla Khan," for instance) are not magical realist. In such instances, the visions are unreal but subjective. Since they are not communal, it becomes impossible

\textsuperscript{111} Bowers makes a case for authors like Edith Nesbit (a children's storywriter) being considered magical realist (104-108). However, a clear distinction must be maintained between the audiences for the two kinds of literature. Though children's literature can follow the plot schemes of magical realist texts, it cannot stage the kind of political and historical themes that magical realist fiction routinely stages. Besides, in children's stories where the setting is realistic, magic is often visible only to the children or to a few adults in the story. Magic is rarely a communally accepted feature.

\textsuperscript{112} I am leaving outside the purview of my analysis the original Grimm brothers' fairytales, which sometimes feature macabre themes. Commonly known tales such as "The Sleeping Beauty," "The Pied Piper of Hamlin," and "Hansel and Gretel" are seen to end in rape, mass murder, and in children turning into killers (respectively). The genre of fairytales I have mentioned above consists of modern, popular versions that are specifically adapted to a young readership.
for the other characters in the fictional world to test the veracity of such experiences. Magical realism thrives on "collective relatedness" rather than individual dreams or memories (Faris 183). Besides, depicting dreams in literature exposes and highlights the boundaries between the real and the dreamt of. On the other hand, magical realism's true purpose is in overtly puncturing such boundaries. The characters in a magical realist world do not express surprise or horror at the goings-on in their world. The lack of these emotions sets them apart from characters in a gothic story. In the latter, ghosts, vampires, and other creatures of the underworld evoke an unwholesome and lurid horror in the characters and in the reader. A magical realist world has no "gothic subtext" or a "dark space of the unconscious" (Cooper 36).

Literary genres like fable also contain overt magical elements, but are still not within the purview of magical realism. A fable is a tale built around the endorsement of a moral lesson with minimal or no importance given to the fictional structure itself. A standard allegory may also contain elements of the bizarre and cleave the fictional world into two distinct worlds. However, in the allegorical reading, one world stands in symbolically for the other. In John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*, a satiric allegory, we find that the plot is overshadowed by its alternative meaning. In magical realism, on the other hand, there is no "alternate meaning that colours with irony the one presented on the surface" (Bowers 29). Luis Leal summarizes magical realism's singular status:

Unlike superrealism, magical realism does not use dream motifs; neither does it distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature or science fiction do; nor does it emphasize
psychological analysis of characters, since it doesn't try to find reasons for their actions or their inability to express themselves. Magical realism is not magic literature either. Its aim, unlike that of magic, is to express emotions, not to evoke them. Magical realism is, more than anything else, an attitude towards reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles . . . (121, emphasis added)

It is this “attitude” towards realism which sets magical realism apart from other literary modes. This attitude depends, in large measure on the characters, but also on the reader. Tzvetan Todorov explains that all “fantastic” literature must be absolutely ambiguous about whether the origin/nature of an event is natural or supernatural. This is done in order to evoke hesitation in the reader, and sometimes even in the character. Under no circumstances can an allegorical or poetic reading of the fantastic be permitted, since that would at once remove the hesitation. The existence of “fantastic” fiction rests on this emotion of hesitation, and not on the mere occurrence of a supernatural event. After all, the occurrence of the latter (in the form of metamorphosis, or of divine intervention) in an epic would be quite acceptable.

Further, if the supernatural experience can be explained away as a dream, as trickery, or as a result of intoxication, then it ceases to be fantastic and becomes what Todorov terms the “uncanny.” Only if the reader is expected to treat the supernatural as inexplicable from the very beginning, then the text enters the realm of the marvelous (Brooke-Rose 63). It is Todorov’s marvelous that can be translated into magical

113 Todorov creates four categories from the genres of the “uncanny,” “marvelous” and “fantastic”—uncanny, fantastic-uncanny, fantastic-marvelous, and marvelous (44).
realism. That is, magic is always, already, a part of the marvelous reality of the fictional world. The reader does not question why it is there, or how it works.

In a magical realist world, the magical and the real appear to be complementary, insofar as one seems to be the "natural" extension of the other, although they are quite clearly antithetical. Magic does not justify its presence. It refuses to explain itself, being subject neither to external law nor to internal logic. Although it is putatively un-natural or super-natural, it occurs just as naturally as any real event. Through it, the laws of physics, such as those of matter, of gravity, and of space and time, are casually defied; communication between the dead and the living occurs as a matter of course. Magic cannot be considered superfluous in magical realist fiction. It disrupts realism, but it is essential to it. Its very presence indicates that it is a requirement. At the same time, without realism, magic would lose its potency in such fiction. Therefore, both are equally essential to the composition of the fictional world. While the two seem to blend naturally (to the characters in the fictional world), there is an evident schism (for the reader) between them that is necessary for each to maintain its identity. Yet, once we have recognized their co-presence, it becomes impossible to imagine reality without either. Magic in magical realism permeates the landscape, the events, and the characters. As a literary mode, magical realism compels the readers to remold our sense of reality so that it is in harmony with that of the characters in the novel.

I have already outlined the history of the term "magical realism," its first associations with art, and its subsequent journey from Europe to Latin America. However, the question of when magical realism began in earnest as a literary mode is
contentious. According to Angel Flores, magical realism began its "modern" literary phase in 1935, with the publication of Borges's *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935). For Flores, Borges is the towering figure of magical realism under whose tutelage the Latin American fiction of this century flourished (113). However, Borges himself derived inspiration from Franz Kafka, and Flores argues that the true beginnings of magical realism lie in Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into a giant vermin (in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*), and in the lack of surprise from the other characters (115). But Leal begs to differ on such an interpretation: are Samsa's family and friends genuinely not surprised, or do they decide to turn away from reality because it is horrific, unbearable, and unacceptable (121)?

Taking off from this premise, Leal and Rawdon Wilson further question how right it is to attribute the beginnings of Latin American magical realism to Borges's fiction. Borges creates "infinite hierarchies," but his labyrinthine mazes and multiplied frames of time and characters are simply counter-intuitive realignments of already existing axioms. Wilson argues that Borges's imagination creates different geometries, where people walk in curved rather than straight lines, where time does not pass linearly, and distances between points do not remain constant, and so on. In other words, matters of time and space and number may be considered mere assumptions which can be easily overturned in another fictional set up (Wilson 211). Borges's fictional "space"114 is one where axiom-like laws are made just for that

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114 "Space" can be considered a diagnostic parameter; its use can reveal important differences between different kinds of fictional worlds. Wilson suggests that "[f]ictional space invokes an experience of place (volume, distance, coordination, interiority, exteriority, and so forth) which may be both, or either, that of the characters and that of the readers" (216). One type of fictional space is created by realist fiction: this is a kind of space where all deictics and descriptions are presented as if they were being used in the actual world. This fact compels the reader to forever compare the fictional world
particular fictional world. His fictional world becomes a self-contained, anamorphic space with its own rules and laws to govern physical parameters such as distance and time. The axioms of the actual world are inverted and rendered counter-intuitive. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and "The Garden of Forking Paths" each presents a world that "magnifies the plural worldhood built into fantasy, but it does not fundamentally alter the (fantastic) principle of the imaginative copresence of worlds" (Wilson 220). In other words, Borges' fictional world has an inherent logical cohesion even in its absurd multiplicity, and it is bound by a rhetoric that wants to contain everything acceptable under the newly contorted laws. It is the Borgesian variety of fiction that Amaryll Chanady mistakenly projects onto the magical realist mode as a whole, when she states that magical realism lays maximum emphasis on "the rationalizing activity of a subject searching for cognitive mastery of the unknown and the reconciliation of experience with scientific paradigms" (Chanady 132).

On the other hand lies Gabriel García Márquez's imagination which is "weary of the undeviating predictability of ordinary life," and "tired of the heaviness of gravity." This weariness with the ordered world gives rise to a world in which things "floated together again," and "called out meaningfully to each other, but did not

with the real one. In effect, the fictional space becomes governed by the truths of the real world. Borges's fictional space is the created world that is distinct from the real world, but runs on its own laws of time and space. García Márquez's space is a third kind, where the magical or the unnatural become infused into the space of the real world. Here, no code of laws can be created that can govern or direct the new reality.

Wilson offers the example of Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queen, where it is possible for interiors to be larger than exteriors, for distance traveled to be proportional to the moral requirements of characters, and so on (218).

This is not to suggest that García Márquez wrote the first truly magical realist novel. Rather, in attributing magical realist imagination to his fiction, I only point out that he took forward, standardized, and popularized a tradition of fiction whose beginnings lie in Carpentier's The Kingdom of this World and Juan Rulfo's Pedro Paramo.
cause one another" (Wilson 211). It is in such a world that true ontological transgression, akin to the perspective of magical consciousness, takes place. Humans metamorphose into animals and vice versa, ghosts and spirits roam about in the living world, seasons no longer occur in natural cycles, and what is more, the characters in this world accept all of this with a complete lack of disbelief or even surprise. There is an indubitable calmness towards oddities, and a neutrality of voice, a "personal lack of division or bifurcation" (221). If anything, wonder and doubt are reserved for those events that the reader will find most mundane. For instance, in One Hundred Years of Solitude, it is not the blood that flows through the streets as an announcement of death, or a child being born with a pig’s tail, that elicit an extreme response from the characters. Rather, it is the sight of a banal object of nature: ice. In other words, the characters see no distinction between magical and real events: that distinction is visible only to the reader.

In contrast to Borges’s worlds, García Márquez’s narratives do not operate on “single axioms from which everything descended, or from which the world hung;” instead there are “two codes that [are] interwound, twisted in a grip closer than blood and mind, in a tight choreography of antitheses” (Wilson 212, emphasis added). The first code dictates that things be as they are in the real world—people are born, they die, they get jobs, move places, and so on. The second code governs the strange things that happen in the real world: people are followed by butterflies, they experience continuous rain or drought, houses grow, and casual conversations are made with the dead. While Borges’s world offers outlandish yet logical explanations, García Márquez’s world disavows altogether the need for explanations. While Borges’s
characters often venture into labyrinths that scare or surprise them, García Márquez's characters seem to accept any labyrinths presented to them, and any creatures they encounter in these mazes, as par for the course.

García Márquez's fictional spaces may contain correspondences to places in the extratextual world, but they also operate on very different assumptions. They are "hybrid" and liminal worlds; they simultaneously allow "a fenestral translucency through which reality flickers" and supply "the ease, the purely natural way in which abnormal, experientially impossible (and empirically unverifiable) events take place." Furthermore, it appears as if these events "had always already been there; their abnormality normalized from the moment that their magical realist worlds were imagined" (Wilson 220). While the magical appears abnormal to the reader, it becomes normal within the fictional world the instant it appears in it. Magical laws of Similarity and Contagion are not necessarily spelt out in such fiction because magic does not need to justify its inner workings or show cause and effect. Rather, all magic, however "monstrous," is naturalized.

If the debate over the genealogy of magical realist fiction has never been satisfactorily settled, that is largely due to the tendency of some critics to associate the mode with an author rather than with the elements of a fictional text. While it must be noted that both Borges and García Márquez have exerted great influence on writers around the world,117 I shall explore the latter's line of magical realism, and, in

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117 Sometimes, the influence of the two authors is visible within the same novel. In Ben Okri's The Famished Road, for example, the child-protagonist encounters roads that multiply upon themselves, creating frightening Borgesian mazes. In these mazes, the child comes across hybrid, animistic creatures that are human but with animal parts; and spirits, but with human features. The latter, of course, are reminiscent of García Márquez's characters.
the process, examine the tasks such writing sets on the creator as well as the reader of a magical realist text.

By and large, the magical realist writer's project is to confront reality and describe it in ways that are not limited by the accepted and the known. In doing so, the writer projects onto the world a "dual spatiality," a space where alternative realities and different perceptions of the world can be conceived of and sustained in a precarious balance of the rational and the magical, while ensuring that neither is superior in terms of credibility. While in a fantasy, the removal of the supernatural is imperative for the restoration of order, in the magical realist world, the magical never overpowers the real or supplants it. Rather, the two co-exist in varying degrees of tension and unobstructed interaction at all times, even though they may appear to merge seamlessly. There lies, at the heart of magical realism, the desire to disrupt notions of realism, ideas about reality itself, and modes of rational interpretation and explanation.

One must be wary when stating the relationship between the real and the magical. Both are primary, both are equally relevant, and the mode cannot exist without both being present. At one place, Faris argues that while magical elements refuse to be incorporated into the real, they exists in a symbiotic relationship with the latter, and often appear to "grow organically" out of the "reality" of the fictional world (163). With such a statement, she appears to suggest that magic is derivative, and that its relationship with realism is not merely one of symbiosis, but one of dependence as well. This view is in opposition to my claim that magic and the real co-exist from the very inception of the fictional world. Their relationship is one of complementariness,
not dependence. Magic is not lower in hierarchy or subsequent in emergence. We cannot begin with a "zero degree of realism" and, as a secondary act, assimilate the super-natural. Rather, the premise we must begin with is that there is a new kind of order, not a readjustment of a previous order (Bényei 153). In this new order, magic and the real are essentially different, but by being deliberately and intimately entwined, a new kind of "reality" is created. By creating this new reality, magical realism also articulates a postmodernist objective: the reader is made aware that this new reality is a creation.

The focus of the magical realist author is on creating reality that is magical, and on exploring the "multifarious world in which we live" (Leal 123). Such multifarious worlds have more dimensions added to them than are normally ascribed in the rational sense of reality. More importantly, a magical realist author does not create an imaginary world into which we can escape. This world does not, like magical fiction, offer an alternative world. Rather, it confronts notions that govern reality by imbuing the ordinary (in realist fiction) with the magical. The writer must ensure that his or her world has one foot in both boats (magic and real) at all times, and neither becomes superfluous to this composite fictional world. In other words, the writer must maintain an ironic distance from the magical so that it does not overpower the real, and at the same time also believe enough in the magical aspect of the world to not make it seem merely figurative. The writer coerces the reader—sometimes playfully—into accepting an outrageous reality presented in the course of the narrative. Richard Todd comments that
Narrators of magic realism play confidence tricks on their readers, disavowing the more straightforward claim of the mimetic naturalist realist that what she or he is narrating actually happened in a heterocosmic world related to the one we know by analogy. Instead the magic realist narrator distorts the very idea of analogy and operates syncretically, asking the reader to believe . . . that the natural order of things can be subverted in the world of her or his fiction . . . (305)

As a result of the dual spatiality, the reader experiences a double heterocosmic effect, a heterocosm being an ordered and whole cosmos that underscores the "otherness" of its fictionality and its distinction from the real world that the reader experiences otherwise (McHale 27). It is important to remember that the heterocosm is experienced by the reader, and not the writer. Hutcheon argues that a heterocosm is not an "object of perception, but an effect to be experienced by the reader, an effect to be created by him and in him" (Narcissistic Narrative 88). Postmodernist fiction, in general, problematizes the heterocosmic ontology of fiction by deliberately creating an overlap between the fictional world and the real world. This occurs when, for example, real-world figures or events feature in fiction in ways not compatible with their historicized personae or with accepted historical narratives that appear so realistic. In magical realist fiction, this postmodernist heterocosmic effect is carried over and there is a secondary splitting as well that the reader experiences: the "internal ontological differences [that] may appear within this [fictional] world" (McHale 28). Of course, these differences are visible only to the reader.
The question of the reader’s receptivity to such an effect is moot. Are some readers culturally more open to magical realist ontology than others? Is the Western audience’s appetite for magical realism greater because this kind of fiction is exotic, while for the Latin American readership of the twenty first century (even assuming for the sake of argument that such a vast readership can be considered homogenous), magical realism is not only internalized but also necessary in order to express its socio-cultural context? Would an assessment of the role that folklore, mythopoeia, and supernatural beliefs play in the everyday imagination of a community be relevant in judging how successful a work of magical realism has been in interpreting real-world places, people, and events? If so, then one would have to examine factors such as the popularity of other genres of fantasy fiction, the pervasiveness of fairy tales, and perhaps even of religion (and faith in miracles), to judge the receptivity of an audience to magical realism. Such questions are well beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that a reader is not given the liberty to push the magical out of the fictional heterocosm by labeling it a dream sequence, a hallucination, or an irrational aberration conjured up by individual or mass psychosis. Any skepticism about magical occurrences can indeed ruin the effect of magical realism. The reader is expected to be surprised but should not, at any level, be offered a causal explanation.

\[118\] If one examines the question of how much folklore is active in the communal imagination, it would become pertinent to also examine the composition of the community. Any geographical area would have several groups residing and interacting within its bounds. Can such a collection of groups be considered homogenous? While belief in magic and in mythic truths does form the basis for communal unity, it would still be impossible to ascertain if each person in the community is equally affected by these beliefs, or lives by them to the same degree. Within the fictional world, the focus is not on individuals but on the entire community not distinguishing magical occurrences from real ones. The writer is not trying to prove that communities are homogenous; rather, their focus is on the reader who must accept other versions of reality as their characters do.
or an allegorical interpretation for the magical aspect; only then can truly alternative and newer ways of viewing reality emerge.

To deal with magical realism, the reader needs to possess a “faculty for boundary-skipping between worlds” (Wilson 210). The reader must suspend his or her sense of disbelief about an unfamiliar world, and offer the same credulity to the magical component as he or she does to the realist fictional world. The reader must accept the “interpenetration of irreconcilable worlds.” The magical realist text “violates our usual sense of what is possible” (Thiem 244). The reader must forgo the restrictive category of the “possible” in order for magical realism to succeed.

In not demanding explanations, the reader (and the characters) renders the element of magic in magical realism “irreducible” (Faris 167). Magical things “really” do happen in such fiction, and the magic element cannot be explained away using the laws of nature as we know them. Irreducible magic indicates a disruption of ubiquitous notions like cause and effect. For instance, Saleem Sinai (in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*) claims to have caused certain historical events, rather than be the affected by them. Melquiades script in Sanskrit turns out to be a prediction rather than a record of history, and the person decoding it (Aureliano) is also a character in this manuscript (One Hundred Years of Solitude 446-47). Valerio Camillo’s “Theater of Memory” is an anachronistic theatre that shows images that are...

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114 In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem claims that in spite of being “the sort of person to whom things have been done” he, the “perennial victim [of history], persist[s] in seeing himself as protagonist” (237). He places himself “at the centre of things” and portrays himself to be the cause of historical events (238). He claims to be responsible for Nehru’s death (279). In another place, he points out how his seemingly innocuous mockery of a Gujarati jingle led to the first of the language riots that killed fifteen and wounded over three hundred people. He states: “[I]n this way I became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay...” (192).
not memories of what has happened but visualizations of what could have happened (Terra Nostra 559-60). It is through such reversals that the reader is made aware of the magic in the quotidian occurrence, and of the limitedness of the world of reality.

According to Faris, the magical realist vision "exists at the intersection of the two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions" (172). That is, the magical realist realm exists in the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead, and between the worlds of the past and the present. The "experienced reality" of the characters renders the fictional worlds "multiple, permeable, transformative, [and] animistic" (Zamora 500). Of course, all these acts of imaginative boundary-skipping are carried out in language, and magical realism revels in the magic of creative language as well.

In trying to justify the presence and importance of magic, the magical realist author cannot overlook the aspect of the real either. More often than not, a magical realist novel begins by inviting the reader to settle into the co-ordinates of a realist time and space. The description of the location and era of the real world in a magical realist novel is often presented in overwhelming detail. Such descriptions are meant to generate for the reader a familiar and identifiable world. Faris adds that magic contests reality, but from within the "realistically rendered historical fiction" (174). However, this is merely a literary strategy; it is not as though magic will impinge on the fictional world at a later point. Magic exists in the fictional world right from the beginning. If a magical occurrence does not appear on the first page of the novel, that is an experiential fact for the reader; it is not a fact about the world of the novel.
Magical realism has very serious and real political and cultural issues at its heart. Given that, the setting of the novel is often, if not always, a real city or country or a fictional construct that is an obvious metonym for the same. García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is set in the fictional town of Macondo, but it essentially represents pan-Latin American history; Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* revolves around Pinochet’s military coup in 1973 when the democratically elected president of Chile was overthrown; Carlos Fuentes’ *Terra Nostra* spans the entire history of the Hispanic world, including Mexico and Spain; Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* is set in Germany during the Second World War and raises questions about the complicity of the general public with the Nazi agenda; Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World* narrates the story of slave rebellion and the dictatorship of King Henri Christophe in Haiti; Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* is set in the ghost town of Comala, in the Rulfo’s native state of Jalisco in Mexico, which experiences the torturous reign of a landlord and bears the brunt of the peasant rebellion; Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* is based in early nineteenth century France and its booming perfume industry; William Kennedy’s *Ironweed* is set in Albany, New York; Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is set in post-independence India; Milan Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* describes Communist totalitarianism in the Czech Republic; and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is set against the backdrop of slavery in America. In such a politically and historically relatable world, objects take on a magical life, and magic reorients the path of history.

The “true” location of a magical realist fictional work—as in much postmodernist literature—serves as a point of departure for a self-conscious
(mis)treatment of official or dominant trends of historiography and cultural memorialization. Magical realism's representation of history is not "irresponsible," but certainly interrogative. Such fiction offers "alternate versions of officially sanctioned accounts," because the official account is almost always biased and rarely commensurate with the multi-layered memory of local or peripheral groups. In order to reorient history, magical realism invokes elements from folklore, from supernatural and unnatural interpretations, and unconventional belief systems, and even from anthropological accounts, thereby (re)creating new strands of "collective memory" (Faris 170). Memory plays a vital role as far as the historical angle of magical realism is concerned. There is always a struggle to unearth lost memories or create extraordinary ones, so that alternative histories may be created. For instance, José Arcadio Segundo is the only person in One Hundred Years of Solitude who remembers the banana company massacre. The entire town, the company owners, and even those in charge of maintaining national records have buried it under various kinds of forgetting. Similarly, Clara and Alba in The House of the Spirits and Pilate in Morrison's The Song of Solomon are sites of magic because they are also sites "of a history that survives and so nurtures the present" (Foreman 286).

Toying with hegemonic historiographies and self-consciously subverting "the natural order" of things to formulate alternate realities that "outrageously transgress" and re-form the "given facts" of history is a regular motif in magical realist novels (Todd 305), as it is in postmodernist fiction in general. It is vital to recognize what such an act of fictionalizing does to the very nature of history. In deliberately falsifying it, or in providing alternative versions, history itself is rendered a field not
of a few facts but of a slew of cultural and human possibilities (Sangari 7). Even when the treatment of history becomes idiosyncratic because of the infusion of magical effects, the “facts” that are transformed are pointedly lifted from recorded history. Such transformations promote the idea that facts are essentially only stories, and that the latter can be narrated in more than one way. Such a strategy also exposes hidden possibilities and interpretations of these facts, especially from an ex-centric point of view. In other words, onto the bedrock of facts are superimposed the “truths” of magical realism. This has been called the process of “rememory” or of “repossessing historical experience” (Foreman 285).

Both postmodernism and magical realism appropriate the historical reality sponsored by a “centrist” discourse only to provide a “correcting” alternative world (D’haen 195). An obvious question that would arise here is: why does the writer not merely write a book of history, an anthropological account, or a collection of vignettes, and provide a “corrected” world? Why is there a need to use magic and risk a frivolous interpretation by the non-discerning reader? The answer lies at the level of discourse rather than at the level of a particular story: a magical realist writer is not merely offering an alternative account that should now be taken as the final truth, but showing that there can exist several alternative accounts. Magical realist writers, like postmodernists, wish to expose the very process of history making; their concerns are not limited to a geographical or social context. The inclusion of the magical serves to show the limitedness of science, of rationality, and of the centrist discourse. The creation of magic is also associated with language: conceptual dualities—that are perpetuated in language and which we have come to rely on are
not up to the task to expressing a reality that is so multifarious. Realism is a result of
the "[p]overty of the imagination" (Carpentier, "Marvelous Real" 85). Magic,
therefore, is "a trope of the capacity of language to cross an uncrossable border, enter
the world, and rewrite it" (Bényei 174). Another reason for opting for magical
"excess" over a dispassionate recording of history is that sometimes the burden of
history and its unbearable violence cannot be justly expressed in a rational voice.

However, the last point does not denote that magical realism is an escape from
the burden of history. The presence of an alternative account does not imply that the
actual historical event can be done away with, or obliterated from time. Magic is
almost never presented as a pleasant path to salvation. Magical occurrences are—
more often than not—dark, oppressive and claustrophobic rather than salubrious. As
Carpentier suggests, the marvelous real refers to the "extraordinary" which is "not
necessarily lovely or beautiful" ("Baroque" 101). The reader will find magical
instances hardly cheerful, though the characters take it all in their stride. The latter
neither rail at nor even comment about what may appear as undue harshness on the
part of nature or man. In other words, while the magical does not evoke horror or
fear, it certainly does present a bleak world of extraordinary reprisals, erased
memories, terrible seasons, failed hopes, and disrupted lives. Heavy rains that
inundate a land for days on end, a pitiless sun that chars everything, a bout of
insomnia that lasts several years, a rain of the letters of the alphabet that reduces
everyone in the town to soundless animal-like beings, a swarm of bees that
impregnate a woman, a maze-like house crammed with ghosts that falls into ruin in
the end, a perfume so potent that it destroys its murderous maker but not before
putting an entire town under a short-lived but powerful spell, and characters that multiply on their own, are just some instances of the claustrophobic and disturbing magical events in such fiction.\textsuperscript{120}

It would be appropriate here to remark upon the absence of magicians in magical realist fiction. I have discussed earlier that societies with belief in magic also put their faith in the powers of the shaman—the human agent who can cause the flux of magic to flow from one entity to another, effect magical remedies, and control supernatural powers. However, the magical realist world is overtly devoid of shamans and magicians because magic is not a force that can be streamlined or controlled by humans. It is as unbridled as reality, and if one cannot control the natural changes in seasons, one can also not control an unnatural deluge. Besides, modern day magicians are tricksters; they perform magic tricks to entertain people, or in cases of black magic or the occult, to exert power over people. Magical realist characters, in their not seeing the magic as power, do not indulge in any such activity.

Magic within the fictional world can be expressed through characters, through events, their interpretation, or through nature. While in some novels, magic derives from the cultural milieu of the setting (\textit{The Famished Road, One Hundred Years of Solitude, The Kingdom of this World}), in others it emanates from characters who possess unnatural abilities. These include Saleem Sinai’s telepathic powers.

\textsuperscript{120} The heavy rains and the years of insomnia are instances taken from García Márquez’s \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude}, the dust storm is from Rushdie’s \textit{Midnight’s Children}, the deluge of alphabets occurs in Janet Frame’s \textit{The Carpathians}, the swarm of bees impregnating Vera Lang appears in the opening sequence of Robert Kroetsch’s \textit{What the Crow Said}, the house filled with ghosts is from Isabel Allende’s \textit{The House of the Spirits}, the powerful perfume made from the essences of virgins is from \textit{Perfume: The Story of a Murderer}, and the phenomenon of characters multiplying themselves endlessly and helplessly appears in Carlos Fuentes’s \textit{Terra Nostra}. 

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(Midnight's Children); Oskar's ability to stop himself from growing physically (The Tin Drum); Tita's ability to embed her emotions into the food that she is cooking and accordingly affect everyone who partakes of it (Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate); Clara's ability to communicate with ghosts in Allende's The House of the Spirits; and Grenouille's supernatural sense of smell and uncontrollable desire to collect the scents of things and people in Perfume: The Story of a Murderer. The discovery of such magical powers does not lead the protagonist to embark on momentous tasks of regional or world domination, and with the exception of Grenouille, magical abilities are not used for fame or power. On the contrary, such abilities are treated as "normal" and unworthy of special attention. Such behavior by the protagonist and those around him is also a sign that no distinction is being made within the fictional world between reality and the fantastic. This fact, in turn, causes the reader to reflect upon what can be considered acceptable in reality itself.

Using the metaphor of "ghosts," Lois Parkinson Zamora sums up the disruptive element of magic. Magical realist ghosts embody the fundamental sense that "reality always exceeds our capacities to describe or understand or prove and that the function of literature is to engage this excessive reality, to honor that which we may grasp intuitively but never fully or finally define" (Zamora 498). That is, ghosts alter the very notion of reality and our ability to circumscribe it. Such literary ghosts reveal their creators' politics and poetics. These ghosts can be the signs of lost ancestries or of civilizational and historical repressions. They can be links to lost memories, and reminders of communal injustices. They can overturn scientific explanations and the imposition of rationality on the imagination. The ghosts prove that reality is
characterized by the exact opposite of these qualities. Zamora believes that these
ghosts are the most “visible” metaphors in such fiction because they can effectively
exist and still be absent. These literary ghosts may not be able to abolish the
conceptual binaries of past and present, here and there, life and death, tribal and
rational, primitive and modern, but they can certainly blur the boundaries between
the two terms of the dichotomies. Their presence makes the fictional world of magical
realism multiple, permeable, and transformative. Most importantly, they amplify the
domain of “experienced reality” (500).

Magical Realism and the Postmodern West

I began this chapter by stating that magical realism has concerns that mirror
postmodernism, and some of those concerns have been explicated above. But the
thesis that magical realism has strong links with postmodernism has its critics. Those
that are uncomfortable with the magical realism-postmodernism nexus are usually so
because they suspect the intentions of the postmodernist West. Such critics claim that
magical realism in the West is either a glamourized and exoticized commercial label
that sells books, or an insidious academic attempt to “playfully” subsume serious
postcolonial critiques.

Another objection to equating magical realism with postmodernist fiction is
the mismatch in their spheres of influence. One can argue that while postmodernism
is not a universal phenomenon, magical realism has become an international literary
mode. Magical realist texts have been produced in almost every continent. To that
extent, magical realism’s reach exceeds that of postmodernist literature. Critics like
John Burt Foster, however, take a contrary view. Foster claims that although magical realism has traveled beyond other, more localized, art movements (such as English Vorticism or Russian Acmeism), it is still not of an "all-encompassing scope," in the way movements like modernism or postmodernism are. He suggests that magical realism is a "significant presence in several national cultures but with no pretension to characterize an entire epoch" (267). Where postmodernism "fuses a critique of early twentieth-century modernist literature with broader questions about modern Western history since the Renaissance," magical realism merely "embodies a certain polemical stance towards realism" (268). Besides, there is the matter of postmodernism being the end product of "the now discredited linear time of modernity and progress," and therefore being a mind-style that is specific to the subjectivity of a Western author. On the other hand, the post- and neo-colonial identity of a magical realist author is based on very different concerns (Sangari 4). In other words, the way meaning is perceived and understood in once colonized cultures is drastically different from the Euro-American situation.

Anne Hegerfeldt does not agree with such contentions, and posits that the incongruity between the Western subject and the non-Western one diminishes considerably when "unconditional faith" in myth, rationality, and science falls short in trying to express lived experience and history everywhere (65). The postcolonial subject, and the postmodernist subject, both recognize that history is created by discourses of power. Marginal voices are present in Western societies as well as postcolonial communities. Hegerfeldt's study of British magical realist texts concludes that "cultures cannot be neatly divided into rational vs. irrational, scientific
vs. magical, but that certain patterns of meaning-making are anthropological constants which will persist even if they are incompatible with the dominant (i.e. scientific) world view" (64). That is, the magical belongs equally to a culture that has a predominantly scientific worldview and to a culture that does not.

I am not arguing that all magical realist novels are postmodernist or vice-versa. Perhaps the motivations of a postmodernist writer and a magical realist writer are also not the same. However, what I am asserting is that magical realism opens up the space for highly idiosyncratic treatments of history and reality, and this makes it a handy mode for writers from around the world. It is also important to note that the West adopts magical realism not patronizingly but earnestly. This is evident in the use of magical realism not only by African-American, Native American, immigrant and feminist writers (all writing from the margins within the geographical locales of the First World), but also by the most privileged group: white, male, educated, and economically stable. Notwithstanding the threat of exoticization, the consumption of magical realist texts by the western world "at least seems to provide, a mode of access for the at once diverse and homogenous discourse of poststructuralism," thus enabling such texts to become part of the Euro-American postmodernist imagination (Sangari 2).

Both postmodernism and magical realism recognize the poverty of a purely rationalistic order, its restrictive binaries, and its inability to encompass the complexity and shades of human experience. My argument that postmodernism and magical realism are closely associated is also reflected in their treatment of history (discussed above). The manner in which magical realism treats history is similar to
postmodernist historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction is highly aware of its status as created in language while also being firmly grounded in history and political actuality. Magical realism also plays up its invented or created status. This is manifested in excessive details reflecting the "real" world coupled with outrageous historical transgressions. Both celebrate "the solidity of invention," and both heighten "their own narrative investment in illusion" (Faris 176, Zamora 501). For instance, historically "real" characters like Harry Houdini and J. P. Morgan appear in E. L. Doctorow's highly postmodernist text *Ragtime*. Joseph B. Strauss, one of the chief builders of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, is transformed into an immortal, and the protagonist's mentor over two centuries, in Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale*. Such historical figures sometimes appear in magical realist worlds as well. For instance, the poet Paul Éluard is present in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (92-95). Even fictional characters cross over into other novels. For instance, the characters Pierre Menard (from Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote"), the "Colombian colonel" Buendía (from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), the "Argentinian exile" Oliveira (from Cortázar's *Hopscotch*), the "Cuban cousins" Esteban and Sofia (from Carpentier's *Explosion in a Cathedral*), and a "Cuban torch singer" Cuba Venegas (from Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers*) appear together in Carlos Fuentes's magical realist text *Terra Nostra* (761). Such instances clearly show an overlap in the postmodernist and magical realist fictional tropes.

Apart from stylistic similarities, a deep concern for postmodernism and magical realism is the engagement with history, which I have discussed earlier. Both posit alternative histories through reformulated memories, without omitting the
official account. As it tries to repossess historical experience that is lost or buried under “official” versions of the story, magical realism reconfigures dominant historiography itself. Postmodernist historiographic metafiction and magical realist accounts achieve their aims similarly: they throw into question realism’s and history’s overwhelming hold over the literary imagination. Both also posit that history and memory are created in language, and as constructs, they can be deconstructed and re-constructed over and over again. In this aspect, they also celebrate the unlimited creative potential of language.

McHale asserts that postmodernism is chiefly ontological in its concerns. The questions of ontology it raises are very similar to the concerns in magical realism. Magical realism not only creates worlds that are very obviously disparate, it also places those worlds in the same context, and thereby forces them to encounter each other. These world-encounters compel the readers to readjust their co-ordinates of meaning-making, and thus to revise their view of reality itself. Magical realism is replete with motifs, events and people that are utterly un-real and ab-normal, but since the rhetoric of the novel presents these elements as naturalized, a new kind of ontology is generated. Thus, magical realism juxtaposes magical and real elements in a constant confrontation, thereby effecting the dissolution of boundaries that the modern reader deems inviolable. Zamora claims that “magical realism is truly postmodern in its rejection of the binarisms, rationalisms, and reductive materialisms of Western modernity” and its “counterrealistic conventions are particularly well suited to enlarging and enriching Western ontological understanding” (498).
I have tried to establish that magical realism is a truly international literary phenomenon. From being created and shaped by Latin American pioneers like Carpentier, García Márquez, Allende, Fuentes, and Rulfo, magical realism has been adopted by writers all over the world. Examples include Günter Grass (Germany), Salman Rushdie (India/England), Mikhail Bulgakov (Russia), Jack Hodgins (Canada), Peter Carey (Australia), Patrick Süskind (Germany), Peter Høeg (Denmark), Mary Kingston Hong (North America), Leslie Marmon Silko (North America), Robert Nye (England), Tahar ben Jelloun (Morocco), Syl Cheney-Coker (Sierra Leone), Kojo Laing (Ghana), and Toni Morrison (North America).

From among several outstanding examples, I explore three textual instances of magical realism in the following chapter. These three novels are by authors who are not Latin American; they are from England, New Zealand, and Nigeria. Each of the three novels also contains postmodernist elements. By exploring the space that is created by both, postmodernism and magical realism, my intention is to further prove that the two are compatible with each other. This will aid in showing that magical realism is one more way in which postmodernism is magical in its imagination.