Chapter Five
Three Magical Realist Texts

In the previous chapter, I examined the features of magical realism, and also enumerated the ways in which it is apposite to postmodernist poetics. The features of magical realism include—excessive realist detail; a "real" location and time; the seemingly seamless merger of the magical and the real that ultimately gives rise to a new kind of fictional reality; the presence of un-natural, super-natural, and abnormal events and characters; the prominence of suppressed or ex-centric narratives; the repossessing of memory and the retelling of historical accounts; a disregard for the rules of time and place as understood in the rational world; the disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect; and, issues of political or cultural importance that form the basis of the novel.

Moreover, I contend that magic does not arise from the culture of an author but from his or her imaginative projection upon the world. Magic in magical realism is very conscious of its literary and perspectival transgressions. It is used as a literary tool to alter conventional notions of realism, and to alter set notions about reality as well. The conventional historical version of an event is subverted through magical excess. Magic is also useful in challenging notions of normative duality and rationality. However, in spite of its presence being the cause of disruption in an otherwise realist fictional world, the magical and realist elements do not exist in separate realms. Rather, they co-mingle, and exist as complements.
Magical realism and postmodernism both posit that history and reality are ideological constructs. Magical realism and postmodernism construct multiple worlds, multiple voices, truths, and perspectives that exist at par with the dominant perspective. Both strive to expose the ideological underpinnings of historiography, and create alternate histories alongside the conventional version. However, while postmodernism employs historiographical metafiction, magical realism transfigures “a historical account via phantasmagorical narrative excess” (Mikics 382). In magical realist worlds, history is not linear and simple; it is exposed as being complicated, mixed, fragmented, and discontinuous. The chaos of history is not recast through a unifying myth, but through “plots that syncretize uneven and contradictory forces” (Cooper 36).

From its roots in Latin America, magical realism has traveled to all parts of the world. In its adaptation by the West, magical realism is altered as much as it alters

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121 Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World* is a unique example of postmodernist metafiction and magical realism coming together. In this novel, fantastic Afro-Caribbean myths and the natural landscape combine to combat a cyclical, inevitably recurring historical violence perpetrated first by the colonists and then by the very people who led the revolution for the freedom of Haiti. The burden the second kind of oppression creates culminates “in a desire to escape history and to exalt instead the fierce power of a natural landscape that overshadows and shows up all human projects” (Mikics 383-84).

Nature is complicit with the slaves’ struggle as thunder accompanies their announcement of rebellion. Ti Noël, the leader of the slaves, is captured at the end of the novel, and will be forced again into slavery. However, in a marvelous twist, Ti Noël, the master of metamorphosis and the tamer of Nature, escapes in a storm he has conjured. However, Carpentier and the reader are well aware that this is “liberation only on the fictive level. The black man’s real, historical status as victim will continue.” In effect, “Carpentier keeps in deliberate irresolution the distance between imagination and the historical facts that resist imagination’s transformative magic” (Mikics 385).

122 Latin American novels such as *The Kingdom of this World* (Alejo Carpentier), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Gabriel García Márquez), *The House of the Spirits* (Isabel Allende), *Like Water for Chocolate* (Laura Esquivel), *Pedro Páramo* (Juan Rulfo), and *Terra Nostra* (Carlos Fuentes) are considered the pioneering examples of magical realism. There are a number of writers in other parts of the world who have also incorporated magical realist elements in their writings. Some of the examples that stand out are: Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (Saleem Sinai has telepathic powers and Parvati is a witch); José Saramago’s *Baltazar and Blimunda* (Blimunda suddenly possesses powers of clairvoyance and the ability to bend wills after witnessing an auto-da-fe); Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (Oskar wields himself...
Western postmodernism. If the hegemony of European modes of literature was the primary focus of magical realism in its early years, it now additionally focuses on other kinds of marginalization created by science, medicine, history, rationality, organized religion, and politics. I mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation that unlike myth, magic is essentially a relative quality. What is un-natural or supernatural or magical is relative to the notion of the “natural” or “normal.” In keeping with the “postmodern recognition of the relativity of perception,” whatever is assumed to be normal, real and truthful will determine where the magical must lie (Cooper 74). In reversing the reactions of the characters in the magical realist world (what is commonplace for the reader evokes wonder, while the magical is an inherent part of reality), the writer underscores the provisionality of the concept of normal.

It is in that sense that magical realism, in its international adaptations, cannot be considered a set of stock literary motifs that are replicated over and over again. Rather, the writer has the freedom to employ magic in various gradations. This creates shades of destabilization, commensurate with the location and issue at hand.

to stop growing taller and his drum alters the course of history); Robert Nye’s Falstaff (Falstaff does not die at the beginning of Shakespeare’s Henry V and instead exists outside of the plays, in “real” Elizabethan England); Jack Hodgins’s The Invention of the World (Donal Brendan Kenelly is a half-human, half-bull Irish evangelist who sets out to create a paradisical Christian colony); Graham Swift’s Waterland (the site of history making shifts to the peripheral Fenlands, a ghost interrupts over and over again screaming “fire,” and a local superstition about eels and barrenness actually comes true); Angela Carter’s Nights at the Circus (Sophie Fevvers, the toast of the circus, is also part swan, complete with webbed feet and feathery wings); Peter Carey’s Illywhacker (Jack McGrath returns as a ghost, and Herbert masters the art of disappearing from the Chinese man who brought him up); Emma Tennant’s Hotel de Dream (the inhabitants of a hotel enter, exit, and alter one another’s dreams); Toni Morrison’s Beloved (a daughter killed returns as an insatiable ghost), and Song of Solomon (Solomon flies, there is a rain of rose petals, and love portions work); Robert Kroetsch’s What the Crow Said (Vera Lang is impregnated by a swarm of bees, and Liebhaber has prophetic powers); Patrick Suskind’s Perfume: Story of a Murderer (Jean Baptiste Grenouille’s history is constantly erased as he moves on, his supernatural sense of smell leads him to murder and ultimately, self-annihilation); and Peter Hoeg’s The History of Danish Dreams (a mad count decrees that time will stop on his estate, a grandmother who runs a newspaper publishes news first and the events occur only afterwards).
In the following sections, through the analysis of selected novels, I study these various gradations of magic as they appear with respect to different issues.

The three novels I have selected are set outside Latin America, and will be instrumental in depicting the international acceptance of magical realism. The novels are set in different parts of the world, and at different times. These novels also have postmodernist concerns built into them. While it is of secondary importance, the fact that the authors of the three novels come from very different geographical contexts is also interesting because they each treat magic differently. Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* (1988) portrays language's loss of power when it comes face to face with the chaos inherent in nature. The novel also examines the privilege of memory and voice. Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) is often read as a feminist fantasy, but on the whole, it deals with the constructed nature of gender identities. The novel is set in a historical period but its concerns are clearly relevant to modern times. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) is a little different from the other two. It combines the indigenous folklore of the Yoruba tribe with the political state of a developing nation. It also contends with issues like political and economic oppression, and the advent of technology combined with an ancient belief system. Okri's novel has postcolonial concerns at its heart, and will enable a discussion of the overlap of magical realism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism.

**Brief Biographies of the Authors**

Janet Frame (1924-2004) was born in Dunedin, New Zealand, in a working class family. As a young woman, she spent almost five years in mental asylums after
being misdiagnosed as a schizophrenic. It was her writing that saved her from a scheduled lobotomy: *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (1951) was published during her incarceration period, and won a prestigious literary prize. That was the only factor that deterred doctors from operating on her. She lived a life of seclusion once she returned to society, and moved to Ibiza and then to England before returning to New Zealand as a recognized author.


Frame won several awards and honors during her lifetime, including a CBE in 1983, and New Zealand's highest civilian honor in 1990 (the Member of the Order of New Zealand), the Commonwealth prize in Literature, and a host of national literary prizes.

Jeanette Winterson was born in Manchester in 1959, and adopted by Pentecostal parents. Raised in a middle-class, evangelical house, she began preaching and writing sermons at an early age, and was popular at her church. However, once she came out as a homosexual, she was forced to break away from the church and her family. She left home at fifteen, and worked to support herself. She also
simultaneously finished school and received a BA degree in 1982 from St. Catherine’s College, Oxford. In 1985, when she was only 23, she published her first novel—*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. She won the Whitbread Prize for this novel, and the television film adaptation won her the BAFTA award for Best Drama.


Poet and novelist Ben Okri was born in 1959 in Minna, northern Nigeria. He grew up in London before returning to Nigeria with his family in 1968. He left the country again when he received a grant from the Nigerian government to read Comparative Literature at Essex University in England, and has lived in London ever since.

He was the poetry editor for the West Africa magazine between 1983 and 1986 and broadcasted regularly for the BBC World Service between 1983 and 1985. He was appointed Fellow Commoner in Creative Arts at Trinity College Cambridge in 1991, a post he held until 1993. He has been awarded honorary doctorates from the universities of Westminster (1997) and Essex (2002). He was awarded the OBE in 2001.

Okri has nine novels, three collections of short stories, and three collections of poetry, plus a number of essays, three works of non-fiction, and a stage play to his credit. In each of these works, he returns to a consistent repertoire of postcolonial themes, but also grapples with postmodernist concerns. His writing is particularly concerned with the ongoing cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in postcolonial Africa.

**Janet Frame’s *The Carpathians***

Janet Frame’s *The Carpathians* displays high postmodernism by employing the formal technique of *mise en abyme* with unreliable narrators. The novel begins with a preface signed by a “J. H. B.,” and ends with another note123 signed by John Henry.

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123 The opening and closing notes follow every convention. The opening note ends with a line of acknowledgements: J. H. B.’s mother’s trip to New Zealand and his father’s love for books that are the inspirations behind the present work. The endnote carries a date—1987. The novel, *The Carpathians*, was published in 1988.
Brecon (the very same J. H. B.), stating that what conspires between these two notes is a work of fiction with possible roots in his "reality." In the pages sandwiched between his notes, we get to know the protagonist, Mattina Brecon, her husband Jake, a host of characters who live on Kowhai street in the town of Puamahara in New Zealand, and of course, John Henry Brecon—Mattina's son. The opening note provides a typical disclaimer proclaiming the fictional status of the novel: "[t]he characters and happenings in this book are all invented and bear no relation to actual persons living or dead" (n. pag.) On the other hand, the endnote informs the reader that the novel was not just a figment of John Henry Brecon's imagination but a novel gleaned from what his father narrated and what his mother experienced. Contradicting this very statement, John Henry also goes on to wonder if perhaps this is all fiction because his parents died when he was seven years old. The reader is left to ponder what is trustworthy in John Henry's obviously contradictory notes. Within John Henry's story of Mattina, there is another manuscript (about Mattina) written by the imposter novelist Dinny Wheatstone. The manuscript occupies many hours and pages of Mattina's existence. Nestled within Dinny's hypodiegetic, episodic narration are mini­histories of the residents of Kowhai Street. Such a Chinese box structure throws all narrative stability into confusion. This is a typical instance of metafiction: the reader is presented with "embedded strata which contradict the presuppositions of the strata immediately above or below" (Waugh 15).

Among the memories in Dinny Wheatstone's manuscript, there is one of Hercus Millow. Millow remembers a soldier who had served with him in the war. If
time and distance are abolished—the soldier had ranted, according to Millow—then there would be unprecedented chaos:

You’d have yesterday and tomorrow breathing down your bloody necks

... And you’d find yourself in ancient cities, and among mountains, some vanished, some still standing ... You’d have cities and rivers of today in your backyard; and you’d have the Carpathians, the Carpathians in your garden. [Frame 66]

The Carpathians—a mountain range—are a metonym for remoteness and alienation (Zoppi 169). Further, the use of the Carpathians is to fuse together the strange and the familiar, the remote and the nearby, the past and the present.

Unreliable narrators notwithstanding, the plot of the novel is quite straightforward: Mattina Brecon, a middle-aged New York millionaire heiress lives with her husband of many years, Jake Brecon, and their son John Henry. Mattina is a patron of the arts while Jake is a writer. After his first novel, Jake finds himself suffering from writer’s block that has lasted through the years. Partly in order to feed him stories, insights and memories so that he can write again, partly for her personal quest to “know” unfamiliar people in their national, regional and cultural contexts, and partly because she senses a deep lack in spite of a privileged life, Mattina travels to distant, strange places.

124 The reader is told that Jake Brecon’s first novel, The Battlefields of New York, was a huge success but has left him unable since then to create a fictional work of similar depth. However, he is suspicious of Mattina’s help: “[t]here had been times when, overcome with crippling shame at his inability to write his second novel, Jake had the wild suspicion that Mattina, realising his anguish, may have been deliberately ‘feeding him’ characters and stories that might inspire his writing” (175). The reader already senses the fictional status of Mattina and Jake, owing to John Henry’s opening note. Within this structure, Jake questions the veracity of Mattina’s travel stories. Suspicion of “truthful” accounts, stories, and memories runs deep at all narrative levels in The Carpathians.
An urgency within her demanded that she ‘know’ how the rest of the world lived, how they felt, and behaved, what they said to one another, what they rejoiced in, despaired of, and dreamed about; and so whenever she travelled, she sought the company of the ‘natives’, listened to their stories, and often, recklessly, felt the satisfaction of giving cheques towards needs that could not recognise or be fed by money. (Frame 19)

Mattina travels to places that are as unlike New York as possible. Such places are “ex-centric,” and she believes that it is only in these places that she will “really know” what she cannot very well articulate as yet. She stays in places like Cloud Cay and Nova Scotia for extended periods in order to collect stories, record memories, and understand the “Other.” These places offer “the magical suggestion of an elusive, parallel world, located somewhere in that remote distance” which people like Mattina “do not manage to describe but which they desperately try to circumscribe” (Zoppi 165). Mattina also buys real estate in these places in order to plant a fragment of her impermanent self in the permanence of land. It is her way of remembering and revisiting a time and a place, like other people would by means of picture postcards or photo albums. It is also her way of possessing “remote objects” (152).

It is on one such “desperate search” (Frame 19)—as Jake puts it—for new memories and knowledge that she journeys to Puamahara, a New Zealand town popularized in travel brochures as the site of the legend of the Memory Flower.125

125 In the Maori language, “pua” is flower and “mahara” is memory. The legend of the Memory Flower is also called the Legend of the Memory Land, or Maharawhenua (“whenua” means both land and placenta).
Mattina is put up in Number Twenty-Four, Kowhai Street. The aim of her two month stay is to document, record, and understand the lives and personalities of her neighbors as well as to study the legend in its native context. Although Mattina poses as a novelist to her neighbors, her aim is purely self-oriented learning; she does not aspire to create a bestseller out of her trip.

One night, Mattina senses that the space of her bedroom has become filled with an invisible and heavy animal-like presence. This mysterious presence continues to inhabit her room thereafter: "it did not follow her but it was there occupying space that had always been the province of Here and Now" (80). A few weeks after this, another inexplicable and incomprehensible event befalls this street and its residents, and only Mattina and Dinny Wheatstone are spared. There is a rain of alphabets, fecal matter and diamond dust, and the residents lose their power of speech, and are able to produce only moans and grunts like pre-lingual, primitive hominids. While we are not told if they have died, they have certainly become unfit for conventional society. Government officials arrive the next day and remove those affected in dark vans to undisclosed locations. What is most surprising to the reader is the complete lack of acknowledgement from those around Kowhai Street that such an event had even occurred.

Mattina returns to New York a few days later, after having purchased all the houses on Kowhai Street in memory of those who have disappeared. However, in a week's time, she is diagnosed with cancer. In the months before she dies, she relates to Jake all her memories of Kowhai Street, especially the night of the rain of the alphabet as "something strange" or "terrible" or "marvellous" (Frame 166). However,
she is unable to put her finger on what exactly had transpired in those two months. A few weeks later, she succumbs to her illness, "surrendering at last her point of view" (170).

Jake visits Puamahara after Mattina's death, as she had requested, and finds that the entire street is still empty but no one—including the real estate agent, Albion Cook—seems even remotely concerned about how this came to be. Jake returns to New York and expresses a desire that John Henry will turn his parents' memory of Puamahara, the existence of the residents of Kowhai Street, and the Legend of the Memory Flower into an (immortalizing) novel. The novel ends with John Henry's postscript, stating simultaneously the origin and the fictionality of the story we have just read. The postscript reads thus:

Yes, he told me. And I travelled to Puamahara. And what I have just written is the novel he spoke of; or perhaps it is merely notes for a novel? And perhaps the town of Puamahara, which I in my turn visited, never existed? Nor did my mother and father in the way they are portrayed, for they died when I was seven years old... What exists, though, is the memory of events known and imagined... (196)

What the reader has just read, John Henry says, is his second novel.126

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126 John Henry's first novel is also mentioned in this novel. It is titled *The Diviner*, presumably about someone who can intuit or foretell events. This novel comes as a complete surprise to his parents. A few days before Mattina is to leave Puamahara for New York, she receives a telegram from Jake which says "Have completed novel. Love, John Henry and Jake" (120). She presumes that Jake, after thirty years of struggling to create another novel, has finally succeeded. It is only upon arriving in New York that she is told it is John Henry and not Jake who is the novelist in the family. At a narrative level, this creates one more instance of confusion for the reader, because in the endnote, John Henry also claims that his parents died when he was seven. Whether he really wrote the first novel, or it is a falsehood manufactured for this novel, remains unsubstantiated.
The most important aspects that determine the course of Mattina's journey are two (fictitious) poles: an indigenous legend and a scientific discovery. The latter is a "quasar" called the Gravity Star. It is mentioned in the opening note and recurs frequently in Mattina's ruminations. The opening note quotes from a "Press Association Report," that defines the Gravity Star as a galaxy, simultaneously—and implausibly—close and several billion light years away from the earth: "the paradox is interpreted as being caused by the focusing of light from a distant quasar (starlike object) by the gravity of an intervening galaxy" (n. pag.). If the Gravity Star were to affect any part of the earth, it would abolish distance and time as we know it, cause the death of concepts as we understand them, and destroy language since concepts exist in language. However, it is also pointed out that poets, who live in "unimaginable reality" (12) have always known of the Gravity Star, and it is the layperson's imagination that will be remade through its presence. The Gravity Star, therefore, is the harbinger of a magical reality that does not maintain dualities.

The exact nature of the Gravity Star's effect is unimaginable (until it happens on the night of the rain of the alphabets), because the requisite language to describe such a reality has not come into existence. Mattina estimates that eventually, the Gravity Star would lead to the birth of new concepts to configure the world, and a new language commensurate with the new reality. Until then, the world, suddenly "deprived of its standards of sanity moulded within its written and spoken languages," would remain suspended in a phase of chaos due to the collapse of boundaries between naturalized binaries that order normative reality (119). The novel posits that the influence of the Gravity Star is not superfluous. Rather, it is
necessary in order to rescue the world, "plunged into a swamp of absurdity, [and] contradiction," to re-form perspective and language, and make people "once again whole, meaningful, new" (101).

The second fictive pole is the legend of the Memory Land, or "Maharawhenua." According to this ancient Maori legend, a young woman was chosen by divine beings to collect the memory of her land and rescue it from oblivion. She traveled its length and breadth in search of memory, amply aided by other creatures, nature, and people, who helped, advised, sacrificed, and informed. Eventually, she picked and tasted a ripe fruit from a tree, and thus released the memory that she has collected into the very air and nature of her land. This is a clear reversal of the Biblical myth of Eve tasting the fruit of knowledge and being banished from paradise. The woman of the Memory Legend is an exonerated and venerated Eve: "where Eve tasted her and Adam's tomorrow, the woman of Maharawhenua tasted the yesterday within the tomorrow" (11). Rather than being punished for tasting the fruit, the woman became the wise storyteller of the land, and turned the memories she had retrieved into stories that people listened to. One day, however, when they came to hear her, she had—in the manner of the mythic Daphne—vanished but in her place grew a tree with a single blossom. This blossom was named the Memory Flower.

The forbidden tree of knowledge transforms into the flower of memory in this invented legend. According to this legend, history is composed of memory and memory is a set of stories. The Memory Flower, moreover, "grows always from the dead" (15). After all, it is the long dead that contain memory, and are the subjects of it.
The inscription at the orchard—at the edge of the town of Puamahara—where the Memory Flower is supposed to have grown, reads thus:

'It is thought to have been here that Puamahara, the maiden of ancient times, discovering and learning the secret of the source of memory was herself transformed into a flower known as the Memory Flower. The identity of the flower is not known. The early settlers claim it was an English rose or apple blossom. The Maoris say it was a flower of the bush. Others have named it as the flower known to bloom from the plant, vegetable sheep, used lately for its contraceptive properties. It is thought to be the same flower brought to England by Sir Joseph Banks and given to William Cowper, the English poet, and credited with effecting a cure of Cowper's depression.' (114)

If one were to examine this novel in terms of modernist and postmodernist concerns, it would appear that Mattina Brecon is a character with deeply modernist concerns but finds herself caught in a postmodernist, magical world. The novel is postmodernist given its destabilized narrative levels, proof of the fictionality of documentation, self-conscious narrators that interrupt their own narratives, the limits of rational imagination, and the open-ended nature of memory and history. As is also typical of postmodernist fiction, a scientific discovery and a legend are invented to carry forward the narrative. While the truth value of these constructs is to be taken for granted in the world of the novel, it provides the reader with three ontologically disparate worlds pressing against each other and, as the novel progresses, interrupting each other as well. In such a destabilized postmodernist world, the
protagonist is on a quest to know, not be. She wants to witness and gather the "real essence" of things and beings, to discover the core of language and memory (Zoppi 162). She accepts that "most of her life had been spent on the trail of really and its parent noun" (Frame 48), evidently without much success. Like a turn-of-the-century anthropologist, she wants to examine, interview, observe, record, and understand the people she meets on her voyages. From these, she wishes to build up a conclusive story. She avers that her voyages are made for that very purpose. She feels well equipped because of her place in the world, and the wealth, knowledge, and language that she was granted from birth. However, in the magical realist world, these are no longer adequate consolations. She is thwarted in her well-meaning attempts to know the "real" at every step: by offending her "subjects" when she offers them money, by the imposter novelist Dinny Wheatstone usurping her voice and supplanting her experience, by her death, and finally by her own fictional status, as exposed in the postscript. What Mattina does not realize is that "the observer influences reality through his act of observation" and "if the observer is part of the observed system, he or she is changed by the act of observation" (Zoppi 166, 167). It is the complex relationship between the observer and observed, between the emic and the etic perspectives, that forms the crux of Mattina's interaction with the residents of Kowhai Street.

127 Frame (or John Henry) is at pains to explain that Mattina is not greedy or overtly snobbish. She takes her wealth for granted and is thankful for it, because it allows her to pursue her passions. She is also extremely generous with it. However, she is removed from reality, and somewhat naïve. Without meaning to, she offends people by unassumingly and generously offering them money, exposing a rather colonial position she subconsciously envisages for herself. She does not comprehend how money sullies the connection she is trying to make with people on her journeys. She believes adequate payment in exchange for service, information, and knowledge, is justified. For instance, she justifies keeping Nanny Parker from her family by stating that the woman has been paid handsomely for her services (164).
The novel also highlights the failure of the cumulative knowledge of Mattina's past experiences when faced with the unprecedented and the extraordinary. Mattina is aware of both—the legend and the scientific discovery—before she goes to Puamahara. Yet, the intrusion of the magical, in the form of the animal presence, is beyond explanation. She can only sense that the presence marks a transition between heretofore distanced worlds and the present, and accept it as her new reality. When she returns to New York, she finds that the Gravity Star is a possible reason for the catastrophe she witnessed, but finds herself terribly unsure of how to articulate what really happened—not only because memory is fickle but also because the reality of that night is inexplicable in familiar idiom.

Mattina, the modernist with a desire to be a detective, comes face to face with postmodernist ontology—the sudden arrival of a completely different world into her world that confuses all order and normality as she knows it. Her journeys are mythic in intent because she is on a quest, but this particular journey is intercepted by magic, and also proves to be her last. Mattina's life is "a journey in search of the core of language and of its deepest meanings and values." However, "until the borderline of reality is defined, analyzed and assimilated, it is not possible to tune into that Outer world which might pivot on what we label 'magical'" (Zoppi 162). That is, Mattina must travel to the edge of her reality, and recognize that everything cannot be explained as dead or alive, past or present. This alone will aid her in comprehending the new reality, which is also magical.

What happens to language and memory in the face of unprecedented chaos, or when they must grapple with a vastly different reality, is the central magical concern
of The Carpathians. Unlike most magical realist novels where the intrusion of the magical is duly described, Frame is setting up the question of language's efficacy in the face of the arrivant—the magical. Here, language fails when the characters try to articulate that which is as yet unspeakable.

Setting up the Realist World

One of the features of magical realist fiction is a meticulously detailed "real" world. Puamahara is not a real place, but is similar to many small towns in New Zealand. The reader is informed early on that Puamahara is a retirement destination with an unusually high number of old people (Frame 39). This urban statistic feeds into, and is fed by, the location of the Memory Flower. The Memory Flower flourishes in Puamahara because the soil there is fed by "the crushed bones of vanished rivers and the blood of former generations" (12). Interestingly, the locals are not very enamored of this legend, and believe it is a gimmick by the tourism department.

The townspeople are extraordinarily fond of horticulture, vegetable gardens, flower beds and orchards. This obsession with fertility is linked to the desire to connect the present with the future. On the other hand, their overwhelming concern with the construction and repairs of their houses, tiles, pipes, and sockets, is a symptom of their desperate attempts to cement their identity and place in technologically dominated present. Through her notes, Mattina gathers that they each have a store of private, individual memories, which are constantly interrupting their

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128 The realist world helps readers to identify with the location and the details assure them that this is not a world removed from reality; while fictitious, this world mirrors the commonplace. As established in the previous chapter, such a strategy is essential because the intrusion of the magical creates a magical realist—rather than a fantasy or fairy tale—effect.
present. It is these divisions of past, present, and future that are complicated by the Gravity Star and the Memory Legend.

We are told that the town has a population of about thirteen thousand, and while not bustling like a metropolis, it has

... its streets of the wealthy and the poor, the wealth observed in the elaborately built homes with their tall fences, spacious driveways, swimming-pools; the poverty in those sections where limbless cars lie abandoned in the overgrown grass of front lawns, and fence posts prop one another, severed from their original root in earth. Puamahara has three morticians, three veterinarians, the usual kindergartens, schools, churches; a medical centre; a library; a cultural centre within an old Victorian house staging exhibits of paintings, sculpture, craftwork, pottery; a marae out of town where the Maori families gather; an art shop offering the framing of paintings and the sale of prints of flowers, trees, wide-eyed children and kittens. Puamahara has its political parties and their headquarters, its real estate agents; a race course, a football field, parks, a show ground for the seasonal agricultural and pastoral show, the travelling circus and fun fairs; and, a few miles out of town, towards the mountains, a picnic ground near the river. (13)

In addition, there are several old age homes, hospitals, the Manuka Home for the Intellectually Handicapped of all ages, and a Home for Wayward Children. Like any other town, each morning is marked by "sounds of motorcycles revving, cars starting, and a train grinding slowly, heavily," someone mowing a lawn, workers hammering
and sawing, and so on (35). The residents of Kowhai Street are involved in
"housekeeping their lives" (15), earning money, going to school, running stores,
playing video games, remembering old wars, dying, and getting murdered. 129 The
residents are the kind of cosmopolitan mix we expect in urban centers. They believe
themselves to be strangers, having arrived here from elsewhere or desiring to be
elsewhere (39).

The residents’ relationship with Mattina fluctuates from a mode of confession
to putting up an act of indifference. At all times, they are deeply aware of her status as
the foreigner, but also as an observer and documenter. They believe that she will
preserve their essence in her notes, memories, and her novel. So, they are clearly
aware of their transience. Her status as observer alters, even if ever so slightly, their
behavior in her presence. On the other hand, they also think of her as a typical
American tourist, and assume her interest in the “exotic” Memory Flower legend as
sketchy and short-lived. Mattina too, cannot decide on the place she wants to occupy
among these residents. On the one hand, she desperately wants to belong and be one
of them, because that is the only way to really know the Other. She wants to know
them intimately enough to be able to interpret (rather than just record), their actions
and thoughts. However, she is also not willing to surrender the privilege of her
individual, outsider status, or her point of view.

129 Realistic descriptions are not restricted to Puamahara alone. New York, Mattina and Jake’s house,
Nanny Parker and John Henry, their vacation with friends in Cloud Cay, memories of growing up, and
an extra-marital affair fill out the identities and lives of each character that belongs to Mattina’s “own”
world. Mattina’s dabbling in the arts, her early romance with Jake, and her various journeys are
described in varying shades of realist detail, complete with time, place, and remembrances.
“Unimaginable reality:” Magical Elements

There are several parallels that can be drawn between the characters in the novel and mythic characters. The fate of the woman of the Memory Legend is the exact opposite of Eve in the Old Testament. However, Mattina is similar to this woman from the legend. Mattina also gathers memories which she then “releases” to her husband and, subsequently, to her son. The woman in the legend disappears and a tree appears in her stead; Mattina’s death is her disappearance, and instead of an eternal bloom, we have John Henry’s immortal novel. While it is true that in The Carpathians “women are both the upholders of an oral tradition and the figures who, within the tales, survive through their language skills, and who preserve and spread information through gossip and other storytelling practices” (Wikse 46), the question also remains whether Mattina is a genuine storyteller. Her voice is usurped by Dinny, and both she and Dinny are replaced by a male narrator—John Henry. In the act of being usurped, the metamorphosis of Daphne from a person to a tree may be considered a motif. Weary of being pursued by Apollo, Daphne begged her father, Peneus, to turn her into a laurel tree. Her feet took root, her arms became branches, and she turned mute. The woman of the Memory Legend is literally the Daphne of folklore, while Mattina, Dinny, Connie Townsend (Rex Townsend’s mother), and Decima James (the autistic and mute daughter of Joseph and Gloria James)\(^{130}\) are all modern-day Daphnes: they have visions, knowledge, and secrets, but before these can be solidified in writing, the women are transformed and lose their narrative ability, or they are disregarded. For instance, Mattina is aware that her story is already lost on

\(^{130}\) Rex Townsend, and Joseph and Gloria James are Mattina’s neighbors on Kowhai Street.
the night of the rain of alphabets. She says to herself: "If I were writing this story ... the words might have begun already to burn, and though still legible they would sink into the flames as if they desired their own oblivion" (125). Even Jake is mildly skeptical of her stories in the months leading up to her death and half-dismisses them as ramblings. Connie is believed to be senile and hence, untrustworthy. Dinny is an imposter with no selfhood and vanishes on the night of the Gravity Star's influence. Decima, "unknown and unknowing" (75), is mute from birth—if she has any language, it is so private as to be of no use in communication. In one sense, Decima's lack of words makes her the exact opposite of Dinny, who has access to the words of all the characters. Yet, Dinny too, has no words that are her own. Through this trope, we are made aware of how histories are made, whose memories are preserved, and whose voices are unheard.

In her normal, realist world, Mattina must confront the magical in the form of the persistent invisible presence in her bedroom. The presence in the room—the "animal of long ago"—may be thought of as a representation of the primitive essence of memory that was held in the core of the Memory Flower, and has crossed over from memory and legend into the physical world. Mattina tells herself that the unnamable primitive presence is "a thought, a memory, a time, or just a shape occupying a new kind of space" (80). The occupied area is a "blank two-dimensional triangular space" causing the "reduction of the room, Mattina, the house, the street and its people ... to a two-dimensional existence ... a world-scape without volume, with their present image of themselves an illusion only" (100-101). In other words, the people around her are no longer real, but only like fictional creations in a novel,
where their existence is restricted to the length and breadth of the page. That is, the presence that purportedly arose from a two-dimensional existence (of the story/legend) has now reduced the real world around it to this two-dimensional existence.

This presence evokes no fear, and although she cannot explain its existence or arrival, Mattina eventually becomes habituated to it. It is "beyond the laws of logical thought or of the exact sciences," and is magical. Through it, Mattina's "consciousness attains a different level of perception, where she can cross the limits of substance and of reality and make contact with true essence" (Zoppi 158). This essence could be thought of as Zamora's "ghost" that has floated in from a time before history, and from a story, into Mattina's room.

The Gravity Star is a scientific discovery in the world of the novel, but also an instrument for effecting magical consciousness. When it arrives, "bearing its overwhelming unacceptable fund of new knowledge from millions of light-years and centuries of springtime" (Frame 125), "ordinary perceptions" will be denied and overturned, and the mind will be thrust into "a channel of the formerly unknowable because then unimaginable" reality (12). Under its influence, "the iron bands that once made rigid the container of knowledge" will burst, and although perceptions of time and space will persist, "widening crevices in what was believed always to be the foundation of perception" will appear. Binaries like "near and far, then and now, here and there, the homely words of the language of space and time" will become useless (14). That is, the concept of reality based on such dichotomies will collapse. This will herald the beginning of a new, as yet "unimaginable," reality.
What magic does to realism, the Gravity Star does to reality in the novel: a complete reconfiguration. The Gravity Star must not be thought of as an explanation for a magical reality; it is the magical that alters the real. It is an instance of nature going rogue: like relentless rain or a persistent dust storm that cause drastic change, the Gravity Star also causes such change that is both unprecedented and catastrophic.

Just as the origins of the Gravity Star lie beyond human time, the Memory Legend is also a part of the atemporal, mythic history of the land. The Memory Flower has been tended to by the "housekeepers of Ancient Springtime"—the poets and writers who preserve Memory. The Flower's blooming "had merged to banish the painful opposites and contradictions of everyday life.... it seemed that lost became found, death became life, all the anguished opposites reverted to their partner in peace yet did not vanish: one united with the other; each two were lost and found" (114). In both cases, then, a magical reality is effected. The interesting juxtaposition, though, is between a local legend and a celestial body. It is the node of the legend that magnetically attracts this quasar, and leads to the explosion of concentrated memory.

The lives of the residents of Kowhai Street are destroyed by a catastrophe that causes upheaval at the ontological level, where entire worlds (a house, a family, a community) disintegrate and the characters are forced to recognize alternative realities (also seen in One Hundred Years of Solitude, The House of the Spirits, Midnight's Children, Terra Nostra, and Like Water for Chocolate). Such a catastrophe does not evoke horror in the characters but in the reader. More importantly, it is an event whose presence indicates that known worlds and realities are pressured to
their breaking point; and beyond this point lies the recognition of multiple worlds and histories.

The night of the rain of the alphabet is described in detail in the novel. Mattina is woken up by the abrupt departure of the primitive presence from her room, and hears cries coming from the street. These are not coherent sounds but horrifying wails, screams and shrieks in a chorus of languages unheard of—a cacophonous and incomprehensible mixture of consonants and vowels. This is the night of the influence of the Gravity Star, when “all changed beyond belief.” There is a shower of a mixture of clay, mud, feces and bright flakes like diamonds, and this mixture falls in the shapes of punctuation marks, musical notes, and letters of the alphabet of all languages. The neighbors Mattina has come to know so well are outside their houses, confusion and hopeless anger written across their faces as they realize that their language has failed them (or they have failed language). They stand rooted to their spots, their eyes shining like nocturnal animals. Like the Biblical flood, this deluge washes away the cumulative being of the whole street. Meanwhile, noises on other streets continue as if nothing has changed. But on Kowhai Street, Mattina witnesses the residents turning into primitive beings with their clothes shredded, able to produce only basic speech sounds, as if they have been forced to return to a pre-lingual stage in a sudden and cruel sleight of rain that glitters on the street and on roofs.131

131 It can be extrapolated that the effects of the Gravity Star are also akin to those in the aftermath of chemical warfare, a holocaust, or the explosion of an atom bomb. As is often the case with new-age technology-driven genocides in the real world, there is mute agony, incomprehensible pain, efficient covering up by governmental agencies, and attempts to obliterate the memory of such an event in dominant historiography [here, among the other people in the town and the media]. These aspects closely resemble the event described in the novel. More importantly, there is an inversion also taking place in this narrative: where historiography is always about the masses and a few prominent individuals, Frame is looking at history through an inverted lens, where an ordinary individual—who
However, this is also the inaugural moment of the new paradigm, and knowledge that is simultaneously ancient and utterly new. Even amid the primitive sounds that betray the futile attempts of the residents to communicate, Mattina detects "a hint, an inkling of order, a small strain recognizable as music," which is "not a replacement of what had been lost but a new music" (126). Once the affected realize the loss of known language, they accept the sounds they can make now and try to master them, muttering in their new speech though they cannot understand Mattina's questions to them. Mattina realizes that "she and the people of Kowhai Street had entered the time of the coexistence of dream and reality..." (131). In other words, they had entered magical reality.

Only Dinny (the imposter) and Mattina (the foreigner) are spared this "disaster of unbeing, unknowing" (129). After the affected have gone back into their houses, Mattina returns to the safety of her house and finds a "small cluster like a healed sore on the back of her left hand." She picks at it, and the scab crumbles. Upon examining it, she finds it is "a pile of minute letters of the alphabet, some forming minute words, some as punctuation marks; and not all [are] English letters..." (129). She discovers that each speck which rained is a microcosm of all languages known to man. However, instead of replenishing those that received it, it has washed away all traces of the alphabet from them. Like the pitiless rain of four years, eleven months, and two days that wiped out all signs of the banana company massacre and its memory in Macondo (García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude 339), the rain of
the alphabet has removed all language from those it fell on. However, while the rain in Macondo ceased and everything went back to normal, on Kowhai Street, there remains only “overwhelming loss” (Zoppi 160).132

The next morning, Mattina muses that she was spared probably because “she had removed herself, her real being, to New York City, that is, to Memory,” and decides that in order for people to beat death, “they must remain within the Memory Flower” (Frame 151). As a celebration of the privilege of memory, the novel, in a long flashback, takes the readers through Mattina’s life leading up to the moment of her arrival in Puamahara. However, while Mattina realizes that this power of memory is lost to those who experienced the deluge, even this epiphany is half-hearted, futile, and lost in the maze of memories that tugs her away from the present moment.

As she sits in her house, government vans with dark-tinted windows quietly and efficiently take away the affected and strip their houses of all possessions that are traces of their erstwhile owners. It appears that having experienced magical reality has rendered these people unfit for normative existence. Dinny’s house is empty by the time the government officials get there, and Mattina hides behind a tree to escape them. No one knows if the affected are dead or alive, rendered mute, or have reverted to an animal-like stage. As is usual in magical realist novels, no one interrogates. The entire incident is omitted from public consciousness, and the sudden emptiness of the street is accepted as normal. Offhand remarks are made suggesting that these abrupt changes happen, entire streets empty out, people leave en masse and out of the blue.

132 We have seen earlier that seasons reinforce the mythical notion of the cyclicality of time. Seasons—and by extension nature—are vital for regeneration and renewal. In magical realist novels, however, not only does nature go rogue, it also disrupts the stability and reassurance that a cyclical return promises.
Even the nurse at Decima's home states, matter-of-factly, that the residents "were visitors who went home or others who happened to be up to their ears in debt or wanting to escape personal problems or from people – as in the case of Decima's parents, who couldn't face having such a daughter and caring for her" (190).

Mattina buys all the empty houses on Kowhai Street before she leaves, but never returns to visit them. However, Jake makes this pilgrimage at Mattina's behest, after her death. The empty houses haunt him too, but life goes on as usual for everyone else. He wonders if they were all drugged or brainwashed, or if the "powerful erosion or obliteration of their conscience or memory or compassion or sense of outrage had been accomplished by the natural workings of the human mind and heart, with perhaps a little help from the spirit of evil" (192). Upon questioning, Albion Cook tells him that he has "clean forgotten" who lived opposite Mattina's house (183). Such communal forgetting of massacres and genocides are not uncommon, as magical realist worlds will remind us.

Narrative Instability, Imposter Voices

The narrative instability featured in *The Carpathians* has already been established. There is also the issue of imposter novelists, whose presence articulates the question—whose subjectivity are we being exposed to? I refer to Dinny

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133 Jake senses that the "residents of Kowhai Street had vanished as if they had never been" (182). This is also a sign of narrative trickery, since the reader also knows these characters only through Mattina's memories. Whether these characters were a figment of Mattina's creation for Jake's sake, or John Henry's imagination, remains a mystery at the level of the narrative.

134 Mass forgetting is a major motif in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Peter Høeg's *The History of Danish Dreams*, Patrick Suskind's *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, and Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale*.
Wheatstone's manuscript that presents a major rupture in the fabric of the novel. It is not merely a narrative trick, but has a deeper concern, such as the usurpation of space and the artificiality of documentation.

The trusting reader conceives of Mattina as the protagonist, and her stay in Puamahara, as the crux of the novel. Yet from pages 51 to 115 of the novel, encompassing almost the entire duration of her two month stay there, it is not her account or that of a conventionally reliable omniscient narrator that we read. Instead, it is in Dinny Wheatstone’s manuscript that Mattina’s life in Puamahara is predicted. It is also in this manuscript that we meet the residents of Kowhai Street. The manuscript lays out their individual thoughts and concerns, their interpersonal conversations, their interaction with Mattina, and their impressions of her.

The reader is aware that Mattina travels in order to gather insight for herself and anecdotes and memories as creative input for Jake. Dinny’s overwhelming presence begs the question: is she doing Mattina’s work for her? In supplanting Mattina’s voice, is Dinny providing imaginary histories (for Jake)? On the surface, this section (titled “Wheatstone Imposter”) appears to be no different than a typical realist narrative, where the omniscient author has complete control over the characters’ lives and thoughts, and provides a bird’s eye view from the standpoint of a logocentric creator. However, Dinny proclaims the artifice of this section by calling herself the official imposter, with the uncanny “leave to occupy all points of view”

Zoppi suggests that in this manuscript, Mattina “recognizes herself (as she was both before and after settling down in Kowhai Street) in the thoughts and actions of a character in the typescript Dinny has put in her letterbox” (157). This implies that the character in the manuscript is fictional, but resembles Mattina. However, it must be kept in mind that Dinny does not think of herself as a novelist—who would create fictional characters—but an imposter novelist—who does not create but divines. Hence, it is a likelier interpretation that the manuscript is about Mattina, not someone like her.
She asserts that she has no subjectivity and can occupy the space of any character she pleases. Like an author of realist fiction, she claims that she has complete access to the innermost thoughts, past experiences, and futures of these characters. However, she is not creating fiction because these characters are "real" (in the world of the novel) and she appears to be divining their inner beings rather than creating them. In that sense, her falsehood is based on absolute truth.

Dinny's manuscript is an episodic description of the Kowhai Street families, and conscious of its being an artifice: "[t]hat evening Mattina opened the typescript left by Dinny Wheatstone, and began to read" (51). What Mattina reads will cover 70 odd pages of the novel, the inner lives and emotions of each resident that Mattina (would have) met, two months of Mattina's life, and Dinny's interrupting assertions of being the author of this part of the novel. The section ends thus:

Mattina closed Dinny Wheatstone's typescript and set it on the bedtable. Her emergence from the typescript confused her. . . . It is now almost two months since I [Mattina] came to Puamahara, yet it is true that I have just arrived here. Is it possible that I have lived here for both spans of time, both within reality, that after my first week, when I began to read this manuscript, my three-dimensional existence became two-dimensional but no less real within the pages of Dinny Wheatstone's narrative while she, writing her story, also moved within the present and future? . . . 'I have been in parentheses,' Mattina said. 'And emerging from this typescript, I leave in a few days for New York and my home.' (115)
The next section of the novel, in John Henry's/the omniscient narrator's voice, begins as an affirmation of this passing of time: "It was indeed so: in three days Mattina would be on the plane to New York" (119). This also raises questions about Mattina actually meeting and getting to know her neighbors. As readers, we know nothing about what she did for most of the duration of her stay except through Dinny's typescript that has predicted Mattina's life—like. The descriptions of Mattina taking notes, recording her thoughts, and pondering over the truth of the Gravity Star and the presence in her room can no longer be clearly slotted as real or artificial.

After Dinny's voice has ceased and John Henry/the omniscient narrator has taken over, we find that Mattina is worried about the fate of the residents who have become so close to her and who confided their deepest concerns to her (121). The question that rises is, have they truly done that? Did it happen and were we, the readers, not privy to it? Even Mattina displays this uncertainty: "Mattina, unable to deny or confirm her fictional experiences of almost two months, forced herself to weave them into her memory . . . as a form of truth composed of the real and the unreal" (121). On the other hand, she also believes she can walk into any house on Kowhai Street and will be welcomed as one of them. How would that be if she has really spent nearly eight weeks reading a manuscript? The novel offers its own solution to this conundrum: "Anything is or will be possible" (123).

The reader knows that Dinny Wheatstone is a resident on Kowhai Street because Mattina meets her in the first part of the novel, outside of the manuscript. Dinny tells her that she has put her fourth novel in Mattina's letterbox the day Mattina first meets her, implying that she had divined Mattina's visit and her purpose.
When Mattina tries to extract information about Dinny's past and present, Dinny informs her that she has neither since she suffers from "the imposter syndrome." This novel, John Henry has told us at the very beginning, is about preserving points of view, and Dinny confesses to having none, but perhaps that is why she is a novelist. It is important to note that she claims to be not an ordinary usurper but an "Official Imposter." In order to be a genuine imposter, one "begins with the first germ of disbelief in being, in self, and this allied to the conviction of the 'unalterable certainty of truth', produces the truth of disbelief, of deception being, of self, of times, places, peoples, of all time and space" (51).

Mattina's quest to know others is a similar act of "imposterism." She also wants to intimately and really know her subjects, enter them and genuinely record their innermost being. However, a true imposter novelist requires such absolute emptiness that Dinny deems Mattina is "no novelist" (95). Dinny must do Mattina's writing for her because she is the all-seeing novelist, whereas Mattina can only observe and take notes on people as if they were animals in a zoo, but never capture their essence. A true imposter, Dinny avers, can gather a great deal of history, ideas, and impressions from the air, so to speak, and does not need to interrogate people.

However, Dinny also betrays her subjectivity. On the one hand, she claims to inhabit nothingness when she is not occupying someone else's world, which explains how she disappears after the night of the rain of the alphabets. On the other hand, she announces her individual existence in her own manuscript: "I, Dinny Wheatstone, author of this imposter record, divine the activities of Kowhai Street, the street of the Gravity Star among the ordinary extraordinary people, while I study the primer of
possible impossibility, the meaning of the meaninglessness..." (57). She is not an innocent imposter either; she appears to exert a certain degree of control over them and their fates, and perhaps their memories too: "I, Dinny Wheatstone, imposter novelist intent on manipulating points of view, choose from daily life the commonplace facts of weather, accidents, quarrels, deaths, losses, gains, delights." Like Melquiades's script that unfolded the story of its reader (One Hundred Years of Solitude), Dinny announces, within her manuscript that Mattina "is reading my typescript" (95).

Mattina's inner thoughts ["I seem to have fallen under the spell of Kowhai Street, Mattina thought" (101)] and her preferences ["Mattina sat in what was now her favourite place—the armchair" (74)] are offset by her appearing to free herself of the imposter novelist creating her within the manuscript: "Mattina, making her quick sketch, smiled to herself, 'At least I'm not at risk of losing substance. For the moment, I'm the observer, the holder of the point of view, and even Dinny Wheatstone's presence can't erase my work" (76). Obviously, there is no way of ascertaining if Mattina has indeed broken free or if Dinny is only mocking her (and us). This could just be one more narrative level: Frame's novel, John Henry's narrative, Dinny's manuscript, and Mattina within Dinny's manuscript fighting her way out. It is possible that the manuscript is actually John Henry's creation. Or, the manuscript is genuine, and was found among Mattina's effects, and inserted verbatim by John Henry. To add to the unreliability, Mattina and Dinny have this conversation after Mattina has read the manuscript and returned it to Dinny. Dinny asks: "You read about the winter world, in my typescript," to which Mattina reacts thus: "'Surely,' Mattina said hastily,
trying to remember. Wasn't there mention of a graveyard, mute Miltons, undiscovered Hampdens?" (123). There wasn't, at least not for novel's reader.

Such references and points of interruption cut across several narrative levels, creating a web of unreliability for the reader. However, such trickery also proves that truth, verifiability, and reality are all very subjective and constructed in language. Whoever appropriates the narrative space controls and creates the truth. Connected to narrative space is the concern with memory. Memory is a privilege, and it is relevant to history only when it is given a voice. With usurping narrative voices, one of magical realism's core concerns is highlighted: that history is directed by not what "really" happened but how it is remembered. Such textual extrapolation of memory and memory making underscores Linda Hutcheon's claim that "all memory is fictionalizing"—a concern shared by postmodernist poetics as well (Poetics of Postmodernism 10). The Carpathians exhibits magical realism in the form of the living, breathing presence of memory, and magic as a result of the collapse of binaries under the influence of the Gravity Star. The ontological concerns of postmodernism and magical realism are voiced in the alteration of the "being" of the characters. The novel also displays postmodernist poetics in the use of a complex narrative structure, playful and interrupting narrators, and self-conscious fictional existence.

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123 The novel has several instances when memory (and thereby history) is considered a body more made and preserved in language than remembered. For one, Madge McMurtrie's murder is fresh news when Mattina arrives in Puamahara, but the narrator tells us that is a matter of a few days before the incident is forgotten and relegated to a police report, unless "the keepers and recorders of memories real and drawn from imagination, set down or spoke in words the story of the time" (34, emphasis added).
Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Cherry

Most of Sexing the Cherry takes place in seventeenth century London. The novel revolves around such events as the Puritan Interregnum, the Great Plague of 1665, and the London fire of 1666. England, of this period, is depicted as full of wondrous discoveries and expeditions, as well as political and social turmoil with the fall of the Charles I and the rule of Oliver Cromwell. In this historical setting, peppered with “actual” events and historical figures, the novel weaves together a fairy tale, a myth, bawdy satire, and voyages to cities that defy all laws of physics.

The protagonists in this world are the Dog-Woman and her adopted son, Jordan. The Dog-Woman, a giantess, lives on the banks of the filthy Thames for most of the story’s span. The Pantagruel-like Dog-Woman is a professional dog breeder, and, as the novel unfolds, we discover that she is also a serial murderer. Named after a river and very fond of making model boats, Jordan is apprenticed in 1640 to Tradescant, the royal gardener and voyager. Together, the two travel to exotic lands. Tradescant’s primary purpose in traveling is to bring back plants and fruit that no one in England has seen or tasted before. Bananas, pineapples and cherries feature prominently in the novel. After Tradescant’s death, Jordan continues voyaging on his own because he is obsessed with the “thought of discovery” (Winterson 3). His

137 John Tradescant the Younger (1608-1662) is a historical figure. He was the head gardener to Charles I and Queen Henrietta.

138 This obsession is the result of having viewed a banana for the first time. In this instance, we see the novel’s nod to One Hundred Years of Solitude. The wonder that Aureliano Buendia expressed at the first sighting of ice, Jordan expresses on seeing the banana that has been brought from the island of Bermuda. Jordan is transfixed by the sight of the banana and knows he is now fated to voyage to undiscovered lands. Although the Dog-Woman is skeptical of the banana’s true nature, when she puts her head next to the awestruck Jordan, she sees “deep blue waters against a pale shore and trees whose branches sang with green and bird in fairground colours and an old man in a loin-cloth” (6).
travels take him to very strange cities, and during one of his expeditions, he chances upon a mysterious dancer named Fortunata. She is a character from a fairy tale and has crossed over from the tale she was born in into the real world of the novel. Jordan returns to London after the worst of the plague has passed. The great fire of 1666 threatens to burn down London, and the Dog-Woman leaves the banks of the city with Jordan to journey to a new land. Unlike Macondo, which "would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men" (García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude 448), London is purified by being burnt to ashes before it can be rebuilt.

The novel's narrative also has an abrupt (and brief) jump to the 21st century, when an environmental activist and a Navy cadet find themselves being visited upon by visions from a long ago past they cannot fathom, but which they must accept as their destiny.

Sexing the Cherry is divided into four sections. The first untitled section has alternate first person narratives139 of the Dog-Woman and Jordan. The former tells the reader about her life, her childhood and her adulthood, Jordan's being found in a floating basket in the Thames, and her strong points of view on those that oppress sexual and moral freedom. She comes across as a staunch Royalist, a believing Christian, and a hater of the Puritans. In these pages, Jordan contemplates his mother, his childhood love for boats, his association with Tradescant, and his solitary journeys to cities that appear highly unrealistic to the rational reader.

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139The banana and the pineapple play an important pictorial role in the novel: the banana ends Jordan's first-person narrative portions, and the pineapple the Dog-Woman's. Similarly, Nicholas Jordan's narrative is marked by a split banana and the environmental activist's by a split pineapple. Such pictorial depictions create connections across time, space and identities.
The second section veers away from the protagonists and into a fairy tale. The Grimm brothers’ tale, *The Shoes that were danced to Pieces* (also translated as *The Worn-Out Shoes*) is recreated as a set of twelve individual stories of women in search of happiness beyond conventional (heterosexual) marriages. These twelve first-person accounts begin after the point where typical fairy tales end: marriage that signals eternal bliss. The stories examine a number of issues related to feminine identity, subjectivity, and homosexuality. The stories do end happily, but in ways that radically subvert our expectations from fairy tales.

The third section, titled “1649,” is a return to the historical period. The Civil War, the beheading of King Charles I, and the establishment of the Puritans is presented through the narrative of the Dog-Woman. Her opinions emerge through these pages: she is particularly incensed at the Puritan men’s excessively sanctimonious pretense and their greatly depraved and debauched behavior in private. Using the trope of bawdy humor, she describes their prurient behavior that she has witnessed first-hand. According to her, Puritans indulge in necrophilia, bestiality, and voyeurism: behavior that clearly belies their exterior of strict morality, social propriety, and austerity. For our protagonist, the Puritans’ greatest shame lies in their denial of bodily pleasures and sexuality.140 This section also contains snippets of Jordan’s life, and many ruminations of a postmodernist nature about truth, reality, and verifiability. Jordan finally finds Fortunata, examines the nature of time and the

140 The Dog-Woman describes their two-faced personalities quite vividly: “Oh they hated everything that was grand and fine and full of life, and they went about in their flat grey suits with their flat grey faces poking out the top. The only thing fancy about them was their handkerchiefs, which they liked to be trimmed with lace and kept as white as they reckoned their souls to be” (22).
flat earth theory, and notes down what he terms "hallucinations." These hallucinations are, in fact, instances of a magical worldview.

The last section is called "Sometime Later." Set in contemporary London, we meet Nicholas Jordan and the nameless environmental activist. Both narrate, in alternating first-person voices, their childhood, and their passion for their respective careers. Their accounts are highly realist until history of long ago begins to interrupt their lives. They meet at the end of the novel, with the inexplicable but tacit understanding that they have lived other lives before and have known each other for a long time. The Dog-Woman and Jordan also appear briefly here, as does the last story that Fortunata had related to Jordan before they parted: Artemis’s version of her own myth.

Figures of Magical Temperament

*Sexing the Cherry* displays its elements of magic through its characters. The most visible of these is the Dog-Woman. She is a source of magic by being a woman of monstrous proportions,¹⁴¹ and demands space literally and literarily. Her size is supernatural: fleas rest in pock mark craters on her face (Winterson 19); she can hold a dozen oranges in her mouth at once (21); the sweat pouring off her can fill a bucket (16); and as a young woman, she had once displaced an elephant in a competition of weight: "[w]hat it says of my size I cannot tell, for an elephant looks big, but how am I to know what it weighs? A balloon looks big and weighs nothing" (21). However, she

¹⁴¹ The novel has often been looked at as a postmodern lesbian text (Marilyn Farwell, Eva Aldea). A lesbian body is often expressed through excess because it does not fit categories that medicine and marriage define.
is not merely *like* an elephant. She is the same size and weight as one. Jordan, as a baby, could sit in her palm like a puppy. Given her abnormal appearance, her father had tried to sell her to a circus as a freak when she was still a child. She had killed him with alacrity, which she recalls was her first murder (122).

For most part of her adult life, it is not her size as much as un-natural strength that defines her. She is not only strong enough to wring the necks of several men at a time, but also pulls a musket ball out of herself when shot at (69). She is practically invincible—a point proved further when she survives shoveling bodies of the victims of the plague without falling prey to the epidemic herself. She is also a woman of strong opinions and a morality that is her own; she is a devout Christian but thinks nothing of murder when the victim is someone she thinks does not deserve to live. For her, the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is secondary to Moses's other law: "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (92). Once, when incited to inflict violence on Puritan men, she enthusiastically wounds enough of them to collect 119 eyeballs and over 2,000 teeth which she rolls out to horrified church goers (93). She kills Preacher Scroggs and Neighbor Firebrace, two men she utterly despises, after spying on them in a brothel. It is with a cheerful spirit that she carries on her loyalist agenda, and this agenda is coupled with a deep sense of duty to the Church and a keen desire to rid the country of the "po-faced, flat-buttocked zealots" (70).

Irrespective of her failure in finding an appropriate romantic partner and her cynicism of men in general, she is a fierce and nurturing mother to Jordan and to

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142 The Dog-Woman is apparently uneducated but displays her knowledge of the Bible quite rightfully. For instance, when a man flatteringly tells her that she weighs no more than an angel, she retorts: "You know nothing of the Scriptures". . . "For nowhere in that Holy Book is there anything to be said about the weight of an angel." (20).
others she takes a fancy to. Generally partial to fellow Royalists, she is very fond of Tradescant, though he was instrumental in taking Jordan away from her. For instance, once when Tradescant faints at the sight of her, "[v]ery tenderly, as a mother knows how, I scooped him in my arms, the bundle on top of him, and with my thirty dogs and Jordan coming behind we entered the gates of the great house . . . " (26).143 Once again, her physical size is highlighted for she can carry a full grown man easily.

From the various aspects of her personality, it can be gleaned that she is created in the image of the Venus of Willendorf, or the Earth Mother, revered during the late magical epoch. Such a comparison stands not only for her physical attributes but also her personality: she is a nurturing and protective mother, a breeder of dogs (an association with the notion of fertility), caregiver to her shriveled witch neighbor and to a plague ridden friend. At the same time, she is also intrinsically and frequently violent, and demands bloody sacrifices in the form of men (Puritan or otherwise).144

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143 This image is also reminiscent of Milton's Sin, who is seen at the gates of Hell with her brood of dogs (Paradise Lost, Book II):

The one seem'd Woman to the waste, and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fould
Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
With mortal sting: about her middle round
A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd
With wide Cerberian mouths full loud, and rung
A hideous Peal; . . . (650-56)

144 In other aspects of her personality, especially her moral system and the humor she evokes, she is closer to the figure of Rabelais's giant Pantagruel. Like the monstrous giant of French literature, the Dog-Woman is also a grotesque figure conventionally, but within the fictional world, she evokes fear not with her appearance but her actions. Humor is evoked less in her actions than in her wily and explicit speech. Both Pantagruel and the Dog-Woman are born to un-natural parents: the former to a giant (Gargantua) and the latter to a witch. Both find comical, and what may appear to be absurd, justifications for their actions. Like Pantagruel, she is also a carnivalesque creature: she depicts her interactions with others in a free and familiar way, treating the reader and her conversationalists with a no-holds-barred approach. Her eccentric behavior like spying on brothel customers and killing Puritans would be unacceptable except in her moral system. Her personality is a carnivalesque
She is certainly a creature of contraries. However, she is not a monistic figure that gravitates towards the opposing term of the duality. Rather, she smashes binaries by not fitting into either side. She is a mother and a murderer, a coy lady and a bawdy comedienne. She says that while she must turn sideways to enter or exit a door, she “can melt into the night as easily as a thin thing that sings in the choir at church” (8). She may kill easily, but she is once offered a job at a whore-house which she turns down due to her “frailty of heart” (40). All the same, her explicit descriptions of witnessed debauchery and even her lies are not for the faint-hearted. For instance, she uses scatological hyperboles to convince the guards at the king’s execution to let her in: she bemoans how she has the clap, stinks like a heap of dung, has rotting genitals, and the pus leaking out of her smells like a dog that has been dead for three days (72). She is comically literal-minded at times and skillfully sly at others, and possesses a vocabulary well beyond the ken of an uneducated, poor, village woman she calls herself. She can quote from the Scriptures as well as from Shakespeare to emphasize her point (96). While she is willing to kill men who oppress women, she is also a staunch advocate of the Church and monarchy, both strongly patriarchal institutions. She evokes laughter, but also pity, sympathy, and appreciation from the sympathetic reader for the staunchness of her beliefs and her private morality. She is almost like a modern day action-hero, invincible but also extremely unreal.

mishmash of conventional binaries. Sacrilegious behavior like exposing herself and murdering people is not only permitted but celebrated.

145 The language she uses would not have been permitted by the Puritans or even the Church. In her worldly negotiations and her language, the Dog-Woman is rebelling against moralist repression of all ages and sources.
The counter-point to the Dog-Woman’s size, heaviness, and earthiness is the corporeal lightness of Fortunata and her eleven sisters. These are the twelve dancing princesses from the reworked fairy tale who floated rather than walked each night into a mysterious city (which was floating in the sky) to dance all night (109). The sisters are so light that one of them did not float away because the umbilical cord held her, and another rode the house cat till she was twelve. When Jordan watches her dance, Fortunata appears to be as light as a floating point of brightness. Fortunata “believes that we are fallen creatures who once knew how to fly” and teaches her pupils to turn into “points of light” that are not bound by gravity (76). Time and space mean nothing to the lightest of the princesses, Fortunata. Her sisters insist that she must have become too old to dance, yet she is as agile and light as her adolescent pupils when Jordan finally meets her.

Magic is evident not only in the incredible heaviness and lightness of characters but also in the collapse of the past and the present. In the guise of the two first-person narrators in modern day London, the novel displays magical intrusion into modern-day reality. Nicholas Jordan is a naval cadet. Like Jordan, he was very fond of making and sailing toy boats as a child. As he reminisces about his childhood, we learn that he remembers a painting he once saw, of the first pineapple being presented to England’s king. This is a reference to Hendrick Danckerts’ 1675 painting titled Royal Gardener John Rose and King Charles II, which is indeed a painting of a pineapple being offered to the king. In the novel, Jordan is said to have brought the first pineapple to England in 1651 (9).
when a man in terribly antiquated clothes had come up to him and asked him about his boats. This man had said, "I used to make them ... and sail in them too. I've been everywhere, but I still have a feeling I've missed it" (130). This stranger walks away, and Nicholas's friend Jack comments that this man must be a "nut" because he was wearing clothes nobody wears any more. Six months after he has become a naval cadet, Nicholas is on board a ship at night when he hears a man's voice tell him that the king is being buried at Windsor. Again, he thinks "nobody wears clothes like that any more" (137). Nicholas looks at this man, and tries to remember where he knows him from. The suspicious reader may speculate that it is the memory of a painting or a hallucination, until Nicholas realizes: "I heard a bird cry, sharp and fierce. Tradescant sighed. My name is Jordan" (137).

The environmental activist is a one-woman campaign against mercury pollution, a personal evangelist for her cause just as the Dog-Woman is for the King. Fighting this lost battle, she remembers her childhood alter ego, an omnipotent and "huge and powerful" woman (142). The activist's physical bigness as a child became channeled into a "Rabelaisian dimension of rage" (141) against corporations and factories dumping chemical waste into rivers. She supposes that staying so close to the mercury is making her hallucinate. "I imagine I am huge, raw, a giant" (138). She fantasizes about kidnapping men from the World Bank, the Pentagon, and world leaders, and giving them compulsory training in feminism and ecology. In her and the Dog-Woman's stories, lies the political crisis that magical realist novels often revolve around. These women are combating unjust systems, whether it is industrial pollution, ruthless capitalism, or the moral repression of Puritanism.
Nicholas Jordan and the activist are destined to meet, and even their turns of phrase echo their counterparts from another lifetime. When Nicholas hears of her first, he thinks he knows her, although that is impossible (159). The activist's final words in the novel to him are: "Let's burn it," "it" being a factory polluting the water (165). The novel ends with the Dog-Woman and Jordan as they turn their backs on the purging fire—whose flames she has fanned—swallowing a pestilence ridden London. By magically fusing the two characters from the past with the two from the present, Winterson is bending time, and substantiating the connections that exist beyond logical dimensions.

A Collage of Literary Modes

*Sexing the Cherry* is a postmodernist pastiche of literary modes and genres. Its setting is deliberately historical, and liberally peppered with historically verifiable dates and events, and historically "real" figures. These create a reference system that cements the novel's time in the past. Some of these explicit references include 1640, when "the ferment in the city is due not only to the heat, but also to the King seeming to turn Papish on us, and Parliament being in uproar, and Cromwell with his lumps­

shaped head stirring it and stirring it" (16-17). The novel details Charles Stuart I's trial that began on 20 January 1649, and lasted seven days. The Civil War, the Scottish war, the formation of the Parliament, the Puritan Interregnum, and the Great Plague appear in the narrative with dates. However, this historical narrative becomes postmodernist historiography by inverting the gaze from a bird's eye view record to a subjective and particularized one. We are informed of these historical events and
others through the first-person narratives of the Dog-Woman and Jordan. Clearly, these events cease to be merely documented facts; rather, the reader encounters them as selected incidents that affect the characters in peculiar ways.

The historically realist setting is interrupted by two genres—the fairy tale and Borges's variety of fantasy fiction. The second genre revolves around Jordan's desire to "fly" away to fantastical cities. These voyages are opposed to the Dog-Woman's rootedness to land. She "anchors the historical narration in the material and visceral, while Jordan's stories are ephemeral flights of fancy" (Aldea 95). She appears abnormal but provides a historically accurate account; he appears normal and aspires to be a hero (Winterson 114), but travels through magical means to magical cities. Neither of them can be treated as purely realistic or purely magical, though. The Dog-Woman's real world feats are unreal and excessive; Jordan's fantasy is rendered real through his empirical approach. He says:

"I've kept the log book for the ship. Meticulously. And I've kept a book of my own, and for every journey we have made together I've written down my own journey and drawn my own map. I can't show this to the others, but I believe it to be a faithful account of what happened, at least, of what happened to me" (115).

Jordan's journeys suggest that the boundaries between the real and the magical are porous. Besides, the verifiable and the fantastical, the experienced and the imagined appear to be complementary and reversible. These journeys are also postmodern insofar as they question the stability of time and space, and cut through intertextual worlds (a fairy tale, references to Sindbad, Gulliver, and the myth of
Artemis). All the same, whether these journeys really take place is always doubtful, and the novel does little to resolve this question. The log suggests that he has made these journeys, but he also says that: "To escape from the weight of the world, I leave my body where it is, in conversation or at dinner, and walk through a series of winding streets to a house standing back from the road" (11). While this may indicate that the cities he purportedly visits may exist only in his imagination, it also means that the boundaries between the real and the magical are contiguous and porous.

Linear time also ceases to matter in these journeys. He notes: "The scene I have just described to you may lie in the future or the past. Either I have found Fortunata or I will find her. I cannot be sure. Either I am remembering her or I am still imagining her" (104). The line between truth and falsehood is very fine too: "And so what we have told you is true, although it is not" (106).

The cities, in themselves, operate upon peculiar axioms. On a particular voyage, Jordan arrives in a city whose residents are so cunning that they dismantle their houses and rebuild them in another spot within a single night. In effect, the number of buildings in the city is always constant, but people are never to be found in the same place where they were the day before. "In the city the inhabitants have reconciled two discordant desires: to remain in one place and to leave it behind for ever" (43). It is in this city that Jordan meets eleven of the twelve dancing princesses of the fairy tale.
Another magical city is the city of words where words cease to be constituents of language and take a life of their own. The words uttered or thought of by people rise up and “form a thick cloud over the city, which every so often must be thoroughly cleansed of too much language.” Cleaners fly up in balloons with mops and scrubbing brushes, but the words “resist erasure” (11). Quarrelling words bite the cleaners, while pretty sonnets are trapped in ornate boxes. In this city is an odd and precarious house with no floors but only bottomless pits, and a ceiling that grows upwards and “never ends” (15). The furniture is suspended from the ceiling, and people walk on tightropes. Here is where Jordan first encounters the incredibly light, dancing princess, Fortunata.

Jordan also flies over the tropics, carried by a flock of sea birds in a Sindbad-like fashion (31). He lands in a city where a young girl’s ghost haunts a tower in which distances change with perspective, and what the eye sees is not necessarily real. Zillah, the ghost, claims she is locked in a tower but when Jordan looks down, it is merely a few feet over a market street. However, when he follows her gaze downwards, he finds that they are “at the top of a sheer-built tower,” the bottom of which is set in rocky crags far below (36). But when he somersaults out the window, he lands on a pile of radishes in the market.

In One Hundred Years of Solitude, the insomnia plague ruins the people of Macondo. Similarly, Jordan visits the city of love, where a plague of love had wiped

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146 The idea that objects and metaphors take on lives of their own is highlighted by Faris as one of the defining characteristics of magical realism (164, 170). In the case of the city of words, words seem to rise in the sky as if they were in thought balloons that appear in comic strips, and these balloons literally rise up in the sky.
out the entire population three times. Each time, the plague affected the religious and the dissolute, the old and the young, alike.

Worse, ordinary men and women, with no eccentricity in their natures, began to eye one another and die for love. Every day new graves were dug in the hillside. The grave-digger himself was so struck by the woman he was burying that he wrenched the lid from her coffin and got in. After hours of pleading his family lost patient and threw the soil in themselves. After that the dead were thrown into the river, and then of course everyone who was left died of contamination. (Winterson 81)

Each time after such an apocalypse, a monk and a whore repopulated the city with their offspring, and forbade the emotion of love and the actions of smiling, singing, or playing music. Jordan finds a contraband guitar and plays a song, which rekindles the emotion of love. The rulers—the monk and the whore—shoot the entire population (of their own children), and get on with the onerous task of repopulating it. Horrific genocides carried out by dictators who can brook no dissent are recast in such episodes that highlight violence without naming it.

Fortunata describes the secret floating city to which the twelve dancing sisters escaped each night, before they were caught. This is the silver city of curious motion that has abandoned gravity. Its inhabitants live in treetops and are acrobats. Once the citizens realized that gravity no longer held them down, "walking turned into leaping, and leaping into dancing, so that no one bothered to do sedately where they could twist in points of light" (108). The city gradually drifted out of the Earth's
gravitational pull, and the citizens use poles to push themselves away from stars and raft their city to wherever they want.

The fairy tale is the second intrusion in the historical fabric of the novel. A fairy tale usually takes place at an undefined time, and in an undefined place. In the Grimms' version, the sisters are locked up each night but secretly escape underground and go dancing with twelve princes. Each morning, they are found exhausted, and their shoes torn. Baffled, the king proclaims that whoever deciphers this mystery can marry the princess of his choice. Many princes try and fail because the eldest princess mixes sleeping draughts into their drinks. One poor, wounded soldier proves impervious to this trick and follows the sisters that night. Having successfully discovered their secret, he gets to marry the eldest princess and becomes the king. In this novel's retelling, the princesses' secret is discovered by a young prince, and the twelve girls were promised to the prince and his eleven brothers. Fortunata is the youngest and runs away at the altar. The remaining eleven have their own stories of failed marriages, but each story is also one of choices that a woman has to make in order to live happily ever after. Through first-person narratives, we are privy to the lives of these women after the end of a conventional fairy tale.

The first princess fell in love with a mermaid and left her husband; the second killed her husband when he burnt the body of a saint to spite her because she collected religious relics; the third's husband was in love with a boy and she killed them both; the fourth's husband was a philanderer and liked women from lunatic asylums so she left him to die of venereal diseases; the fifth was the lover of Rapunzel and was tricked by a cross-dressed prince and blinded, while her own husband had
turned into a frog the first time she had kissed him; the sixth’s husband was obsessed with hunting and so she left him; the seventh’s husband was actually a woman and they were deeply in love but when the villagers found out and came to kill the lover masquerading as a man, the princess killed her instead to save her from the ignominy of a public lynching; the eight’s husband was a glutton and ate a cow and pig every day—she grew tired of his habits, and poisoned him because she preferred farming to cooking; the ninth’s husband trained her to be a pet falcon with a chain around her neck, so one night she tore his liver apart (“I was none of these things, but I became them” (57)); the tenth’s husband did not want to choose between his wife and mistress, so she left him; the eleventh’s husband was a man caught in his own delusions and demons, imagining his spirit to be trapped inside his body, so she smashed his skull and set it free. In each of these cases, marriage literally takes away the princesses’ ability to fly, and they must make difficult choices in order to restore happiness.

Winterson’s use of a reworked fairy tale woven into the historical world of 17th century England is in “the manner of a playful palimpsest that simultaneously evokes and critiques through its critical, parodic distance from the pre-text” (Makinen 149). Winterson twists the seemingly innocuous fairy tale to raise questions about genre as well as subjectivity. Although fairy tales are circulated, narrated over and over again, and exist in both oral and written traditions, their tropes, characters, and plots remain more or less fixed. Further, they are inherently patriarchal, and reinforce stereotypes about women. However, in Winterson’s choice and reworking

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149 The use of a reworked fairy tale is a literary style also seen in Angela Carter’s work of fiction *The Bloody Chamber*. 249
of the tale, these stereotypes are challenged: the princesses in the original tale are not
docile to begin with, and rebel against patriarchy (the king) by sneaking out at night.
However, in the original tale, they are selfish and think nothing of the men being
beheaded after they fall asleep and are unable to discover the princesses’ secret. In
the reworked version, their selfishness is an act of rightful rebellion, and a desire for
individual happiness. Through the use, re-use, and ab-use of such a literary genre, the
author creates space for alternative voices, change, and the restructuration of identity
within a familiar context, but also highlights the limitations of a genre.

Apart from the fairy tale and the invisible cities, the myth of Artemis is also
invoked. Fortunata tells Jordan that she has been in the service of Artemis, and this is
her story: Artemis begs her father Zeus to let her live alone on an island and hunt
instead of marrying and bearing children. In her solitude, she discovers the joy of
traveling, and being alone, as only men could be. She knows “about the heroes and the
home-makers, the great division that made life possible. Without rejecting it she had
simply hoped to take on the freedoms of the other side . . .” (150). In this, Artemis is
an example of what Hélène Cixous refers to as the fluid notion of bisexuality,
“understood not principally as a form of sexuality, but as an embodied recognition of
plurality and the coexistence of masculinity and femininity within individual
subjects” (Onega 97).150

However, Artemis’s quest for equality and solitude is rudely interrupted by
Orion, a massive hunter with a terrible reputation. His sole intention is to disturb the
choices she has made: “She was a curiosity; he was famous. What a marriage”

150 In the novel, the Dog-Woman and Jordan are also appropriate figures of the coexistence of
masculine and feminine characteristics.
(Winterson 151). He eats her goat, scatters her goods, rampages on her island, and finally rapes her. However, she does not suffer in silence: "[h]er revenge was swift and simple. She killed him with a scorpion" (152).

This version of the myth is another intriguing reversal in the world of the novel. A mythic goddess must struggle in her quest for freedom from patriarchal norms, while a mortal (the Dog-Woman) has no trouble sustaining her freedom. It is, therefore, not a goddess, but the Dog-Woman, who is the alter-ego for the environmental activist. We are aware of the fictionality of the Dog-Woman, but she is real in the magical realist world of the novel. Artemis and the women of the fairy tale are also rendered "real" in novel, but the source of their origin is other stories. This is a feature of postmodernist metafiction, wherein characters from different literary worlds appear in a new literary context. It is also a feature of magical realism, if we think of these women as "ghosts" who can cross over from their stories into other stories. In using these "literary" women, Winterson is creating a space for them to renegotiate their histories.

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151 The myth of Artemis has several versions. She is the twin of Apollo, born to Zeus and Leto. According to some versions, she was born a day earlier and helped her mother deliver Apollo; hence, she became the patron goddess of midwives, and the goddess of fertility. Desiring to remain a virgin and a huntress, she asked Zeus to let her live on an island. Hence, she is also the goddess of wilderness, hunting, and wild animals. One version suggests that she and Apollo killed the children of Niobe, the queen of Thebes who had boasted that having borne more children than Leto, she was greater and must be worshipped. In Asia Minor (Ephesus to be precise), she was worshipped as a fertility goddess, whereas in mainland Greece, she was venerated as a huntress.

Among the several versions of her followers and their beliefs, one is that she and her companions were strict virgins, and very harsh on any man who threatened their virginity. Actaeon, for instance, chanced upon Artemis and her followers bathing in a secluded pool, and was unable to stop staring at the beautiful goddess. Enraged at this violation, Artemis turned him into a stag, and set his own hounds upon him. Another story is that Orion, a giant and a hunter, raped her and she killed him with either an arrow, or a scorpion. A different version of the same story is that Apollo, jealous of the time Orion and Artemis were spending together, challenged her to shoot an object at a great distance: the object turned out to be Orion's head.
Demolishing Dichotomies

I stated in the previous chapter that magical realism relies on the binary opposites of magic and realism and creates a new kind of reality. The idea that two contradictory terms combine to form a new kind of organism, or affect, manifests in several ways in *Sexing the Cherry*. For instance, the title of the novel is based on the horticultural technique of "grafting" wherein a tender or weaker plant is fused artificially with a hardier strain, which produces "a third kind, without seed or parent" (84). Jordan and Tradescant manage to successfully graft a cherry branch for the royal garden in Wimbledon. However, the Dog-Woman echoes the Church's sentiment that grafting is an unholy, unnatural act of artificially creating things. She believes that things that have not grown naturally have "no gender" and are "a confusion to themselves." Jordan mollifies her by saying that "we have sexed it and it is female" (85). The essential point being made here is that gender is not necessarily granted at birth. A third kind of plant can acquire gender eventually. In effect, gender ceases to be one of the determining characteristics for the birth and existence of this new mode of being.

Maria DiBattista states that gender is not a "fact" but a social construct. It is "a space in the psychic life, a hole or lapsus in identity onto which are projected the imagoes, archetypes, or stereotypes comprehended in terms male and female" (qtd. 

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152 Jordan, who aspires to be a conventional hero, wonders if this art of grafting can be applied to him as well. He feels the lack of innate qualities that make a hero, and wonders if he could be grafted onto the stronger, hardier Tradescant (85). The new being born from this grafting would be a mix of Jordan and Tradescant, with the best qualities of both. This belief rests on Jordan's notion that if these stereotypical qualities are not innate, one should be able to acquire them from elsewhere. Further, such an idea implies that the category of a hero is an artificial construct, and one can become a hero, if one is not born a hero.
in Front 109). That is, as exemplified in grafting, gender is determined by societal norms rather than by birth. Jordan and the Dog-Woman also display a clash of stereotypical gender roles: she is endowed with traditionally masculine strength, logic, and fearlessness; he is sensitive, intuitive, and imaginative.

There are instances where the novel creates a new kind of gender, which is a mix of both masculine and feminine characteristics. For instance, Jordan dresses up like a woman in the brothel, and at the King’s execution (Winterson 29, 72). He turns into a woman in the eyes of those around. Moreover, he claims he is not the only one to do this: “I have met a number of people who, anxious to be free of the burdens of their gender, have dressed themselves men as women and women as men” (28). Gender stereotypes, therefore, are not only a construct but also a burden.

The grafted cherry plant is an instance of hybridity. Hybridity “shakes our assumptions about the boundaries between the sexes and between species” and it “violate(s) categories in different ways” (Caroline Walker Bynum qtd. in Onega 96-97). The cherry plant may be termed female, but it is essentially a third sex, having been ascribed to the plant belatedly (Front 109). In a similar fashion, the Dog-Woman’s personality is also a hybrid. She cannot be classified as either completely masculine or feminine. Her being oscillates between gender stereotypes, and creates a third kind that cannot be neatly compartmentalized as masculine or feminine.

As readers, we too cannot decode the Dog-Woman with any kind of finality. She is simultaneously pious and profane. At times, she is not coy and lifts her dress in front of a crowd (Winterson 20). In such cases, she cannot be associated with traditional feminine identity markers like passivity and shyness. At the same time,
she bites into a peach in a “ladylike fashion” (17). She is not conventionally beautiful, and her physical strength aligns her with a masculine identity. However, she simultaneously challenges this notion by being fond of fine things like lace and ribbons, good clothes, and even pearls. Like a typical mother, she is nurturing and extremely protective of Jordan, and even looks after her neighbor, the old witch. But she thinks nothing of killing men when her morality warrants it. Then again, she dislikes the idea of gender being artificially bestowed, and displays a traditional bent of mind. In these ways, she deconstructs the clear distinctions between assumed masculine and feminine gender identity markers. If anything, she identifies herself with nature: “I am too huge for love. No one, male or female, has ever dared to approach me. They are afraid to scale mountains” (32). In her fluid personality, the Dog-Woman personifies magic itself. Magic in the novel cannot be “reduced to a device for undermining binary categories.” Rather, it transforms into “something that escapes these categories, something which appears as supplemental to the realist realm where these binaries are expressed” (Aldea 97).

The element of magic in this novel is clearly irreducible, whether it is the physical nature of the Dog-Woman or Fortunata, or the magical sojourns of Jordan. In addition, there are ontological concerns voiced by Jordan when he ruminates over the hybrids of time and space, which dissolve binaries of the here and now, and there and then. Jordan lists four anachronistic short stories in which characters (echoes of the novel’s protagonists) find time and space jumbled up. They find themselves inhabiting a reality that cannot be defined by logical parameters of time and space. From these stories, Jordan gleans the “lies” that we believe in, which lead to
"diseases" of the mind. These lies include: thinking of time as a straight line; believing that we can be in only place at a time; assuming that the past has occurred and the future has not; and accepting reality to be synonymous with truth (Winterson 90). These “lies” mirror both postmodernist and magical realist concerns, and posit the basic fallacy of existing in a system of dualities, and allowing it to circumscribe reality.

Magical realism and postmodernist poetics do not seek an alternative final truth. Their aim is not to merely reverse the value invested in binary oppositions. Rather, by destabilizing dichotomies, identity and meaning become fluid constructs. Winterson appears to posit, through the characters in her novel as well as through the use of magic, the desire to turn binaries into hybridity. Hybridity grants newer dimensions to reality, and is a metaphor for magical realism itself.

There is one more metaphor for magical realism that the novel offers: the ancient alchemists (who have been regarded as magicians) are reported to have said, "Tertium non data," or the third is not given (150). That is, the process of metamorphosis from a common element to gold takes place in the magical, unknown, and unverifiable space between the beginning and the end. This space is the space for metamorphosis and for magic.

In addition to the aspect of magic, there are also instances of postmodernist self-reflexivity and self-conscious narrators in the novel. For instance, Jordan recognizes that there is written proof of his voyages, but his own life is a piece of fiction: "I discovered that my own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts, was flying without me like the Twelve Dancing Princesses who shot from their window every night and returned home every morning . . ." (2). The Dog-
Woman is also aware that her life is a story chosen over another equally plausible story. She remembers the time her neighbor, the witch, had predicted that Jordan would abandon his mother and go away, and thinks to herself, "I should have killed her and found us a different story" (7).

Postmodernist ontological concerns are especially voiced in the conversations between Jordan and Fortunata. When he asks how it was that the sisters flew every night to an enchanted city to dance when there are no such places, Fortunata responds: "Are there not such places?" (106). We do not receive any direct and final answers to such questions, but these instances sustain the pervasiveness of magical realism, and press the reader to ponder over not the possibility of the existence of such worlds but what such an existence means.

*Sexing the Cherry* demands that the reader remain in a constant state of awareness of the hybridity that rests on a collapse of normative dualities, the kind of hybridity that the fusion of magic and realism brings forth in fiction, and the hybridity of gender that renders it a socially constructed, and not a biologically determined category.

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

*The Famished Road*, by Ben Okri, is a magical realist novel set in Nigeria and has elements of postmodernism as well as postcolonialism. Brenda Cooper suggests that modern day African writers can be split into two broad groups.\(^{153}\) While both

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\(^{153}\) The split in the two generations of African postcolonial writers is clear not only in their aims, examinations, and experimental aesthetics (such as non-sequential narration and non-realistic descriptions), but also in the way the newer generation views the older. In an interview, Okri is asked
sides are united in their efforts to challenge the cultural hegemony of the West, writers like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe generally tend to adopt the "nativism" approach, wherein authors return to their "roots," excavate traditional African mythology, and revive their culture in a form uncontaminated by colonial influence. On the other hand, writers like Ben Okri are "cosmopolitan" (Cooper 53) because through their fiction, they not only attempt to rescue indigenous cultural beliefs, myths, and folklore, but also add postmodernist elements to their narratives. This kind of postmodernism-postcolonialism is deeply interested in exploiting the provisionality of truth claims, fragmentation, hybridization, and self-reflexivity, as well as in re-constructing history from different perspectives (one of magical realism's aims too). Besides, such writers are less willing to decry the symbols of the West and highlight the beauty and integrity of indigenous elements. Writers like Ayi Kwé Armah, Achebe, and Soyinka emphasize the thesis that development can only come through political action, either from better leadership or

to define his relation with the older generation of Nigerian writers. His response is that he "accepts" them, implying that he does not necessarily draw inspiration from them, or desire to continue their project (Hawley 32).

By "cosmopolitan," Cooper intends such writers whose sources and ideas rely on identity formations that cut across national and regional boundaries. The cosmopolitan attitude is generally adopted by those writers who are "nomadic" or "dispersed" from their homelands (55). They are also the privileged among the Third World intellectuals (29). Such writers have a global attitude, and feel comfortable mixing elements from native and international contexts. Writers like Okri, Syl Cheney-Coker (from Sierra Leone), and Kojo Laing (from Ghana) are writers placed on the margins (1). Cooper argues that these writers are not escaping their histories or denying them. Rather, they are aware of the new forces in place that do not necessarily originate from an "external" source. They can debunk the idea of both tradition and progress.

For instance, in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* a white woman, who is married to a black man, is shown to be sexually frigid and psychologically deficient. She is the symbol of all white women, who, in Achebe's world, are dangerous and destructive for men. Thus, inviolable oppositions are created based on race, culture, or gender. Writers like Okri fight such essentialism using characters like Madame Koto, who is black but corrupt, fertile but dangerous. In *The Famished Road*, it is not colonial powers that are dangerous but Nigeria's own political parties. Writers like Okri refuse to keep up the divide between the colonizer and the colonized, and between the West and Africa.
popular movements. In contrast, writers like Okri do not place their faith in political action. They believe introspection of national and local relations of power, the tensions of history, and the nature of collective sensibility is the only way towards progress (Hawley 32). "Party to inherited traditions, open to global influences and scepticism," these magical realists "offer antinomies, embrace hybrid transformations and, at the same time, wish to participate in the project of national healing" (Cooper 58). In Okri's fiction, a third kind of (hybrid) space is created that overlaps indigenous and Western traditions, and local mythology and postmodernist poetics, giving rise to postcolonial-postmodern magical realism.

*The Famished Road* is difficult to summarize not because it has a labyrinthine plot, but because similar events occur repeatedly, like being caught in "a weird delirium of history" (Okri 195), inhabited by "the interchangeable faces of violence and politics" (192). The historical moment is vital to the novel: Nigeria's national independence looms large, corrupt politicians are on the rise, technology is making inroads in the form of photography, electricity, and cars, and the construction of roads is destroying the forests that abut urban habitation. The story unfolds through the first person narrative of an *abiku* child. According to Yoruba mythology, *abiku* are spirits born in human form who die early and are reborn repeatedly.\(^\text{155}\) The *abiku* have the power to will their own death, and they choose to die early because they long to return to their weightless world of spirits, fauns, and fairies. Ironically, the

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\(^{155}\) In using an abiku as a protagonist, Okri is also commenting on the countless deaths of newborns in the country due to lack of infrastructure and medical care. On the other hand, the abiku is also an element of aesthetic sensibility: its presence creates the possibility of looking at the world through a very magically fluid perspective.
happier they are in the spirit world, the sooner they are reborn to human parents. Thus, they are caught in an endless cycle of death and rebirth.

Most importantly, an abiku is the symbol of the permeability of the membrane that separates the living and the dead. Through an abiku’s existence, Okri attempts to see reality with “a third eye”—one which perceives paradoxes rather than certainties. Azaro, the novel’s protagonist, is a witness to the chaotic story of the birth and nascent years of Nigeria as an independent nation. He stands on the cusp of the creation of a national identity, but he also straddles two other worlds—the human and the spirit worlds. The “web of connections between the lands of the living and the dead” (Faris 173), which blurs the boundaries between the multiple worlds is one of the central magical realist and postmodernist concerns of the novel. Thus, Azaro’s identity is the threshold through which the living and the dead, folklore and modern advancement come together.

By the time we first encounter Azaro, he has been to the “world of the Living” innumerable times. But on one occasion, “somewhere in the interspace between the spirit world and the Living” he decides to stay in the human world, for the sake of his human mother (Okri 5). His choice proves to be a bane. Enraged by his desire to not return to the spirit world, the other spirits inundate his earthly hours with

157 Renato Oliva argues that suffering death and being reborn is a way of creating Azaro’s identity as a shaman (175). That he, is cross over into the realm of the spirits, but does not succumb to their charms. Rather, he experiences the chaos of the spirit world, and returns to the living world and is fully conscious of what he has experienced in both realms. Zamora points out that one of the recurrent motifs in magical realism is the dramatization of death as “metamorphosis from one state of consciousness to another” rather than a radical change of states (524). In Azaro’s case, it is not merely the change, but the co-existence of different states of consciousness that allows him to contain many paradoxes.

158 John C. Hawley comments that the novel “dramatizes the abiku’s difficult choice, an interior struggle that adult onlookers recognize as beyond their ken” (30).
hallucinations, cause trouble that he gets blamed for, and constantly pull him towards their world by trickery or threats. One-, two-, three-, and four-headed monsters are sent to bring him back to his spirit friends. This fact is not unknown to his human parents—Dad and Mum—who perform a number of rituals to keep him with them.

Through Azaro's first person narrative, we learn that his parents are very poor, and the family lives in a one-room house in a ghetto in an unnamed Nigerian city. For the first half of the novel, Dad breaks his back toiling—lifting heavy sacks of “garri,” salt, and cement, and later even nightsoil: menial tasks for which he is meagerly paid. Mum hawks paltry provisions around the city in the burning sun, and often returns home having sold nothing. Due to poverty, constant threats from the thugs of political parties, and the insults of the landlord of the ghetto, Dad turns violent. He fancies himself a boxer, and gradually establishes himself as one by fighting off local thugs and strange men. However, every fight knocks out a little of his sanity. Soon he takes it into his head to counter corrupt politicians by becoming a politician himself. He spends all his money in trying to become popular, but makes a pitiable fool of himself in the end. Mum, on the other hand, gets a stall in the market for a while, but the goons hired by the party she refuses to vote for upturn her stall and throw her out of the market regularly. Added to their financial worries is the

\[159\] It is this tug-of-war that is also responsible for his name. Once, his spirit companions trap his soul and keep it away from his body for so long that his parents give him up for dead. However, he wakes up just in the nick of time as he is about to be buried. This incident prompts his parents to christen him Lazaro (after Lazarus who rose from the dead). This name is shortened to Azaro. He learns later that he had been hovering between “not dying and not living” for two weeks. His constant movement between the worlds of the living and spirits, and between life and death, provides the most vital instance of magical traffic.
constant threat of Azaro's departure to the spirit world. Never knowing a moment of peace, the family remains "turning on the same axis of anguish" (Okri 280).

The ghetto they live in abuts a forest, which is home to innumerable spirits, ghosts, monsters, and witches. At the junction of the road that connects the ghetto to the city is a bar. The bar—owned by Madame Koto—is a meeting point for politicians who come from the city and the spirits that spill out from the forest. Madame Koto is a rich businesswoman, a priestess, and a practitioner of magic.

Even when he does not want to, Azaro often finds himself "crossing the threshold," and he wanders great distances on the labyrinthine roads in the human and spirit realms. What he encounters sometimes satisfies the childlike curiosity in him, but at other times, leaves him frightened and despairing. He roams restlessly through overcrowded marketplaces and silent forests, and discovers that the real and unreal worlds are not clearly demarcated.

Even though his constant crossing over between the human and the spirit worlds causes great anguish to his parents, Azaro is not willing to relinquish one for the other. While he wants to go on living in the human world, he does not want to give up his "spirit tokens" because he doesn't want "to entirely lose contact with that other world of light and rainbows and possibilities" (9). It is possible that his

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160 I borrow this phrase from Oliva, who suggests that "crossing the threshold" is the one basic experience repeated over and over again in The Famished Road as well as its sequel, Songs of Enchantment (177). Interestingly, the act of crossing over, from reality to dreams, from the realm of the living to the world of the spirits, from present reality to ancient folklore, and from the ghetto in the city to the village of the ancestors is performed not only by Azaro but also by Dad, Mum, Madame Koto and others.

161 These spirit tokens include magic stones, magic mirrors, golden threads, special promises, and unique objects of identity. While their parents make elaborate ritual sacrifices to make them stay and to reveal their spirit tokens, the abiku usually disdain such offerings and keep their tokens closely guarded.
unwillingness to let go of either world is because he has memories of his past lives, his life as a Spirit, and his life as a human. These memories create a complexity that will be lost to him if he forgoes any of his worlds. In other words, he is unwilling to let go of the simultaneous co-existence of different states of being.

The passing of time in the novel is measured, not by Azaro’s wanderings, which appear to have no connection to linear time, but by political events and the invasion of technology in the ghetto. Azaro notes how one day the "Party of the Rich" (a political party competing with the "Party of the Poor") comes to the ghetto to campaign for elections, and distributes free milk powder. This milk powder is rotten and makes everyone sick. This is the Saturday "when politics made its first public appearance in our lives" (127). The political history of the ghetto rests not on its inhabitants who appear to be haplessly caught in a vicious cycle of events, but on two characters: a photographer and Madame Koto. While the photographer, who lives in the ghetto, is a documenter of history,\(^{162}\) and uses his camera to capture horrifying images of politicians’ cruelty to the poor, Madame Koto joins the Party of the Rich and multiplies her wealth and stature. In fact, she literally swells as the novel progresses.

\(^{162}\) The photographer often gets into trouble because of this role as the recorder of history. Once, he is arrested after another riot breaks out between the thugs of a political party and the people of the ghetto. After his three day stint in prison, he comes back fearless and louder. He is welcomed as a hero in the street (155). His photographs of people being beaten up by the thugs appear in the newspaper, and "[f]or the first time in our lives we as a people had appeared in the newspapers. We were heroes in our own drama, heroes of our own protest" (156). Another time, after he is forced to go underground, the photographer is absent when the Party of the Rich causes another major riot.

And because the photographer hadn’t been there to record what had happened that night, nothing of the events appeared in the newspapers. It was as if the events were never real. They assumed the status of rumour. . . . After a while, when nothing happened, when no reprisals fell on us, it seemed that nothing significant had happened. Some of us began to distrust our memories. We began to think that we had collectively dreamt up the fevers of that night. It wouldn’t be the first or the last time. (182-3)

The photographer, by virtue of documenting history, is also its true maker. Without him, memories disappear, and without memories, it is as if the incident never occurred. He is a reflection of the postmodernist idea of the provisionality of history.
Her monetary gains bring to the area its first gramophone, electric connection, and a car—quickly dubbed "the mad tortoise." It is the photographer's regular arrests and Madame Koto's increasing wealth and power that mark the passage of time.1&3

"We knew no boundaries:" The *Abiku* Children

Ben Okri's use of an *abiku* child as a narrator serves several purposes. First, it links the narrative strongly to Yoruba myths, thereby cementing the setting of the novel in a very specific social and cultural context. Second, the *abiku* residing in the human world underscores that they are not merely imaginary mythical beings, but actually live in the real, physical world. Third, it allows the narrative to meander across worlds, to view on the same plane both spirits and humans. Such an interaction creates a magical space in which the human and the non-human intermingle. The *abiku* children themselves are essentially magical: "[we] could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries."

The *abiku* are not only trapped in the cycle of death and rebirth, but often also torn between their love for their human families, and their dislike of being born into the world of the Living because of the "rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying ..." They fear "the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see" (3). As if Okri is setting up a counterpoint

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1&3 Other minor incidents also mark subtle changes in Azaro's everyday existence. An old man in the ghetto is blinded by a yellow angel, and he becomes the harbinger of evil and insanity. Azaro befriends a boy named Ade, who is also an *abiku*. Ade has chosen to make his exit from the human world soon. With each sojourn into the forest, Azaro witnesses the chaotic world of the spirits and ghosts as well as the increasing denudation of the forest to make roads through it.

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to the dreariness of the real world, the spirit world is full of fauns, fairies, and beautiful beings. The spirit children are compelled to be born as humans, but make pacts to return as soon as possible to the spirit world. However, while *abiku* can will their deaths, they cannot will their rebirths. They exist in a strange reality as humans.

Those of us who lingered in the world, seduced by the annunciation of wonderful events, went through life with beautiful and fated eyes, carrying within us the music of a lovely and tragic mythology. Our mouths utter obscure prophecies. Our minds are invaded by images of the future. We are the strange ones, with *half of our beings always in the spirit world*. (4, emphasis added)

This means that it humans and spirits are not so different from each other: both despair over existence and share the same angst.

Azaro is fleshed out as an *abiku* and a human child. Being an *abiku*, he has magical premonitions, but he is also an ordinary child with ordinary fears and moments of wonderment, embarrassment, and stirrings of desire. Once when the rain floods the floor of the house, Azaro wakes up embarrassed, thinking he has wet his mat (311). Another time, he walks to the backyard late at night and is afraid: “I thought the clothes on lines were men in black glasses” (191). As an *abiku*, though, he simultaneously also exists in distorted time and space. He has visions: he sees Dad being swallowed up by the all-consuming road and Mum hanging from the branches of a blue tree. He confesses: “I had no idea whether these images belonged to this life, or to a previous one, or to one that was yet to come, or even if they were merely the host of images that invades the minds of all children.” His experience is a cumulative
effect of many worlds, many births, and many deaths: "I had a clear memory of my life stretching to other lives. There were no distinctions. Sometimes I seemed to be living several lives at once. One lifetime flowed into the others and all of them flowed into my childhood" (7).

The road and Azaro have a deep connection. The labyrinthine, tortuous roads traverse the human and the spirit worlds, as well as the worlds of dreams, visions, and prophecies. For instance, Madame Koto says that she had seen Azaro in her dreams, and asks (in waking life) what he was doing there (350). Another time, she appears in a dream of his, begging him to give her some of his youth because she is two hundred years old and will die soon unless infused with some young blood (496). One night, he finds himself in Dad's dream, "travelling to the beginnings: I went with him to the village, I saw his father, I saw Dad's dreams running away from him" (441). After a particularly brutal boxing match, Dad's spirit has gone wandering in the "Land of the Fighting Spirits." Azaro then finds himself in the dreams of his mother, who asks him to go back because she is out in her dreams to bring Dad's spirit back to the human world (479).

Azaro's willingness to stay amid squalor, poverty, hunger, and discomfort has a deeper connotation for Okri's nationalist project too. History itself is like the spirit child, as is the formation of the nation of Nigeria. Ade (another abiku) calls Nigeria an abiku country, and like the spirit-child, "it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong" (478). By comparing the nation to an abiku child, Okri implies that both will refuse to stay unless propitiatory sacrifices are made
to keep them, and the caretakers of both promise to bear the burden of their unique existence.

The spirit-child is an unwilling adventurer into chaos and sunlight, into the dreams of the living and the dead. Things that are not ready, not willing to be born or to become, things for which adequate preparations have not been made to sustain their momentous births, things that are not resolved, things bound up with failure and with fear of being, they all keep recurring, keep coming back, and in themselves partake of the spirit-child's condition. They keep coming and going till their time is right. History itself fully demonstrates how things of the world partake of the condition of the spirit-child. (487)

A "stream of primeval mud, a river:" The Road

A road is usually a symbol for progress, discovery, and development. In The Famished Road, the physical road circumscribes the world of the ghetto, and the forest. It is also the path of Azaro’s travels in and out of dreams, and between the worlds of the living and the dead. It is a sign of progress as well: the road “begins in the realm of the past and of tradition, but it is a road that embraces change and embodies not warnings but their opposite—injunctions to explore and to grow” (Cooper 79). However, most strikingly, the road is a metaphor of age-old, indigenous greed already recognized in folklore.

The opening lines of the novel outline the Yoruba myth of beginnings: in the beginning "there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to
the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry” (3).

Dad narrates this ancient legend to Azaro:

Once upon a time, . . . there was a giant whom they called the King of the Road. . . . He used to be one of the terrible monsters of the Forest and there were many like him, competing for strange things to eat. When the Forest started to get smaller because of Man, when the giant couldn’t find enough animals to eat, he changed from the forest to the roads that men travel. . . . The King of the Road had a huge stomach and nothing he ate satisfied him. So he was always hungry. Anyone who wanted to travel on the road had to leave him a sacrifice or he would not allow them to pass. Sometimes he would even eat them up. He had the power to be in a hundred places at the same time. . . . For a long time people gave him sacrifices and he allowed them to travel on the road. . . . And because of him, and partly because of other things, a famine started in the world. . . . And because they [the people] were dying of hunger they stopped giving sacrifices to the King of the Road.

(258-9)

The King’s hunger compelled the people of the world who got together and sent a delegation to reason with the King of the Road, and to ask him to leave them alone. The delegation carried with it several carts filled with food to mollify the King. After many days of searching, when he could not be found, the delegation assumed the King had died. They began to celebrate and ate up much of the food, but on their way back they encountered the lean and weak King. He ate up the remaining food and
the delegation. A second delegation met with the same fate. With the third delegation, the people cunningly sent poisoned food, and the King of the Road, as expected, devoured all of it. But his hunger was so great that he ate up all the people of the delegation too. Only one man could escape his massive hunger. That sole survivor was Dad's great-great-great grandfather who knew the secret of making himself invisible. Due to the poisoned food, the King of the Road became so ravenous that he ate up not only the trees and bushes and rocks, but also himself, until only his stomach remained. After that it rained for seven days, at the end of which the stomach disappeared into the ground but could be heard growling there. The King of the Road became part of all the roads in this world. The King "is still hungry, and he will always be hungry" (261).

This story explains the significance of the title of the novel. The road has great significance for the poor people of the country. It is "the soul of their history" (329), a history that is always famished. It constantly demands sacrifice, and it has a voracious appetite for violence. The road, in other words, is an ancient manifestation of insatiable greed. It mirrors corrupt and greedy politicians, whose hunger leaves the poor in the novel perennially voiceless and powerless. However, Azaro claims that it is from this perennially hungry road that a new road needs to be created, one that is the "road of our refusal to be" (487). Additionally, the King of the Road could also be thought of an archetype of the unconscious, manifested in the form of a god. Such gods are "like an underground river flowing beneath the surface of visible events"
(Oliva 187). That is, history is partly made of events in the physical world and partly the underlying symbols of the unconscious.164

This explains why, in Azaro’s experience, the road is alive and malicious. It can lead him to his destination, or go nowhere but in delirious circles. For instance, once when Azaro is fleeing from the two albinos who have kidnapped him (Okri 110-2), the road does not lead him home but turns into an endless network:

One road led to a thousand others, which in turn fed into paths, which fed into dirt tracks, which became streets, which ended in avenues and cul-de-sacs. All around, a new world was being erected amidst the old...

... And then, as I walked about in the darkness of being lost, I saw a disembodied light ahead of me, ... I followed the light. And it led me on longer journeys. ... The roads seemed to me then to have a cruel and infinite imagination. All the roads multiplied, reproducing themselves, subdividing themselves, turning in on themselves, like snakes, tails in their mouths, twisting themselves into labyrinths. The road was the worst hallucination of them all, leading towards home and then away from it, without end, with too many signs, and no directions. The road became my torment, my aimless pilgrimage, and I found myself merely walking to discover where all the roads lead to, where they end. (113-15)

164 Oliva analysis of Ben Okri’s fiction is through the paradigm of Jungian psychoanalysis. He suggests parallels between Jungian archetypes and Okri’s characters’ psychological experiences, and between Jung’s idea of a shaman and the characters. He also suggests that the analysis of history as “psychohistory” is closely linked to Jung’s idea of “synchronously” linked events. In Jungian terminology, synchronicity replaces causal connections.
The road of the ghetto is also an enabler of misfortunes. Once, the driver hired
to drive Madame Koto's car rams the car into a pole. He is severely injured and his
blood mixes with the rainwater and flows right into the mouth of the road. This,
Azaro says, was the beginning of real troubles for his family. The mixing of blood and
rainwater has stirred the hunger of the road: "[t]he road was young but its hunger
was old" (424).

The road in the novel, therefore, is many contradictory things at once—it
symbolizes the danger of curiosity and the joy of adventure; it kills and rescues; it is a
sign of modern progress but is also a part of indigenous myth; it enables events in the
real world but also crosses into the spirit world. The same road that ushers in
technology, politics, and wealth, also continuously returns to "what it used to be, a
stream of primeval mud, a river" (Okri 286). The road may go around in circles, but
its own fate is also a constant cycle of hunger and sacrifice. In the novel, beginnings
and culminations, reality and dreams, the new and the old, are collapsed repeatedly
via the road.

"Transformed appearances:“ Madame Koto's Bar

Cooper suggests that magical realism flourishes in zones of transition, change,
ambiguity, and shifting borders. Such zones are also created when a pre-capitalist,
postcolonial world comes face to face with capitalist development and nascent
technology (Cooper 15). For instance, a family becomes split between members who
have had Western education, and those that have been locally educated; or between
traditional belief system of the indigenous peasant class and the newly emerging
belief systems in urban centers. The magical realism of cosmopolitan writers derives potency in such transitions, especially when capitalist development clashes with pre-capitalist modes of postcolonial societies, when creolized communities are created, and when the "impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new" (Rushdie qtd. in Cooper 16).

Madame Koto's bar in the novel is the site of such a clash. It stands at the junction of the road—a sign of human habitation, and the forest—the residence of animals and spirits. The bar is frequented by spirits and ghosts from the forest, the poor people of the ghetto, and by corrupt politicians and rich people who come from the city. The bar is a site of magical reality, and it can be simultaneously "completely empty, and completely noisy" (Okri 111). Within the space of the bar, Azaro sees all the spirits fused in a grotesque parody of the human form. The spirits usually possess the limbs of animals or a pair of wings or a beak. He recognizes them "beneath their transformed appearances" (133). In the same way, humans are also transformed in the bar. The people of the ghetto become drunk and noisy and forget their troubles; the politicians appear to be benevolent when they are not actually so.

Like her bar, Madame Koto is also a fusion of many stories, rumors, and strange activities. Azaro first encounters her when his father takes him there to drink palm-wine. A brawl takes place, and a full-grown drunk is single-handedly beaten up by the formidably sized proprietress. This public spectacle permanently alters the collective imagination of her in the ghetto:

Some went into the bar, to drink of her myth. Others went back to their different areas, taking with them the embellished stories of the most
sensational drama they had witnessed for a long time. . . . That evening was the beginning of her fame. Everyone talked about her in low voices. Her legend, which would sprout a thousand hallucinations, had been born in our midst—born of stories and rumors which, in time, would become some of the most extravagant realities of our lives. (37)

Madame Koto is physically large, like the Dog-Woman in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry*, and literally swells as she grows richer. She is also a shaman who communes with spirits and carries out voodoo rituals and sacrifices. When Azaro sees the bar bustling with spirits, he soon guesses why they are so curious about her. He sees her digging the earth in her backyard and planting strange items like cowrie shells, stones, beads, and eggs in pits, hears strange chanting, and sees her performing magic rituals in her rooms behind the bar. Her image as a witch and a practitioner of evil magic begins to get consolidated slowly from the rumors generated, and by the end of the novel, her character assumes monstrous proportions in the people's imagination. Stories that she has buried three husbands and seven children, that she is a witch who ate her babies while they were still in her womb, that she casts evil spells that cause illnesses and miscarriages, that she bewitches husbands and seduces young boys, that she poisons children, and that she belongs to a secret sect that flew to the moon, abound and add to her myth (100-01). For Azaro, she is not evil because she practices magic, but because she allies with corrupt politicians.

On the other hand, Madame Koto is also known to have performed countless acts of generosity, including giving money to Azaro's mother on more than one
occasion (372). When malaria almost kills Mum and Azaro sees her blue spirit hovering near the roof, it is Madame Koto who helps him bring her back to life. That Madame Koto has supernatural powers is demonstrated over and over again. Once, Azaro sees her command a bubbling pot of soup to be quiet. Immediately, the soup “became calm, as if it had never been boiling” (102). When Azaro does the same, “the soup gathered into a tremendous wave of foam and rushed over the sides” (103). This is an interesting reversal: she is human with magical powers, while he is half-spirit but with no such powers.

Madame Koto’s contradictory nature is also instrumental in allowing magic and science to co-exist. While she is believed to be a shaman or witch, she also brings technology to the ghetto. The bar is where new scientific inventions make their appearances, which keep the ghetto dwellers in a state of awe. During a raucous party, Azaro discovers that the source of music is a gramophone. Having never encountered one before, he thinks it is “a perfect instrument for the celebration of the dead, for the dances of light spirits and fine witches” (272). After the gramophone, the day of the great political rally is marked by strings of light bulbs around the bar.

While the people of the area are familiar with cables, pylons, and wires, the bright bulbs that are not extinguished by the breeze take their breath away. However, they are still puzzled for they cannot see the famed electricity itself (373). It is during this party that a Christian priest stands outside the bar, carrying out a bitter attack not only on the sinful bar, its evil owner and its lascivious patrons, but also against electricity. He delivers in the pouring rain “a tremendous philippic on the apocalypse of science” while the ghetto dwellers revel in their amazement (376). Such opposed attitudes to science show it is not wholeheartedly accepted or rejected by a community.
The West African Magical Realism

Cooper points out that many African writers are uncomfortable with the label "magical realism" because it suggests an imitation of Latin American writing, and an automatic denigration of local knowledge, indigenous belief systems, and native narratives. Cooper argues that this wariness arises because writers tend to overlook the importance given to the contextually ex-centric, and instead believe magical realism to be a collection of literary motifs. However, as I have already established, the basis of magical realism is a political or cultural concern that is specific to a context, and the interpretations and layers of reality underlying this concern are enhanced by the writer's subjective interpretation. Sometimes, as in Okri's case, indigenous narratives, folklore, and different storytelling styles aid in creating and sustaining the magical.

We have already seen how magic creates connections between ontologically distinct worlds. This interconnectedness is the basis of both magical consciousness and magical realism. In the West African literary context, unhindered interaction between humans and animals, the animate and the inanimate, and the dead and the living, also occurs commonly in local folktales and songs. The hybrid overcrowding of spirits and humans in West African magical realist novels is inspired from the Yoruba belief that the orun (otherwordly) coexists with the aye (people, animals, and plants) (Cooper 41). This hybridism is also called "animism," and writers often "incorporate spirits, ancestors and talking animals, in stories . . . in order to express their passions, their aesthetics and their politics" (40). Animism creates "a type of realism . . . or at least verisimilitude," but this realism—a feature of European literature—is shaped by
a non-Western mythology, resulting in "a surging and constantly transmogrifying reality" (Hawley 36). For instance, Azaro sees a wizard approaching him, and turns to run. He then hears a bark. He turns around and sees that the wizard has gone and there is a dog standing in his place (Okri 415). Someone throws a stone at the dog’s mouth and it disappears. Moments later, the wizard reappears with one of his eyes swollen (416).

Several features of magical realism and postmodernism, such as creating and sustaining paradoxes, reconstructing history, and enabling porous boundaries between disparate worlds of the living, the dead, nature, animals, and humans have been exemplified. Here, however, I would like to present one instance of the special type of “African” magical realism that blends animism, local folklore, mythic wisdom, distorted time and space, science, life cycles into one “irreducible” magical world.

Mum tells Azaro and Ade how, on one particularly hot day, she came across a tortoise at a crossroad. The tortoise said something to her. Another day, a white man wearing blue sunglasses came to her. He offered to give her his sunglasses if she would tell him how to get out of Africa. Mum told him, “[t]here are many roads into Africa but only one road leads out” (482). She asked the man to tell her his story. The man narrated that he had been in Africa for ten years, seven of which were spent comfortably. But in the last three years, since political trouble began brewing, he had been trying to leave Africa but simply could not. After a while, a bus with a motto written on it passed by. The motto read: "All things are linked." This is exactly what the tortoise had also told Mum, and she repeated the words to the man. The man then said: “[t]he only way to get out of Africa is to get Africa out of you” and left (483).
A few days later, a strange Yoruba man came to Mum’s stall to buy all her fish. When his hands touched the fish, the fish came alive. The Yoruba man told Mum that he was the same white man who had given her the sunglasses. He elaborated: “I met you five hundred years ago,” after which “I discovered the road” that led out of Africa. He explained that after meeting Mum, he went home and in a fit of madness killed his African servant. He was arrested and thrown in jail but let out since he was a white man. He began to wander around naked, and people were shocked to see “a mad white man in Africa.” One day, just as suddenly, his head cleared and he realized that five hundred years had passed. He changed his way of thinking and living. Soon, he arrived in England, married, had children, and retired from government service. Then at seventy he had a heart attack and died. He was buried in a local cemetery. Once again, “Time passed. I was born. I became a businessman. And I came to the market today to buy some eels and I saw you.” Mum, scared and confused, said to him, “[b]ut I only met you two weeks ago.” The man replied, “[t]ime is not what you think it is” (483-4).

The crossroads where Mum meets the tortoise is a symbol for choices, and the tortoise is a totemic wise voice from the indigenous oral tradition. This wise voice preempts a problem and offers a cryptic clue. The blue sunglasses which protect Mum’s eyes from the heat and dust are symbolic of the advantages of science. The sunglasses are also an inversion of the traditional mask that Azaro had found in the forest. The mask opened up a blinding vision of a world of grotesque beings, while the sunglasses dim the brightness outside.
The motto, “all things are linked” epigrammatically states that there is no absolute distinction between animal and human, the living and the dead, the past and the future, the animate and the inanimate, and that there is no closure possible. This is postulated by Yoruba myths as well as by the magical imagination. The Yoruba man touches the fish and makes them come back to life. This act implies that life and death are not watertight compartments. Besides, the white man and the black man are the same person in different forms.

In the first part of the story, Mum has wisdom to impart to the white man. In the second half of the story, she has to learn to see, to fathom the riddle of changed skin color, and the distorted aspect of linear time. The man’s deaths and rebirths are also a reversal of the abiku cycle insofar that while the abiku live through an endless cycle of worldly heaviness and spiritual lightness, here death and rebirth result in a better life and more wisdom. Finally, Mum’s claim that the story is absolutely true is symptomatic of belief in magic that characters in magical realist worlds display.

*The Famished Road* is replete with instances of animism or “intermingled” magical reality, in which what are assumed to be two different realities are present in the same time and place, and where actions in one realm create ripples in another. Azaro sees a marketplace filled with ordinary sights and all sorts of people and animals, but also unearthly beings so numerous “that they interpenetrated one another” (12). He realizes that “one world contains glimpses of others” (10).

I saw people of all shapes and sizes, mountainous women with faces of iroko, midgets with faces of stone, reedy women with twins strapped to

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1. There is a close to Derrida’s idea that the text is endless, and the context is boundless (Culler 123).
their backs, thick-set men with bulging shoulder muscles. . . . I shut my eyes and when I opened them again I saw people who walked backwards, a dwarf who got about on two fingers, men upside-down with baskets of fish on their feet, women who had breasts on their backs, babies strapped on their chests, and beautiful children with three arms. . . . One of the men had red wings on his feet and a girl had fish-gills round her neck. (15-16)

Such reality that Azaro experiences, pulsates with what Zamora calls "proliferations and conflations of worlds," and with "appearances and disappearances and multiplications of selves" (501). Such a vision is also greatly carnivalesque, filled with grotesque and unstable images, riotous colors, altered and multiple identities—another motif of magical realism (Faris 184; Cooper 26). Yet, here, the carnivalesque also suffocates with its excesses.

One might question the soundness of such a vision, since it is visible only to one person in the novel. Is it merely a hallucination in the mad world of a spirit child? While this scene may be visible only to Azaro, there are numerous instances where local knowledge is informed by magic, magicians, and ghosts. During a party, one woman speaks of a wizard who had hidden a child in a green bottle. Another woman speaks of how her sister was found floating on a stream with her head crowned with sacrificial beads. The first story is accepted by all but Mum immediately challenges the second woman, insisting that her story is unbelievable because she never said that she had a sister (Okri 43). Incidents like coffins floating into politicians' houses, wells found filled with fish, eagles carrying red flowers in their mouths, and a woman
giving birth to a giant egg are events that make Azaro feel that he is being "lightning-struck by life" in the human world (345).

Dad's first boxing match is another instance of magical reality. The match takes place in the dead of night, with only Azaro as audience. Dad's extraordinarily strong opponent takes a long time to fall down. When he finally keels over, and hits the earth with "an unnatural thud," the strangest thing happens: the man disappears into the earth (357). All that is left is a deep imprint of a full-grown man. This man's name is Yellow Jaguar, a famous boxer who had died three years ago (358). Having defeated a spirit, Dad has "magically appropriated animal energies to himself," and become an animal-like creature. He begins to call himself Black Tyger. However, this is not merely his nickname; rather, "he is Black Tyger" (Oliva 180).

The novel also displays the unbreakable connection between the real world and the spirit world. For instance, Azaro recounts how "Dad coughed [in the human world], and I tripped over a green bump on the road [in the spirit world]" (Okri 327). A three-headed spirit who comes to the bar to lure Azaro back to his spirit companions is invisible to humans but causes a bad smell and the occupants sneeze uncontrollably (297). That there are layers under visible reality is a point repeated throughout the novel. Most importantly, the novel presents the notion that not only is everything interconnected, but that these interconnections cannot be explained in rational terms.

The world that we see and the world that is there are two different things. . . . We need a new language to talk to one another. Inside a cat there are many histories, many books. When you look into the eyes of
dogs strange fish swim in your mind. . . . There are human beings who
are small but if you can SEE you will notice that their spirits are ten
thousand feet wide. . . . Angels and demons are amongst us; they take
many forms. (498)

Such passages articulate the literary motifs, not only of West African magical realism,
but of magical realism everywhere. The notion that all things in the world are
interconnected, that reality is much more complex than what appears to us, that
normal and abnormal are not given, but constructed categories, and that opposites
poles of a duality are finally collapsible and create a new hybrid—these are elements
of magical realism in general.
Concluding Remarks

The title of this dissertation comprises three distinct elements: magic, postmodernism, and the imagination. In the course of this work, I have explored the postmodernist imagination through selected texts and contexts. I examined magic using two different perspectives. In the first chapter, I outlined the structures of consciousness, as delineated by Gebser. Among the five clearly distinguishable structures, the second is the magical structure. The features of the magical worldview provide us with a sense of how the world appeared when this structure was dominant. It also explains our worldview when this structure becomes temporarily dominant in the present. The magical structure is succeeded by the mythical structure. While Gebser does not encourage a purely historical approach to the classification of the structures of consciousness, viewing these structures diachronically makes his model more viable for the study of the "evolution" as well as of the distinctive features of each structure of consciousness.

Each structure has a ruling quality: the magical worldview projects the individual and the world in a relationship of fluid intermixing; the mythical worldview divides the world into polar oppositions; the mental-egoic worldview—which is currently dominant—is governed by dualities (binaries) and rationality.

Adhering to the principle that there is only one dominant structure of consciousness at any given time, I arrived at a definition of the imagination. At the peak of the mental-egoic structure, the artist, aware of the shortcomings of rationality in adequately explaining reality, turns towards latent structures of consciousness.
This is what I mean by the imagination. Most importantly, the imaginative artist does not merely reverse his or her consciousness, shun the dominant worldview, and surrender to a latent structure. Rather, being highly aware of the dominant structure, he or she brings, through art (and specifically through fiction), an alternative, latent worldview that coexists with the dominant structure.

In the second chapter, I developed the categories of magic and myth. Myth is a foil to magic, and provides the necessary context through which magic can be viewed as a discrete category. In that chapter, I shifted focus from the structures of consciousness to the social and cultural constructions of magic and myth. I examined magic not as a mode of consciousness but as a category created through the etic perspective of academic disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. The focus was on communities that have a magical worldview, but a magical worldview which is nevertheless analyzable only from a mental-rational standpoint. Such a perspective adds impressions, evaluations, and interpretations to the definition of magic. Similarly, I limned the various interpretations of—and the value systems attached to—myths.

My contention was that modernism tends towards a mythical imagination, and postmodernism towards a magical imagination. The mythical-modernist nexus provides a literary context for the magical-postmodernist imagination. In the third chapter, I explored modernism (the literary movement), and its relationship to history, tradition, and to myths. I discussed the modernist method of "mythification," in which ancient myths are used in conjunction with modern concerns. My argument was that it is not merely direct allusions to ancient myths, but also the creation of
new mythologies, and the adoption of certain mythic features—the notion of apocalypse, cyclical time, and mythical archetypes—that makes the modernist imagination mythical. In projecting their age to be one of civilizational crises, the modernists turned towards myth in order to discover permanent, ahistorical anchors, and to impose order over the chaotic nature of their reality. Modernist writers also used myths to provide formal unity to their writing.

From the context of mythical modernism, I moved to the pivot of this dissertation: postmodernism and its magical imagination. One of the defining features of postmodernism is its skepticism towards metalanguages, metanarratives, and grand truths. This skepticism marks a shift away from myth, because myths are accepted as truths par excellence, inviolable answers to existential questions, and ideological meta-structures that govern the social, political, and cultural mores of a community. Moreover, myths infuse reality with sacred meaning and cosmic significance. I argue that the move away from myth takes postmodernism closer to magic. The defining feature of the magical worldview is the fluid intermingling of categories that appear ontologically distinct to the rational mind. Besides, magical interconnections cannot be explained through rational parameters like cause and effect. Magic also does not take into consideration binaries. It is because of such characteristics that postmodernism can be called magical in its imagination.

Postmodernism differs from modernism in many other ways as well. Postmodernism is interested in casting history and reality as constructs in language. There is no category that is absolute, closed, and final. Rather, every category exists in an infinite context, and is constantly being altered by the flux of factors that are
connected to this infinite context. In the modernist view, the exemplary individual (often, the artist) was expected to rise above the masses; in the postmodernist world, the identity of the individual is only a space where various discourses intersect. A modernist work of writing, such as *The Waste Land*, is filled with fragments and encyclopedic *bric-a-brac*, but it is nevertheless bound and finished, and has an inherent unity that makes it an independent work of art. On the other hand, postmodernism argues that there is no such finality of meaning, interpretation, or subjectivity that is possible. Hence, what is created and understood is a "text," a web of infinite connections in language. Through such metaphors that convey fluidity, dissolving or non-existent boundaries, and spaces of flux, I further my argument that postmodernism is magical. Moreover, deconstruction, an important element of postmodernist thought, is thoroughly dismissive of the naturalized hierarchies in binary pairs that pervade our sense of reality. This is another reason for postmodernism to be thought of as magical.

Just as modernism employs the process of mythification in its fiction, postmodernism expresses its magical fluidity through the literary mode of magical realism. Magical realism is magical not merely in the mundane sense of "supernatural," but because magic in this literary mode functions like magic in primitive society. It is communal, disruptive (with respect to a rational set-up), and does not follow the rules of logic. Furthermore, in employing magic, magical realism transforms the very nature of realism. Realism, of course, is a product of metonymic language and a reflection of the way we conventionally view the relationship between reality and fiction. Magic, on the other hand, creates permeable boundaries between
disparate sections of reality within the fictional world. In the second half of the fourth chapter, I traced the journey of magical realism from Europe to Latin America, and from Latin America to the rest of the world. My interest, however, lay in exploring not only the meaning of magic and its significance for the literary mode of magical realism, but also in how magical realism overlaps with certain features of postmodernist fiction.

The third chapter of the dissertation provided the context to magical postmodernist imagination. The fourth chapter delineated how postmodernism finds itself reflecting a magical imagination. With the overlap of magical realism and postmodernism, the connection between postmodernism and magic becomes stronger. The fifth chapter explored certain texts that display magical postmodernist imagination. Rather than analyzing the most well-known Latin American novels, I chose three novels that prove that magical realism is an international literary mode. More importantly, these three novels also display certain salient features of postmodernist fiction. One of the novels I discussed was Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. I used this novel, set in Nigeria, to explore the connection between magical realism and the new wave of cosmopolitan postcolonial writers.

Magical realism has been closely affiliated to anti-European, anti-colonial literatures ever since its association with Latin American fiction. However, it is equally true that many postcolonial cultures, at one point or another, felt uncomfortable applying the label of magical realism to their own literatures. The fear was that such a label would make their literatures appear to be an imitation of Latin American fiction and not an expression of their indigenous cultural underpinnings.
believe that it is more profitable to think of magical realism as the fiction of the marginalized, and of the ex-centric, than of any specific kind of postcolonial subject. In its international avatar, magical realism is used by writers from postcolonial backgrounds as well as from the postmodern West. This also means that magical realism is not merely a set of stock literary motifs. Rather, it creates space for a writer’s subjective concerns to be amplified, and for contextually relevant historical and cultural issues to be explored via magic and realism. In the process, magic and realism create a new kind of realism in fiction. This new realism promotes such postmodernist themes as the constructed nature of history, and the suppression of alternative interpretations by powerful discourses. In effect, magical realism also puts pressure on the reader to reassess accepted modalities of reality, truth, and meaning-making.

In the move from modernism’s epistemological and mythical concerns to postmodernism’s ontological and magical concerns, we can sense a shift in our perception of boundaries and margins. The magical worldview preceded the mythical worldview, and it was only with the mythical worldview that ontological boundaries and hierarchies began to become solidified. Therefore, the magical imagination not only dismantles hierarchies, but more importantly, highlights boundaries and exposes their constructed nature. Its endgame is the dissolution of these boundaries. We see this dissolution in the way subjectivity, meaning, and language are deployed. We also see this dissolution in the blend of the fantastical with the real, and in the mix of genres like history and fantasy. All these factors add to the creation of a new reality.
I end this dissertation by suggesting that the next step in fiction carries forward the dissolution of boundaries even further. A case in point is the "novel-memoir" writing of W. G. Sebald. Sebald's literary writing cuts across the traditional generic boundaries that cast history and literature as separate categories (Kochhar-Lindgren 369). Through his writing, there emerges the hybrid of the novel-memoir, which blends the expectations we have from literary fiction with the putatively accurate recollections we expect from a memoir. Sebald further emphasizes this blend by using documentary-style jargon, photographs, newspaper clippings, and handwritten lists, which we, as readers, assume are the authentic signifiers of reality. On the other hand, we are also aware of the fictional idiom that connects and contextualizes these representations. In this way, Sebald achieves "a vertiginous mixing of genres that are always in motion" (370). He also creates seamless transitions between cultures and historical periods, as seen in The Rings of Saturn (1995). Similarly, in Vertigo (1990) and Austerlitz (2001), we find a seamless transition between different narrative voices. Through such transitions, time past and time present become indistinguishable from each other, and history becomes a vast and fascinating web of interconnections.

Through the example of Sebald's fiction, I have tried to project the nascent move of literature towards further obliterating boundaries, and through this obliteration, further exposing the limitations of rationality and realism in expressing reality. It was similar limitations that prompted the modernists and postmodernists to seek the mythical and magical imaginations to create fuller representations of reality respectively.