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Magical Realism and The Fantastic

Arndt Lainck and Enrique Rodrigues-Moura

Magic realism reflects "the hybrid nature of much postcolonial society" (Faris 2004, 1). Thus, although there is a powerful tradition of the fantastic in the North of the Americas – proliferating in the 19th century with works by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and continuing into the 20th century with examples like Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* before moving into 21st century incarnations like Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* – the cultural traditions, literary history, and politics of Latin America make this region's literature much more closely associated with magical realism. Throughout the Americas, though, the fantastic and magical realism have nourished multiple literary spirits voicing anti-establishment attitudes, anti-colonial positioning, and emancipatory outlooks.

This entry intends to determine the nature of the relationship between realism and the fantastic in magical realism, where the marvelous comes into play, and how exactly the lines between such apparently distinct categories as reality and fantasy are crossed or made indistinguishable. By taking a closer look at how the creation of this new combination of dissimilar elements fits into the cultural landscapes in which it originated, reasons can be found for why magical realism has become so successful in the Americas, Latin America and beyond. The scope of the endeavor of defining magical realism might seem daunting, but can ultimately be rewarding; a sentiment echoed in the words of Sharon Sieber, who wrote that two words, magical realism, "can contain, capture and project so much in imagination, theory and definition, [which] is nothing short of amazing" (Sieber 2012, 171). Over time and with its global recognition and spread from the 1980s on, magical realism has proven itself to be a quite nomadic and adaptive concept across the Americas (→ Media Flows, III/35).

Before relating and differentiating magical realism and the fantastic further, this entry first looks at the formation, the changing use, and the discursive history of magical realism. Even though Novalis had already used the term in a different context in the 19th century, the German art critic Franz Roh coined the term Magic Realism in 1925 to describe what he saw as a new direction in painting after Expressionism. He wrote an essay, *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei*, which was translated into Spanish and printed in Ortega and Gasset's *Revista de Occidente* in 1927. About this new realism in painting, Roh wrote in the preface to his book, "[w]ith the word 'magic,' as opposed to

'mystic,' I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it" (Roh 1995, 16). Lacking a precise definition, the term found its way into the literary community with changing success and meanings. Years later, when Roh published his *Geschichte der Deutschen Kunst von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart* in 1958, the art history term *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] had prevailed over the originally proposed Magic Realism label. Even though Roh coined "Magic Realism," it is important to point out that there is no evidence that his thinking behind the phrase had any direct influence on Venezuelan writer Uslar-Pietri or Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who in 1948 and 1949 created their own theoretical versions of magical realism for the realm of literature.

Magic Realism in Latin America and its Links to the North

In 1948, Uslar-Pietri pondered in his book *Letras y hombres de Venezuela* the quality of a short story by observing "[w]hat ... left an indelible mark there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a magical realism" (Leal 1995, 120). But the first real starting point for the popularity of the term can be pinpointed to Carpentier's publishing of the preface to his novel *El reino de este mundo* in 1949, the same year Miguel Ángel Asturias published *Hombres de maíz*, a novel which is heavily influenced by Asturias' knowledge about American Indian legends (→ Indigenous Literatures, III/10; Foundational Discourses, III/8). In the preface of *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier, who like Asturias was very familiar with Latin America and Europe, creates his own theoretical version of magical realism as *lo real maravilloso americano* [the Marvelous Real in America], ascribing to the Latin American reality a quality of being *naturally* endowed with what can only be viewed as fantastic. Setting the concept up as contrasting with the European movement of Surrealism, Carpentier does not wish to describe a literary movement that makes reality artificially magical, but holds that reality, in Latin America, is in itself already "marvelous," even before writing about it. For Carpentier Latin America is a cultural realm where mythologies are still alive; in order to do the region justice, any "realistic" depiction of it must necessarily seem rather wondrous for European eyes and take the fantastic into account as something natural and commonplace. At first, the miraculous quality of reality in Latin America rests for Carpentier on a faith that has not yet been tarnished by the kind of (European/Western) rationalism that would make the alteration of reality by a miracle seem impossible; this faith can will miracles into the fabric of existence, as he explains, "This seemed particularly obvious to me during my stay in Haiti, where I found myself in daily contact with something that could be defined as the marvelous real" (Carpentier 1995, 86-87). Mariano Suskind (2011, 843) writes that "according to Carpentier, the marvellous was a constitutive organic element of reality" in Latin America.

Later on, in 1975 Carpentier shifts his focus toward a synthesis of these cultures, holding that "America, a continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, *mestizaje* [mixture; fusion], has always been baroque," (→ Hybridity, I/30) viewing the baroque as something that "arises where there is transformation, mutation or innovation" and clarifying his concept of the baroque when he writes,

> The baroque always projects forward and tends, in fact, to a phase of expansion at the culminating moment of civilization, or when a new social order is about to be born. It can be a culmination, just as it can be a premonition.
>
> (Carpentier 1995, 98)

His 20th-century conception of the baroque harkens back to a sensation of instability, change, *perpetuum mobile*, and even to the typical secrecy, deception/disillusionment (*engaño/desengaño*) and dissimulation topoi, but Carpentier is not as much interested in the geometry of passions (Bodei 1991) or the cold passions of the baroque once they have passed through the controlling filter of rationality (De la Flor 2005). The characteristic mixture of indigenous and European cultures in Latin America is for Carpentier a natural breeding ground for the baroque that brings with it a heightened self-awareness for the expansion of hybrid forms in the arts. He explains,

> The American baroque develops along with *criollo* culture, ... with the self-awareness of the American man, be he the son of a white European, the son of a black African or an Indian born on the continent ...: the awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic ... .
>
> (Carpentier 1995, 10)

In this respect, Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (1933) could also be considered as a starting point and as an example of a positive hybridization of Latin American culture; Magical realism has often been used as a powerful tool for self-definition vis-à-vis European concepts that could not easily be applied to Latin America. This new reflection made by Carpentier on the historic source of the marvelous real thus already heralds and speaks to the attractiveness of magical realism for postcolonial schools of writers and thinkers (→ Postcolonialism, I/38), who, after the years of Latin American Boom literature, have made it a truly global phenomenon with works like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Critics have interpreted this novel not only as postcolonial and postmodern, but also as a direct heir of magical realism, as the author himself has stated on numerous occasions.

Where Carpentier saw a baroque spirit at work as the driving force for his version of magical realism, the marvelous real, in 1954 Ángel Flores saw typically hybrid forms of romanticism and realism at play behind the creation of magical realism in Latin America (Flores 1995, 109-110). As the first scholar on the topic, Flores tried to define a group of Latin American authors as belonging to magical realism, even though nowadays some of the named authors would not be regarded as canonical magical realists in the purest sense. Taking Kafka as a precursor of the movement and citing Edgar Allan Poe as a persistent influence – who, it should be noted, provides an excellent example of inter-American cultural transmission – Flores highlights the linking element between Latin American writers as those who engage the supernatural in their fiction in some form or another "in the amalgamation of realism and fantasy," naming Borges' *Historia universal de la infamia* published in 1935 as a point of departure for magical realism, a claim Luis Leal would later contest (Flores 1995, 111-113).

According to Flores, common to all practitioners of this new trend in Latin American fiction is to "cling to reality as if to prevent 'literature' from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms" (Flores 1995, 115-116). This balancing of the magical and the real can also be seen in U.S. works, similarly inspired by and contemporaneous with Poe's literary productions such as "The Black Cat." In the 19th century, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," "The Birthmark," and "Rappaccini's Daughter," Ambrose Bierce's "The Death of Halpin Frayser," and Edith Wharton's "The Lady's Maid's Bell" and "Miss Mary Pask" are among the best known works in the tradition. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) was key to defining

the elements of fantastic literature in the U.S. academic context, focusing on the characters' – but also the reader's – uncertainty about whether supernatural forces are at work: this ambiguity marked the fantastic's difference from pure fantasy and "marvelous" fiction, where magic is clearly identified, and from Gothic works that provide a rational explanation for strange events.

Drawing on Tzvetan Todorov's work, Amaryll Beatrice Chanady (1985) distinguishes magical realism from the older and more general body of work called the fantastic by claiming that the narrator in fantastic fiction is usually still very much rooted in rationalist thought, trying to find a logical explanation for supernatural phenomena. While in magical realism, the narrator usually appears to be much less reliable or less suited for the reader to identify with, because he or she presents an unconventional world in an understated way. Thus, the magical realist mode is more engrossed in the "natural quality" of its magic, with the narrator displaying a distinct lack of amazement (or amazement at different elements in the narration than readers might expect), whereas the fantastic narrator keeps a further distance from something he or she feels obliged to mediate for the reader's understanding; this narrator wavers in his or her belief and non-belief in the hardly believable circumstances of the narrated world. Irlemar Chiampi concurs, labeling magical realism as the "denaturalization of the real and the naturalization of the marvellous" (1980, 155). This is what Wendy Faris calls the "irreducible element" in magical realism. Moreover, she points out that these elements are even more normalized in magical realist fiction than they would be in other traditions that also allow for miracles to happen, like myths, religious narratives (→ Religious Beliefs, I/40), or folkloric tales (→ Popular, I/37).

Magical Realism and its Roots in the Realities of the Americas

The cultural aspect of magical realism and the form's resistance to Western European notions of the "real" are crucial to understanding its roots in the realities of Latin America, the Caribbean, and indigenous communities of North, Central, and South America (→ Indigeneity, I/31). In other words, beyond a textual analysis of literary works, one should not overlook the socio-political aspect of Magical Realism and the extra-literary quality that comes into play when works are labelled as such. Aside from ascribing a certain set of authors to the movement (or excluding others), all definitions aim at trying to weigh against each other the two oxymoronic elements of this construction: the adjective "magical" with the noun "realism." But what, precisely, is "real" and what is fantastic/magical/marvelous?

Commenting on Flores' first attempt to define magical realism, Luis Leal proposed that magical realism "is not an aesthetic movement" and "does not ... distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature ... do", but that the writer "confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts" in order "to seize the mystery that breathes behind things" (Leal 1995, 121-123); thus giving in 1967 a definition that harks back to the phrasing of the very origin of the term created by Franz Roh. The year 1967 was, coincidentally, also the year the Guatemalan writer Miguel Ángel Asturias, another precursor or founding father of magical realism, received the Nobel Prize for Literature, making that year a veritable *annus mirabilis* for magical realism, because the very same year saw the publication of Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. Asturias also gave an interview in 1967, where he describes what magical realism means to him in an interview,

> Between the 'real' and the 'magic' there is a third sort of reality. It is the melting of the visible and the tangible, the hallucination and the dream. It is similar to what the surrealists around Breton wanted ... 'Magical realism' of course, has a direct relationship to the original mentality of the Indians.
>
> (Mead 1968, 330)

Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid proposes something similar – although linked more closely with the retention of African traditions in the Caribbean – in response to an interview question about the function of dreams in her book *At the Bottom of the River* (1983), which has been categorized by Western critics as both surrealistic and magically real (Kincaid interviewed by Cudjoe 1989). She states,

> [T]o be honest I don't really think I make these distinctions about dreaming and waking. ... As a child, I really believed all my dreams and took them very seriously. I still do, in quite the same way. So when I write about dreams, it's not really a dream, it's something that happens ...

she continues, "And as I say, this had to do with the strange perception of reality where I grew up. Reality was not to be trusted [;] the thing you saw before you was not really quite to be trusted" (409). She asserts that this is not folklore, but rather people's "experience with life" (410). Interviewer Selwyn Cudjoe concurs: "*there is another reality* over which we, in our modernity, have no control – and certainly of which we know very little" (408, italics added). Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosas provides yet another example of magical realism that fits into "a third sort of reality" in the short story "A Terceira Margem do Rio" (1962), which teases out a space between reality and the fantastic, carefully avoiding to decide on either one.

Cien años de soledad becomes the work that is most often cited as a clear example of magical realism or even "its canonical incarnation" (Hart and Ouyang 2005, 3). In 1971 García Márquez told Mario Vargas Llosa that in *Cien años de soledad* he is a realist writer, because he believes (similar to Carpentier's beliefs referenced above) that in Latin America everything is possible, everything is real (Celorio 2007, 526). Vargas Llosa described the novel as mixing the objectively real and the "imaginary real" to create a "literary realism" where man and his ghosts are joined in one verbal representation (Celorio 2007, 527). This rationale for magical realism's characteristics would immediately remind one to include the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo as another important representative of magical realist writing with his groundbreaking novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955), where the narrative plane of the living and the whispering murmurs of the dead are intricately intertwined and bundled up in the images of a town called Comala, making it hard for the reader to find his or her bearings in the text between the two spheres of the living and the dead, reality and imagination. Adding to the allure and uncertainty of the novel is that after the first reading of the text, the reader does not know, just like its protagonist Juan Preciado himself, who is alive and who is dead. García Márquez professed to be himself deeply influenced by Rulfo.

Rulfo and the aforementioned Guimarães Rosa could therefore also be categorized as magical realists *after the fact* precisely because they wrote about a rural Latin America that seemed to have vanished with all its apparently magical pre-industrial properties. These rural societies of the interior of Latin America were rapidly disappearing due to industrialization processes implemented by the governments of the respective countries, Mexico and Brazil, through large-scale state projects (→ Developmen,t II/6). The novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas*

by Guimarães Rosa (1956) takes place in the Brazilian Sertão, a rural and scarcely developed region that is partly fictional in Guimarães Rosa's narrative and, in turn, becomes a metaphor for the country and the world as a whole, passing in the novel from a local to a universal perspective, while still being anchored in a national space. Given this history, the overarching motivation for a narrative perspective in magical realism which chooses to tacitly gloss over its otherness (which, however, is still very much noticeable for the reader) might be taken as a sign of "remnants of existential anguish at an un-co-optable world," which are then "tempered by the more playful side of surrealism (or the intersection of diverse cultural traditions)" (Faris 2004, 7-8).

According to some of magical realism's most representative authors (like Carpentier or García Márquez, for example), including the chronicles of the Spanish conquistadors is crucial to the search for magical realism's archeological roots (→ Foundational Discourses, III/8). These chronicles were themselves rife with legends and medieval myths that had been transferred to the Americas of the 16th century but were eventually read by 20th-century readers, thus mimicking Pierre Menard's situation when he enters into a dialogue with Cervantes' *Quijote* in the eponymous short story by Jorge Luis Borges.

Returning to *Cien años de soledad*, a peculiar mixture of the two spheres of what is commonly accepted as real and the fantastical can be seen, creating a sense of wonder which reflects back even on everyday items. What seemed familiar becomes noteworthy and astonishing again, and what seems extraordinary or outright implausible becomes normalized because it forms a natural part of the same narrated world. Introductions of new technologies in Macondo (the fictional town in Latin America where the novel takes place) like the cinema (→ III/25) and the railway create the same sense of wonder amongst its inhabitants as a block of ice and a magnet, two items which might be seen as less amazing and more primitive. On the other hand, flying carpets and acts of levitation seem much less marvelous in Macondo and are an accepted possibility of life.

The inversion and new indexation in the diegetic world (the fictitious world described in the narrative) of what appears to be normal and what might be assumed to be fanciful are thus quickly rearranged in the reader's mind and create new hierarchies of what has to be assumed as possible in that world. The process of assimilation that is carried out by the reader can never be truly complete because it cannot be fully reconciled with his or her existing notions about reality. Thus, the created world of elements formerly seen as essentially heterogeneous and unlikely to crop up in the same sphere of existence can, potentially, challenge one's ideas of what is generally accepted to be normal/real on the one hand, and exotic/strange/foreign/fantastic on the other hand. Because the created effect does not allow the reader to separate the real from the fantastic again, thwarting any attempts to successfully and completely rearrange the perceived hierarchy of formerly disparate spheres into a coherent new whole, magical realist fiction thereby creates a space for unaccustomed insights and the chance to see reality with fresh eyes. The two spheres rub off against each other, so to speak, since unusual exaggerations and hyperbole alongside detailed descriptions intended to create a realistic effect can still convey a higher poetic truth about reality, making those elements that were formerly believed to be an all-too-common and inconspicuous part of reality also more "real" again along with it. Once the normal seems wonderful or strange again and the fantastic appears to be normalized, everything is on the table and up for questioning. The magical element in magical realism ends up heightening its realism and does not, paradoxically, simply distract from it.

But how exactly does the realistic part sustain the magical elements in Macondo? The key components of politics, social grievances like perpetually on-going civil wars between

liberals and conservatives, and the direct interference of U.S. capitalist interests in Latin America in the form of a banana company (→ Transnational Corporations, II/23) do not give off much of a contrast against the backdrop of a fictitious world where these elements seem normalized amongst the other equally improbable objects. But they are intentionally inserted to clearly remind the reader of how wondersome they are for being *factual* and based on real-world problems. Put another way, the reader must recall the fact that, if these political elements can appear as disconcerting and magical as the easily identifiable truly fantastical elements like a flying carpet, this does, indeed, point to a real problem that is not as easily explained away as the other elements that might serve a merely embellishing function, as in fairy tales for instance. A world where everything is possible is not necessarily good when negative elements are as likely as or even more real than the rest of that landscape.

Even though the success of *Cien años de soledad* was overwhelming and García Márquez received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981, later on, after the height of the Latin American Boom in literature, magical realism was criticized for being a mere marketing ploy and hollow label for Latin American authors riding the coattails of the few greats that made Latin American fiction popular and a world-wide sought-after commodity. Some authors were seen as exploiting the magical elements in an imitative fashion, adding a few realist references to give their escapist fantasies a little more weight, and ultimately failing to incorporate any political message or central ideological thrust to the work – a criticism that has been levelled, for example, at authors like Isabel Allende, Luis Sepúlveda and Laura Esquivel. In contrast, the former magical realists were seen as trying to capture the so-called essence of the continent by establishing a literary language that was meant to be emancipatory from European models and could be viewed as an act of literary independence.

It is necessary to remember that economic and political dependency theory were highly popular in Latin America, proposing the industrial development of "Third World"/Global South countries during the Cold War (ca. 1947-1989/1991) (→ Development, II/6). The endeavor to attract foreign capital and to establish a level of industrial innovation capable of creating homegrown wealth was aimed at doing away with the inequality in exchange rates (i.e. the economic *and* the cultural dependency on what are now identified as nations of the Global North). The Latin American Boom in literature went hand in hand, culturally and politically, with the Cuban Revolution in 1959. In this sense, magical realism became a form of cultural postcolonial independency before the term postcolonialism (→ I/38) was coined and before postcolonial studies became prominent at universities around the globe.

As a direct consequence of the excessive popularity of Latin American magical realism, Chilean authors Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez published in 1996 an anthology called McOndo (as in U.S. capitalist giants Macintosh and McDonald's). The title, with the obvious pun on García Márquez's Macondo (the epitome of magical realism for so many) was intended to reject the notion that Latin America was synonymous with magical realism. It united authors who wanted to distance themselves from the previous generation of magical realists and reclaim their right to write about other topics than the exotic stereotypes about Latin America that had become an expected staple of authors from the region. Trying to negotiate a new identity for what it means to be an author from the Americas, who in theory should be able to freely choose their subject matter and settings to reflect the increasing interconnectedness of the world, the editors of the anthology recount in the preface a curious anecdote of another unnamed editor who had turned down two short stories for the inclusion in an English language anthology on the sole grounds that they were "lacking in magical realism" and could have been written in any Global North

country. Apparently, for these authors who came after the Latin American Boom era, the originally emancipatory quality of magical realism from European models had become a constricting factor again. These post-boom generation writers, including writers from the Mexican counterpart of the McOndo-movement, Crack, also had an urban background in common, distinct from the jungle as a cultural and environmental backdrop. Twenty years later, when the five members of the Crack movement wrote and signed each text of the "Postmanifiesto del Crack 1996-2016," Jorge Volpi repeats his ferocious critique of magical realism's epigones, "Out there, the impostors dressed as García Márquez triumph. The five rear up: they adore the original and spurn the copycats. And nobody listens" (Volpi 2016, 119). The generic model of magical realism still holds strong on a commercial level, but has left behind its transformative calling to emancipate Latin American societies.

In the U.S. Mexican American writers in particular have further popularized the genre. Important titles include Ron Arias, *The Road to Taranunchale* (1975), Orlando Romero, *Nambé Year One* (1976), Miguel Méndez, *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras* (1989) and José Rivera's *Marisol* (1987) adopt elements of magical realism and the fantastic to narrate traumatic histories (→ Trauma Literature, III/21), to juxtapose the American Dream with Northern realities in the experience of Chican@ communities in the U.S. and to narrate the cultural tensions and connectedness between South and North (→ Migration Literature, III/13).

The Flows of Magical Realism

The underlying longing for a world that is un-co-optable, i.e. open to the likelihood of the extraordinary, on the one hand, and a playful approach to reality that is linked to a relevant political message, on the other hand, helps explain magical realism's adaptability and success as a world-wide trend. As such it has crossed over and has spurred in other literatures in the Americas from various regions of the world. Magical realism has casted fictitious worlds in a decidedly hybrid but, within themselves, reconciled state of affairs. Readers are invited in with the allure of a (fictitious) world that appears to be already fully formed and, at the same time, as something completely different, thus accomplishing two things: still being connected somehow to the Old World models (the dominance of a Western system) while offering a reality that looks as if it were in the midst of developing itself, quite naturally, according to alternate (or postcolonial) laws.

A further explanation for its success is that when something becomes real in magical realism it does not immediately lose its magic for the beholder but, as a whole, the veneer of eclecticism gets simply smoothed over in order to establish a new inner consistency of the presented reality. By merging the fantastic and the realistic world in an analogous manner to the visible merging of cultural worlds, magical realist types of fiction have become renowned for questioning received notions about identity by making historical spaces and times seem a lot more fluid and malleable. In search of a tradition of their own, these writers of the Americas can establish new yet still connected – however tenuously – transnational fiction set in imaginary worlds with discernible references to their places of origin. They can assert their differences and critique social ills, querying hierarchies far beyond the Americas and the Latin American context of Boom literature.

For better or for worse, magical realism has been established as a Latin American genre that was exported all over the world, especially in prose, but also in movies and other forms of media (→ Cinema, III/25). Magical realism has become one of the main Latin American contributions to world culture in global North-South dialogues and in South-South dialogues between Latin America and other regions. For example, Borges influenced U.S. writers such as Thomas

Pynchon, Donald Barthelme and John Gardner; García Márquez can be claimed as a literary ancestor to writers such as Ben Okri from Nigeria and British Indian novelist Salman Rushdie. Other well recognized authors include Latife Tekin (Turkey), Mia Couto (Mozambique), and Mo Yan (China). This diverse array of examples demonstrates the wide-spread appeal and long-lasting success of magical realism. However, while novels like *Night at the Circus* (1984) by Angela Carter, *Das Parfum. Die Geschichte eines Mörders* (1985) by Patrick Süskind, and *Truismes* (1996) by Marie Darrieussecq also recreate an aesthetic that coheres with their Latin American predecessors, these texts are stripped of culturally and politically emancipatory content. In other words, they are heirs to Latin American magical realism but present a tempered version where they refrain from building on its liberating and constructive streak. This latter set of novels provides proof of the international impact magical realism has had not only as a postcolonial project but also as a commercially marketable product in a globalized consumer market (→ Consumerism, I/23).

Additionally, one should not forget that the South-South dialogue has not established itself in a direct manner, but in a roundabout way via the Global North as a proxy, which still holds sway over the means of cultural production (→ Cultural Industries, III/27). Getting to Mumbai, Beijing or Casablanca still means more often than not having to pass through Barcelona, Paris or New York first. Still, magical realism has given a voice to perspectives and realities that long clamored for recognition. Suskind summarizes that

> magical realism should not be considered solely as an aesthetic form that can be forged anywhere, under any sociocultural conditions, but as a discourse emerging from cultural formations marked by the perception of a lack and the register of emancipatory desires.
>
> (Suskind 2011, 843)

Homi Bhabha attests to its international postcolonial power by pointing to its marked desire to unfetter and resignify the colonial past, maintaining that "'Magical realism' after the Latin American Boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world" (Bhabha 1990, 7). It is important to point out, however, that in 1956, *before* the Boom, the Haitian novelist Jacques Stephen Alexis described the magical realist situation that Haitians were already living in. He alluded directly to Carpentier, but implied a more combative stance for those who actually had to live under the harsh conditions described by Suskind (and were not just simple observers like Carpentier).

Magical Realism and the Fantastic as Emancipatory Literary Modes in the Americas

As an emancipatory literary mode, magical realism can be seen in U.S. fiction in novels by African American writer Toni Morrison (→ African-descendant Literatures, III/2), including *Song of Solomon, Tar Baby,* and *Beloved*; in Chicano writer Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me, última* and the collection of short stories *The Man Who Could Fly;* in works by Native American writer Louise Erdrich, from *Tracks* and *Love Medicine* to *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* and *The Round House* (→ Indigenous Literatures, III/10). For people of color in the U.S. and Canada – often examples of the Global South residing in the midst of the Global North – fantastical elements enable anti-colonial resistance, identifying reality as constructed and calling attention to ideological and institutional mechanisms that maintain the hegemonic order.

Less traditional examples of the fantastic in the African American context are presented in Maleda Belilgne's *Bodily Trespass,* which reconfigures the genre in terms of Space. Belilgne identifies marvelous and magical "eruptions" in 20th-century realist and surrealist narratives as a way of cataloguing and then resisting the spatial restrictions and constrictions that have marked the experiences of African American people in the U.S., beginning with the Middle Passage and continuing into the present-day carceral state (2011). Starting with Pauline Hopkins' 1902-1903 serial *Of One Blood, Or, The Hidden Self* and moving on to discuss canonical works such as Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946), Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953), James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," and Ralph Ellison's "King of the Bingo Game," Belilgne proposes the fantastic as a way to establish a new black geography that defies the suppression of black legal, civic, and social space by defying conventional logics.

More popular in the last few decades, however, is speculative fiction by African American and African Caribbean authors that does not does not safeguard the line between the supernatural and the "real"; instead, it places itself firmly in the science fiction, fantasy, and horror genres previously dominated by white men. Some notable examples are works by Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, N.K. Jemison, and Nnedi Okorafor. Victor Lavalle's novella *The Ballad of Black Tom* distinctly engages with the supernatural world and (the often racist, xenophobic) horror legacies of H.P. Lovecraft, while *The Changeling* starts off in the ambiguous reality commonly identified as slipstream fiction before resolving itself in the fantastical. Slipstream, like magical realism, is a style that stimulates cognitive dissonance in the reader – a feeling of strange-but-familiar "otherness," disrupting traditional notions of realism and blurring the borders between conventional science fiction, fantasy, and realistic literary fiction.

Conclusion

Unlike in Latin America, where magical realism prevailed for much of the latter half of the 20th century, science fiction and horror overtook the conventional fantastic as more popular genres in the United States. From the very beginning, U.S. literature has teemed with tales of hauntings, terrifying obsessions, and gruesome incursions, of the uncanny ways in which ordinary reality can be breached and subverted by the unknown and the irrational (→ Trauma Literature, III/21). However, Henry James's fantastic "The Jolly Corner" yields to the nightmarish post-apocalyptic savagery of Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream"; Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* gives rise to H.P. Lovecraft's "The Shunned House" and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward;* ghostly narratives of the Edwardian era lead to other lurid classics from the pulp heyday of Weird Tales, and later works by Shirley Jackson, Ray Bradbury, Stephen King, and Clive Barker, whose names are more recognizable to today's mainstream readers.

It is possible to think of magical realism and its postcolonial nation-building endeavor as the last large-scale cultural movement that was still able to benefit from literature's status as an esteemed institution before its social relevance diminished considerably due to the rise of social media (→ III/41; Digital Culture, III/28) and the crisis of the nation state as champion of a more homogenous identity (→State Transformation, II/21). Magical realism has offered the world a literary model of resistance, being rebellious, anti-establishment, non-European, and anti-colonialist in its origins. While the genre in its original calling and form is no longer *en vogue* its variants keep on nourishing alternative literary modes and visions in the Americas and beyond.

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