Introduction

The paradigm shift from modernist fiction to postmodernist fiction has been interpreted along several axes. Brian McHale borrows from Roman Jakobson the notion of the "dominant" to define this shift. Modernist poetics accents epistemological concerns, while postmodernist poetics foregrounds ontological questions. A survey of the modernist and postmodernist movements yields ample evidence for why a particular set of concerns prevails more assertively in a certain age. In this dissertation, I try to show that the shift from modernism to postmodernism can be traced using a different kind of paradigm: from myth to magic. My hypothesis is that modernist fiction tends towards a mythical imagination, and postmodernist fiction towards a magical imagination.¹

In order to examine this hypothesis, I trace the beginnings of myth and magic in Jean Gebser's model of the structures of human consciousness. According to Gebser, there are four distinct structures of consciousness that can be traced through human history, and these structures became manifest in art and in socio-cultural constructs.² Of these, the magical was the second structure to "unfold," and myth the

¹ In stating my argument, I am not refuting McHale's claim that epistemology and ontology are the dominant in modernist and postmodernist poetics respectively. My assertion that modernists tend towards mythical imagination and postmodernists towards magical imagination is, in fact, in consonance with the claim that epistemology and ontology are the overriding paradigms of thought for these two literary movements.
² Gebser's model includes a "spiritual" thread as well, and his cross-disciplinary theory includes religion, theology and spirituality. He simultaneously mentions the ego and the soul, I am, however, limiting my use of his model. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use Gebser's definition of human consciousness in its phenomenological context, the main structures of consciousness, and the structures' social, historical, and cultural relevance. In addition to Gebser, I also employ the insights of Ken Wilber. However, Wilber's project expands in directions that are not directly relevant to this
third, Gebser argues that each structure projects upon the world a specific kind of perspective. That is, the interpretation of the world—the worldview—is predicated upon the structure that is dominant at that time.

This movement through the structures of consciousness is essentially the journey of the creation of the ego, or individuality. Gebser's first structure is termed the "archaic" structure, when human consciousness was dim. There was no distinction between the self and the other, and between the internal and the external world. From this completely embedded and undifferentiated condition, consciousness began to gradually crystallize in stages towards a separate selfhood. Historical and archaeological records show that consciousness in the "magical" structure entailed a faint separation of the self from the other, but the self was essentially in a state of fluid intermingling and interfusion with nature. Internal and external worlds were still not differentiated. With the subsequent "mythical" structure, consciousness enters the phase of hierarchies, where distinctions between the self and the other begin to become obvious. Gods were created as projections of the ego's fears, and placed above humans, and humans were placed above animals, and so on. These distinctions became starker, and the ego finally emerged with the fourth "mental-egoic" structure. This structure is marked by the predominance of rationality, the development of dualities (from polarities), clearer distinctions of the past, present, and future, and a perspectival vision of space. A fifth structure that Gebser predicts—and which he suggests is only visible in certain individual imaginations as of now—is the "integral" structure. In this structure, all the previous
structures of consciousness will be rendered transparent, and the ego will transcend its separation from nature.

Gebser's model, above and beyond its historical plotting, displays some characteristics that are crucial to my argument. One, that this movement of consciousness is common across all cultures and regions. Two, Gebser argues that the structures of consciousness are all present together at all times, even if only one is dominant. This active or dominant structure directs our perception of space and time, and creates conditions for language, symbols, and social organizations to develop. Under certain conditions, a latent or dormant structure of consciousness can be brought to the fore. For instance, human society, on the whole, is experiencing the mental-egoic structure in the present. However, in our dreams, we experience the magical structure. That is, our dreams project the reality that magical humans experienced in their waking life. These latent structures, and their corresponding worldviews, can also be deliberately sought out and imaginatively reconstructed.

My argument rests on this availability of latent structures, but I suggest that this is not a Romantic exercise in nostalgia. Rather, I use the term imagination instead of a "structure of consciousness" when applying the idea of magical and mythical consciousness to postmodernist and modernist fiction respectively. What I mean by the imagination is this: modernists and postmodernists are highly aware of the mental-egoic structure that predominantly directs their worldview. They are also extremely aware of the main feature of this structure—rationality. With this

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3 This argument does not assume that myth and magic have not featured elsewhere in fiction. They have, but the aims and effects achieved by modernism and postmodernism are distinct from these other uses of myth and magic in fiction. Mythical and magical imaginations imply more than merely using the tropes associated with each. Rather, it is a matter of reconfiguring realism and reality.

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awareness comes the realization that rationality restricts their perspective of reality. So, in order to expose and subvert the dominance of rationality and conceptual binaries, they need to find alternative ways to imaginatively reconfigure their (and their readers') worldview. This exercise in the imagination requires the artists to be highly conscious of their present situation. In other words, these writers and thinkers are not escaping their present by slipping into a different structure of consciousness. Rather, I propose that their imagination finds maximal potency in subverting the dominant structure by using a latent structure of consciousness. It is this unique combination and reconfiguration of two structures that sets the imagination apart from an uncritical submersion in rationality or in dreams. Why the modernists choose the mythical worldview and the postmodernists the magical worldview, is explored in detail in the dissertation. My focus is primarily on postmodernism and its magical imagination, and I use modernism as a foil to explore the paradigm shift.

The basis of my argument lies in a phenomenological approach. Consciousness projects a certain reality onto the world and onto the self. Fiction writers, influenced by their moment in history, project a worldview through their work. The writer and the complicit reader are willing to allow fiction to project a different way of reality itself. However, while these structures of consciousness are deemed to be transcultural in scope and operation, I am restricting my use of modernism and postmodernism to the West, where the two originated and flourished as literary movements. In order to explore my argument, I employ the following order.

The first chapter delineates the four structures of consciousness, and the first sightings of the fifth; the worldviews each structure affords; and historical and
archeological proof of their manifestations. While Gebser's ideas are the mainstay for this exploration, I also take into account Ken Wilber's, Georg Feuerstein's, and Morris Berman's additions to them. I cite, from the sources mentioned here, archeological remnants like cave-paintings, recorded (or reconstructed) events like the formation of hunter-gatherer groups, farming, permanent settlements, the formation of cities, the creation of religion, and the rise of symbolic systems like language and money to substantiate the model Gebser has proposed.

In the second chapter, I focus on the terms "magic" and "myth." The cores of magic and myth reflect magical and mythical worldviews. However, in this chapter, I explore how these categories have been interpreted through the centuries in social, cultural, and political contexts. That is, I examine magic and myth as independent categories that were consolidated through anthropology and social science. Through academic and intellectual expositions, I examine not only how magic and myth are different from rational consciousness, but also how these categories are viewed through the etic lens of rational, scientific discourses. I identify some of the important interpretations of magic and myth, and their significance in social, cultural, and historical contexts. However, it must be kept in mind that there is no essential difference of features between myth and the mythical worldview, and magic and the magical worldview. Myth and magic as categories subsume, and reflect, these worldviews.

Through an exploration of the formulations of James G. Frazer, Marcel Mauss, and others, I arrive at the most persistent characteristics of magic and the magical perspective. I also explore the connection between magic, science, and religion; the
fluctuations in reputation that magic went through; and the role of magic in social contexts. Magic shows clear signs of a lower differentiation between the human agent and nature. It operates in ways that cannot be explained by logic or rationality, and is often regarded as an inferior form of intelligence by those that put their faith in rationality.

For the study of myth, Bronislaw Malinowski and Mircea Eliade are my primary sources. From my study, myth appears to posit final truths and provide answers to persistent existential questions. Myths are believed to be universally occurring. Myth is narrative, while magic is action; myth vertically separates, magic horizontally combines; myth gives rise to universally acknowledged archetypes, magic is often attributed to “illicit” and secret circles. However, since the magical structure precedes the mythical structure, magical elements sometimes get subsumed in mythic narratives, and are exemplified through motifs like metamorphosis. Given the limited scope of this dissertation, I have had to gloss over such schools of thought that employ myth—archetypal criticism and psychoanalysis for instance.

In the third chapter, I outline the modernist literary movement at its acme, and examine its various literary aspects. Through a brief historical sketch, I show that modernist writers required a unifying narrative in their fiction. In order to grapple with both rationality and history, they were compelled to turn to myths, which provided structure to their fragmented and chaotic present. I support my claim through the writings of important figures of the modernist movement such as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce. Through other factors like their engagement with tradition, the idea of newness, and the necessity for order through art, I demonstrate
that the modernist \textit{zeitgeist} did indeed look towards the mythical worldview to battle the civilizational despair that had gripped the Western world.

The fourth chapter shifts to the central theme of my dissertation: postmodernism. Like modernism, postmodernism is also a much discussed and documented subject, and for the purpose of this dissertation, I look at a mix of some prominent theorists and literary critics such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, and Brian McHale to arrive at a composite picture of postmodernist poetics. Through this composite view, I show how the most fundamental features of postmodernism—the destabilization of centers, the rejection of metanarrative, the valorization of pluralism in interpretation, the dominance of ontological concerns, deconstruction, and the belief that reality and identity exist only in language—derive support from the core features of the magical perspective.

The second half of the fourth chapter narrows its focus from postmodernism in general to a specific literary movement: magical realism. Notwithstanding the fact that magical realism can sometimes be an overused literary gimmick, it is also a literary mode with many concerns that overlap postmodernist concerns. I trace the coinage of the term by Franz Roh in Europe, its appropriation for Latin American literature by Alejo Carpentier, its use by Gabriel García Márquez and others, and finally its adaptation by fiction writers all over the world. I propose that magical realism is best thought of as a fictional mode that gives voices to the "ex-centric," rather than as a mode germane to a particular culture. I explore the meaning of magic in magical realism, and the ways in which it reconfigures realism. I also suggest that the magical realist world is created by the writer. Hence, the configuration of this
world depends on the imagination and perspective of a writer vis-à-vis the specific power structures he or she is trying to destabilize. Magical realism and postmodernism both find magical features particularly useful in questioning official versions of history and normative interpretations of reality.  

The fifth chapter extends the overlap between postmodernism and magical realism through textual evidence. I choose three texts that highlight this overlap: Janet Frame's *The Carpathians* (1988), Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). Historically, geographically, and thematically diverse, these three novels are set in New Zealand, England, and Nigeria respectively. Together, the novels confirm the international presence of magical realism. I use Okri's novel to briefly explore the presence of magical realism in the fiction of “cosmopolitan” postcolonial writers.

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*It is not the case that mythical themes are completely omitted in postmodernist texts. Myth is pervasive, but postmodernism uses it not to unify or supply final truths but to create further subversion. Like the idea of Jakobson’s dominant, myth and magic are also not watertight compartments. The presence of one does not automatically imply the absence of the other. Rather, as with consciousness, where structures co-exist at all times but only one is dominant, magical and mythical imagination too can co-exist, but only one of them dominates a literary epoch.*