

# Patriarchy and Power in Magical Realism



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By

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**To Nader**

“If history is an agreed fable, as Voltaire said [...] then any initiative to change things must begin with stories.”

—Marina Warner, “Who’s Sorry,” (2003, 467)

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## PREFACE

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's answer to the question she poses in the title of her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is a clear "no." For Spivak, the subaltern, particularly the subaltern as female, lacks or is denied access to the dominant discourse and thus "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (Spivak 1988, 307). By her claim that the subaltern cannot speak, Spivak actually wants to say that even if the female subaltern tries to speak she is condemned to silence because she has no distinctive voice in which to make herself heard by the dominant discourse (Spivak 1996, 292). Another important point Spivak stresses is that if the subaltern were to make herself heard, then "her status as a subaltern would be changed utterly; she would cease to be subaltern" (*ibid.*, 6).

Bhabha, in contrast, by claiming that all forms of culture are products of hybridity, contends that cultural hybridity opens up the "third space of enunciation," a liminal, in-between space where "[t]he process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha 1994, 37; 1990, 211). In the third space meaning, identity, and relationships are negotiated, and as such it provides the very space from where the subaltern can speak and "entertain difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 1994, 4).

For Bhabha, hybridity has the potential to challenge "the boundaries of discourse," and opens a space where "other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition" (Bhabha 1985, 160 and 156). Bhabha celebrates magical realism as the "literary language of the emergent postcolonial world," while Theo L. D'haen sees it as "the cutting edge of postmodernism" and Wendy B. Faris as "a point of convergence between postmodernism and postcolonialism" (Bhabha 2000, 7; D'haen 1995, 201; Faris 2004, 2). But what the contemporary theorists of magical realism in general agree upon is that "magical realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic" (Zamora and Faris 1995, 5). For Zamora and Faris the "in-betweenness" and "all-at-onceness" of

magical realist texts “has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women” (ibid., 6).

In *Magical Realism: A Clash with Patriarchy and Power*, Maryam Ebadi Asayesh chooses three female writers from different geographies and cultures of England, Latin America, and Saudi Arabia. The female characters presented in these novels are empowered with magic: Sycorax in *Indigo* is a shaman, Clara in *The House of the Spirits* is clairvoyant, and Fatma in *Fatma* is a woman-snake. These female characters, along with others in the stories discussed, are subalterns who suffer under patriarchy. Ebadi Asayesh wants to show how these writers use magical realism—to quote D’haen—that “reveals itself as a ruse to invade and take over dominant discourse(s)” (D’haen 1995, 195). Magical realism provides these writers “access to the main body of ‘Western’ literature” (ibid.), and by maneuvering within the framework of hegemonic discourse (realism) they try to evade and unsettle hegemonic views. Ebadi Asayesh sees magical realism as having the potential to give the subaltern the voice to be heard. The selected novels are also concerned with revisionary nostalgia and, since nostalgia is not just about the past but also “a means of sense-giving to the present” (Arargüç 2012, 3), they reflect a challenge to patriarchy; Warner in *Indigo*, Allende in *The House of the Spirits*, and Alem in *Fatma* changed the tradition of history being written by the powerful, showed the presence of women, and let their unheard stories be heard.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Indigo:</i>	<i>Indigo, or, Mapping the Waters</i>
<i>Spirits:</i>	<i>The House of the Spirits</i>
<i>Fatma:</i>	<i>Fatma: A Novel of Arabia</i>

# INTRODUCTION

Over the coming chapters, this study attempts to show how three contemporary magical realist authors use magical realism and the techniques of a magical realist fiction to present a clash with patriarchy and power.

## I. Theoretical Background

### A. Magical Realism: The First Moment

Magical realism first became well known throughout Latin America in the 1960s and became globally recognized from 1980 onwards. The term was first introduced to the art world in Europe in 1925 by the German art historian and photographer Franz Roh. In 1927, Massimo Bontempelli, an Italian critic, first defined magical realism in literary circles. This study charts the path and discusses the development of magical realism from its initiation in Europe to its development in Latin America and across the world.

Magical realism in Europe incorporates the views of Novalis, Roh and Bontempelli. However, it seems irrational to expect the same essence of magical realism from today's contemporary novels, with magical realism in an ongoing process of evolution.

As stated above, the first use of the term "magical realism" is usually attributed to Franz Roh. Some authors, including Warnes and Guenther, attribute the term to Novalis. Guenther states that the concept of "magischer Idealismus" (magical idealism) in German philosophy is an old one. At the end of the eighteenth century, Novalis wrote about the "magical idealist" and the "magical realist" in philosophy (Guenther 1995, 34). Warnes mentions that in 1798 Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, the German Romantic poet and philosopher better known by his penname of Novalis, imagined in his notebooks two kinds of prophets "who might live outside the boundaries of enlightened discourse without losing touch with the real" (Warnes 2009, 20). He proposed that such prophets should be called a "*magischer Idealist*" and a "*magischer Realist*"—a magical idealist and a magical realist (ibid.). He also mentions that Novalis preferred the term "magical idealism".

Novalis was considered a “lyric poet of early romanticism” and a philosopher (Beiser 2002, 407). According to Beiser, Novalis should have an outstanding place in the history of German idealism, as before Schelling and Hegel he had devised some of the essential themes of absolute idealism. In idealism, as opposed to materialism, material objects and the external world do not exist in reality; they are creations of the mind or constructs of ideas. Referring to the ideal and real, Novalis wrote:

That the absolute is the divine logos, the identity of the subjective and objective; that the ideal and the real are only parts of a single living whole; that thinking lapses into falsehood and contradiction in abstracting parts from the whole; that unity is not possible without difference; and, finally, that only art has the power to perceive the absolute. (quoted in Beiser 2002, 408)

Novalis calls this magical idealism. While some believe that he was influenced by Fichte or predicted Schelling and Hegel, others state that he was a realist more than an idealist. Beiser himself accepts that Novalis was *not* an idealist “in the Kantian-Fichtean way” (ibid., 422) yet his views did not have similar characteristics to “absolute idealism” (ibid., 409). Absolute or objective idealism starts with a rejection of “the unknowable thing-in-itself, thereby enabling philosophers to treat all reality as the creation of mind or spirit” (“Idealism” 2012). For Novalis, the absolute has subjective and objective aspects that unite idealism and realism. Thus, Beiser links Novalis with Hölderlin, Schlegel, Schelling, and Hegel.

What Novalis means by magical idealism seems obscure to some, but most define it as “the possibility of a complete control over our bodies and all of nature” (Beiser 2002, 422). Beiser refers to the fragments from *Vorarbeiten*: “In one fragment Novalis imagines that some day we will have the power to control our external senses just as we now have the power to direct our internal ones” (ibid.). For Novalis, the location of external senses is in the body and that of internal senses in the soul: “Through the body we perceive stimuli in the external world, whereas through the soul we perceive stimuli within ourselves” (ibid.). According to Novalis, we can control our internal senses. Beiser suggests that in another section Novalis focuses on the relationship between mind and body rather than that between internal and external sense. Novalis supposes that one day we will be able “to control the inner organs of our body just as we are now able to control our thoughts, actions and speech” (ibid.). He believes that if we can control our bodies, we can control our senses, which will allow us to influence the world. He believes in the power of the will to extend over nature. Beiser regards Novalis’s thinking

as utopian, because he demands the “ideal of a complete control over nature,” so that we human beings reach the status of God at last (*ibid.*, 423). Magical idealism in Novalis’s definition has the Romantic principle because romanticism forms the world into a work of art, so that it gets back to its magic, mystery, and beauty. The magical idealist should become familiar with the art of interpreting the signs of nature, and learn how to read “the inner structure of things from their external and empirical characteristics” (*ibid.*, 425). However, this control of nature does not take place by supernatural means. He wants to reach the outstanding goal of traditional magic—that is, control over nature—“through method, rule [sic], and reason” (*ibid.*). For Novalis, magic exists in art. There are two arts for a magical idealist: medicine and poetry. A magical idealist, through medicine, learns how to expand our inner stimuli, and to reach “a balance between over and under stimulation;” and it is by the means of poetry that he learns how to attain a magical alteration of the sensible world (*ibid.*, 426).

Another doctrine of Novalis is that of “syncriticism,” which is a combination of idealism and realism. Beiser claims that in syncriticism Novalis believes that the magical idealist should have the power “to make not only his thoughts into things but also his things into thoughts [...] He shows how the soul externalizes itself in the things of nature as well as how the things in nature internalize themselves in the mind” (*ibid.*, 427).

As Novalis was a Romantic poet, nature and unity with nature dominate his philosophy. At the same time, his theory of magical idealism brings together the dualities of mind and body, subject and object, inner and outer world, real and ideal. Although Novalis refers to magical realism, he does not develop this concept clearly. However, from his discussions on realism, we can infer that a magical realist uses the supernatural power that exists in both nature and the empirical world.

Magical realism appeared in Germany for the second time in 1925 through the publication of Franz Roh’s “Magical Realism: Post-Expressionism.” Almost all studies on the history of magical realism attribute the first use of the term to this essay. In studying magical realism, Guenther finds it necessary to consider the “historical context and aesthetic explanation of the term” because it connects Roh’s artistic construction to its literary implications (Guenther 1995, 34).

Roh first uses the term to describe a new painting’s return to realism after expressionism’s abstract style. While realism is used to recognize a movement in the writing of novels during the nineteenth century and represents human life and experience in literature, expressionism does not use realistic descriptions of life and the world; instead it includes

unrealistic and emotional states of mind. Roh chooses the term magical realism instead of “post-expressionism” because he believes post-expressionism implies a chronological relationship to expressionism. He states, “with 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).

Roh states that what distinguishes one phase of art from another is only the use of the particular objects that the artists of the phase observe. A new painting is different from expressionism through the use of its objects. As a reaction to impressionism, expressionism “shows an exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects,” while in post-expressionism “the fantastic dreamscape has completely vanished and our real world emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of a new day” (ibid., 17).

Roh tries to distinguish expressionism, futurism, and post-expressionism through objectivity:

But during the development of Expressionism, painting, which has somehow almost always held on to nature, went as far as it could toward rejecting its representative, imitative meaning; specific objectivity was suspected of lacking spirituality; in Futurism, the objective world appeared in an abrupt and dislocated form. (ibid., 18)

On the other hand, post-expressionism aims to amalgamate reality into the center of visibility.

Expressionism lacks a combination of reality and appearance, Roh claims. This combination was not possible until the recovery of the objective world. It seems to eliminate the image of real nature in order to choose an entirely spiritual world. Post-expressionism affords us the miracle of existence in its serene time: the endless miracle of everlastingly mobile and vibrating molecules. Roh continues that “new objectivity,” a term he borrows from Hartlaub, is more than the simple respect for the objective world with which we are fused. Besides, we see the contrast in the forms of the spirit and the very solidness of objects. We will see this later in magic realism when it enters the domain of literature. Roh discusses two worlds in post-expressionist painting, stating that “[t]he point is not to discover the spirit beginning with objects but, on the contrary, to discover objects beginning with the spirit; for that reason, one accords consummate value to the process in which spiritual form remains large, pure, and clear” (ibid., 24). He goes on to say this second objective world is similar to the first, the existing world, but it is a refined world. Talking about the paintings of German artist George Schrimpf, Roh states



that Schrimpf wants his painting “to be ‘real’ to impress us as something ordinary and familiar and, nevertheless, to be magic by virtue of that isolation in the room: even the last little blade of grass can refer to the spirit” (ibid., 25). He calls this a double-sided art that strives between contraries.

As mentioned, Roh did not put any special value into the term magical realism. He finds magical realism to be the most appropriate among other terms such as verism, ideal realism, and neoclassicism. Guenther believes that Roh never gives a brief definition of magic realism (Guenther 1995, 34). He gives twenty-two characteristics for post-expressionism in contrast with expressionism. In his *German Art in the Twentieth Century* in 1958, Roh reduces the number to fifteen and refers to new objectivity, finding out that his terms had been concealed by Hartlaub’s (ibid., 35). Two years earlier than Roh’s “post-expressionism” Gustav Hartlaub, a German art historian, expressed his intention of a new objectivity exhibition. Roh’s magic realism and new objectivity both arose with the decline of expressionism and the outcome of World War I.

For Roh, magical realism is an aesthetic category. According to Chanady, although it is useful to know what “magical realism” initially concerned itself with within Roh’s theories, it cannot be put to use in relation to “both pictorial art and literature without causing confusion because the two belong to a different medium of expression” (Chanady 1985, 17–18). Even if there are similarities between magical realism in painting and in literature, they have different implications. At the same time, she says that we cannot abandon the term completely. Chanady does not mention how Roh’s aesthetic definition of magical realism differs from those in the literature. She finds it helpful for developing a useful critical notion.

Similarly, Hegerfeldt finds that many of Roh’s aspects are totally related to technical features of painting. She suggests that one central difference between Roh’s definition and the current literary concept is in the meaning of the term magic. While magic for Roh refers to “the sense of newness with which quotidian reality is endowed through painterly emphasis on clarity and clinical detail,” it now refers to the opposite of “realistic” (Hegerfeldt 2005, 13). While Roh’s magical realism tries to show that “everyday objects are endowed with a sense of mystery and unreality,” today’s magic realism “springs from the naturalization of fantastic occurrences” (ibid., 60).

Another significant figure in the development of magical realism in Europe is Massimo Bontempelli, an Italian poet, novelist, dramatist, and critic. In 1926, Bontempelli founded *900* (*Novacento*), a review in which

he expressed his perspectives on contemporary matters. Witt calls Bontempelli the creator of magical realism in Italy. Bontempelli became secretary of the fascist syndicate of writers and authors in 1928. Witt finds Bontempelli's creation of myth "the most enthusiastic and most developed" (Witt 2001, 109). She states that according to Bontempelli, the creation of new myths is imperative due to the contemporary historical and political situation: World War I created a "tabula rasa" from which a new era was beginning (ibid.). Bontempelli divides history into three periods: the classical, the romantic, and the present. The classical includes the pre-Homeric times to the time of Christ, the romantic contains the beginnings of Christianity to World War I. From Bontempelli's point of view, Nietzsche is the pioneer of the third period and of fascism. As humanity is starting again, we should "feel elementary" and rebuild from nothing, and create our own myths, as happened in the other periods (ibid.). How are we going to create these myths? Bontempelli's answer is that the style of the present age will be "'magical realism,' which conceives of art not as an imitation of reality but as an exploration of mystery and of daily life as a miraculous adventure" (ibid.). Bontempelli does not define myth in a clear way but rather associates it with politics; he sees fascism and communism as the new systems for the new age.

Explaining Bontempelli's devotion to fascism, Witt quotes him: "my long-standing adherence to Fascism is due primarily to the fact that I considered it to be a frank political primitivism, which joyously and with one clean sweep canceled the experiences of the outworn politics that had preceded it" (ibid.). At the same time, Bontempelli warns that the new start in politics and art is not total because we cannot become Adam: we have a past. He suggests that the making of new myths for the new men must be "self-conscious." It should not be simple like the making of the myths of the pre-Homerics (ibid., 110).

Magical realism finds meaning in philosophy, art, and literature, but its true nature flourished in the literature of Latin America. However, the amalgamation of reality and fantasy in this iteration was not the same as that which we observe in magico-realist fiction today. It is not clear whether Roh borrowed the term from Novalis. For more than forty years, Warnes states, Roh was the main person in critical and artistic circles in Germany. His academic training made certain that he was familiar with the thinking of German philosophy, and the effect of Romantic ideas is clear in his dialectical method of analysis and in the language of his commentary on *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting (Warnes 2009, 24). As a result, he might have been familiar with the magical realism of Novalis. Warnes

believes that in order to understand more about Roh's particular choice of term, we must return to Novalis (*ibid.*).

Warnes links Novalis's and Roh's "conceptualisations of magical realism [...] with the limits of mimesis and a reliance on dialectics of inwardness and outwardness, subject and object, spirit and the world in their formulations of this concern" (*ibid.*, 25). German Romanticism develops away from irrationalism, while magical realism ends the subjective prejudice of expressionism. As Romantics do not return to rigid neoclassicism, or to the autocracy of the mimetic principle submitted by Novalis, so too the magical realist painters of the 1920s could scarcely return to painting impressionistic landscapes and inanimate objects (*ibid.*).

As previously mentioned, Novalis developed the concept of magical idealism. For Novalis, the absolute has both a subjective and an objective aspect that unites idealism and realism. Magical idealism requires a complete control over the body and soul (external and internal senses). If we can control our body, we can control our senses, and our power will extend to nature. A magical idealist can interpret signs of nature as well as the inner and outer structure of things. For Novalis, magic is in art, medicine, and poetry. It is through poetry that a magical idealist learns how to attain a magical change of the sensible world (Witt 2001, 426). In his doctrine of syncriticism, Novalis states that a magical idealist should have the power "to make not only his thoughts into things but also his things into thoughts" (*ibid.*, 427). He shows how the soul externalizes itself in nature as well as how nature internalizes itself in the mind.

Comparing Roh and Novalis: Roh does not equate the magical with the mystical. Like Novalis, he is not trying to find something supernatural in magic, which he views as something that is behind objective reality. In syncriticism, Novalis believes that the magical idealist should have the power "to make not only his thoughts into things but also his things into thoughts. He shows how the soul externalizes itself in the things of nature as well as how the things in nature internalize themselves in the mind" (*ibid.*). Similarly, according to Roh, new objectivity (magic realism) is more than the simple respect for the objective world in which we are combined. Besides, "we see juxtaposed in harsh tension and contrast the forms of the spirit and the very solidity of objects, which the will must come up against if it wishes to make them enter its system of coordinates" (Roh 1995, 22). Roh's and Novalis's magical idealism hover between opposites: for Novalis, those of mind and body, internal sense and external sense, subjective and objective; for Roh, a double-sided art in which we can see a real, familiar, and ordinary thing plus its spirit.

Another point to be considered is whether Bontempelli adopted magical realism from Roh. Warnes regards Bontempelli as a “more relevant figure than Roh to magical realism’s genealogy” (Warnes 2009, 27). He explains Bontempelli’s desire for a new mythography that would regard the connections between past and present. The kind of art he offered was one that would find miracles in the middle of ordinary and everyday life (ibid.). Like Guenther, he believes that Bontempelli was independent from Novalis or Roh when he called his art magic realism.

Bowers states that Bontempelli was influenced by both surrealism and Roh’s magical realism. She mentions that Bontempelli’s *900* published magical realist writing and criticism. From her point of view, Bontempelli’s magic realism coincides with that of Roh. On this issue, she quotes Dombroski’s observation that Bontempelli was concerned with presenting “the mysterious and fantastic quality of reality” (Bowers 2005, 12). She quotes Dombroski in that, before reading Roh, Bontempelli emphasized the role of the imagination and nature in his writing, “providing a preparation for the influence of Roh’s search for the magic of life shown through the clarity of heightened realism” (ibid., 58). While Bontempelli applied magic realist thoughts to writing, Roh applied them to pictorial art.

Although Bontempelli introduced magic realism in a 1927 article, Guenther considered that he defined certain features of “realismo magico” in the first four issues of *900* and used the term in both a literary and artistic context (Guenther 1995, 60). Unlike Bowers, who refers to the adaptation of Bontempelli from Roh, Guenther states that whether Bontempelli borrowed the term from Roh or not cannot be determined with any degree of certainty (ibid.). However, she does try to establish links. Bontempelli cooperated on *Der Querschnitt*, a prominent German artistic and literary journal in which essays about modern art appeared. It was in this journal that Hartlaub publicized his 1925 Mannheim exhibit (ibid.). Moreover, Georg Kaiser, mentioned in Roh’s magic realism book, helped Bontempelli edit *900* (ibid.).

Hegerfeldt considers one important difference between Roh and Bontempelli’s magical realism to be that the latter contains the use of realistic techniques to convey fantastic elements—something Roh clearly omits (Hegerfeldt 2005, 15). Faris writes that Bontempelli used magical realism to describe both painting and literature almost concurrently in 1926 (Faris 2004, 39). At the same time, magical realism in the sense of Roh’s description of “European painting’s movement back toward realism after expressionism” in 1925, includes features from “visual history” (ibid.). In this case, its verbal representation cannot be well applied.

Both Roh's and Bontempelli's views on magical realism were presented between the world wars and during the rise of modernism. Bontempelli believed that after World War I, we collectively needed to create a new myth—maybe because it could help bind people together. Magical realism, in this context, is not an imitation of reality but an explanation of mystery and daily life as a miraculous adventure. His view is similar to that of Roh, who argues that in post-expressionism, the fantastical dreamscape entirely disappears and our real world appears before our eyes. In other words, post-expressionism sought to reintegrate reality into the heart of visibility.

Another similarity lies in their view of magic and art. For Novalis magic exists in art, while according to Bontempelli art is discovering magic. Novalis says that there are two types of art for a magical idealist: the art of medicine and the art of poetry. It is through poetry that a magical idealist learns how to achieve a magical transformation of the sensible world. Bontempelli believes that in the same way that politics rediscovers power, art revives magic. Moscow and Rome are the tombs of democracy; democracy's demise needs new myths, and new art forms.

Despite the differences in their views, Novalis, Roh, and Bontempelli believed that magical realism encompassed the burden of unreality behind reality. This is the point that links magical realism in Europe to its practitioners in Latin America, the place where it flourished.

## **B. Magical Realism: The Second Moment**

Latin America is widely considered the place where magical realism developed exponentially and began its rise as a global literary phenomenon. Latin American magic realism rose with the publication of the Spanish *Revista de Occidente* (1927). Magical realism in Latin America emerged from European-educated Latin American writers such as Alejo Carpentier, Arturo Uslar Pietri, and Miguel Ángel Asturias. These writers became familiar with surrealism and post-expressionism in Europe during the 1920s and tried to create a Latin American version by using the myth and history of the continent.

While his writing was connected to Roh, Miguel Ángel Asturias included Mayan mythology and the history of the colonial oppression of Guatemala in his work. His novel, *Hombres de maíz* (*Men of Maize*) is based on the Popol Vuh ("sacred almanac") of the Mayans. The novel features a plot that is distinctive for its traditional native storytelling. Franco states that in the writings of Asturias and his contemporaries in Latin America, previously negative characters are shown in a more

positive light (quoted in Cooper 2004, 31). Cooper writes that Asturias, Arquedas, Carpentier, Roa Bastos, and Rulfo started restoring early legends, traditional cultures, and ancient ways of life through magical realism (ibid.).

Surrealism in 1920s Europe challenged realism. Faris states “the realms of dream, myth and unconscious, and ‘primitive’ culture” made Carpentier and Asturias uphold what America had to suggest in those areas (Faris 2004, 34). Carpentier’s idea of the marvelous real was a uniquely American phenomenon. Church sculptures portrayed “the intercultural phenomenon of angels playing the maracas,” and unearthly plants grew in abundance. As a result, there was no need for the kind of artificial combination that is found in European surrealism (ibid.). Latin American magical realism progressed in the 1950s and 1960s through the fiction of, among others, Rulfo, García Márquez, Fuentes, and Cortázar. It progressed to join the “cosmopolitanism of Jorge Luis Borges’ universally oriented speculative philosophical fictions” with the precisely American prospect of Asturias and Carpentier (ibid., 35). Asturias and Carpentier found in myth the promise of merging the universal and the native, as well as a new validation of Latin American nature and culture.

Arturo Usler Pietri, a Venezuelan writer, was a close friend and contemporary of Bontempelli, Carpentier, and Asturias. Faris considers that for him, magical realism encompassed man as a mystery in the middle of realistic facts (ibid., 65). Bowers writes that both Usler Pietri and Carpentier, while living in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, were significantly influenced by European artistic movements. She states Usler Pietri influenced Venezuelan writers with his magico-realist short stories in the 1930s and 1940s (Bowers 2005, 13). Pietri’s writing emphasized the mystery of humans living among the realities of life rather than going after Carpentier’s new emerging versions of American reality. According to Usler Pietri, magical realism can “achieve a ‘poetic divination’ of reality” (quoted in Hegerfeldt 2005, 16). Hegerfeldt states that his definition has been criticized for being unclear and confusing. Generally, Usler Pietri’s definition is as unhelpful as Roh’s for defining today’s literary concept (ibid.). Bowers writes that Usler Pietri regarded magic realism as a continuance of “the ‘*vanguardia*’ modernist experimental writings of Latin America” (ibid.). She says that due to his close connection with modernism and with Roh, “some critics such as Maria Elena Angulo emphasize Usler Pietri’s role in taking magic realism to Latin America before Alejo Carpentier” (ibid.).

Usler Pietri and Carpentier returned to Latin America after World War II and the fall of the Spanish Republic. The 1940s became a time of

maturation for many Latin American countries; as a result, these countries wanted to produce and articulate a consciousness separate from that of Europe and tell their own stories.

*Lo real maravilloso americano*, which distinguished American magical realism from European surrealism, was introduced by Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban writer. Carpentier was involved with surrealism in France during the 1930s. According to Booker, surrealist art attempts to make connections with the unconscious mind and to attain new effects by blending apparently odd images (Booker 1996, 488). However, Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano* is different from surrealism: "The case of the Surrealists for so many years was never anything more than a literary ruse, just as boring in the end as the literature that is oneiric 'by arrangement' or those praises of folly that are now back in style" (Carpentier 1995b, 86). He notes that the marvelous, for surrealists, was rooted in disbelief as a literary trick. Discussing the nature of the fantastic in Latin America, the editor's note to Carpentier's work comments that:

In Latin America the fantastic is not to be discovered by subverting or transcending reality with abstract forms and manufactured combinations of images. Rather, the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, and politics—not by manifesto. (ibid., 75)

Carpentier defines *lo real maravilloso americano* in the preface to his first novel, *The Kingdom of This World* (1949). The idea first came to him near the end of 1943 when he visited Henri Christophe's kingdom of Haiti. His meeting with Pauline Bonaparte proved to be a revelation: "I saw the possibility of bringing to our latitudes certain European truths, reversing those who travel against the sun and would take our truths to a place where, just thirty years ago, there was no capacity to understand or measure those truths in their real dimensions" (ibid., 84). Carpentier goes on to say that after having felt the spell of the lands of Haiti, the magical writings along the red roads of the Central Meseta, the drums of the Petro and the Rada, he was moved to set this newly experienced marvelous reality in contrast with the tedious marvelous in certain European literatures of the past thirty years (ibid.). He explains how the marvelous arises from reality:

[The m]arvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and

categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state. (ibid., 86)

Carpentier defines the marvelous as follows: “[T]he phenomenon of the marvelous presupposes faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with the miracles of saints, nor can those who are not Don Quixotes enter, body, soul, and possessions, into the world of Amadis of Gaul or Tirant le Blanc” (ibid.).

Finding *lo real maravilloso americano* in America, Carpentier writes about the marvelous in Haiti, where thousands of men who were anxious for freedom believed in Mackandal’s lycanthropic powers such that “their collective faith” made a miracle on the day of his execution (ibid., 86–7). He concludes that the existence of the marvelous real was not the single privilege of Haiti, “but the heritage of all of America, where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies” (ibid., 87). The marvelous real is found at every phase in the lives of men who celebrate the history of the continent, such as those who looked for the fountain of everlasting youth and the golden city of Monoa, or the first rebels or modern heroes with mythological reputations from wars of independence, such as Colonel Juana de Azurduy. He asks, “After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?” (ibid., 88)

Carpentier continues his discussion of the marvelous real in “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” in 1975. He defines baroque as:

a constant of the human spirit that is characterized by a horror of the vacuum, the naked surface, the harmony of linear geometry, a style where the central axis, which is not always manifest or apparent (in Bernini’s Saint Teresa it is very difficult to determine a central axis) is surrounded by what one might call “proliferating nuclei,” that is, decorative elements that completely fill the space of decoration, the walls, all architecturally available space: motifs that contain their own expansive energy, that launch or project forms centrifugally. (Carpentier 1995a, 93)

The baroque arises “where there is transformation, mutation or innovation” (ibid., 98). He remarks that America, a continent of cooperation, alterations, sensations, *mestizaje*, has always been baroque due to its “cosmogonies” (ibid.).

He explains that Latin America is “the chosen territory of the baroque”:

because all symbiosis, all *mestizaje*, engenders the baroque. The American baroque develops along with *criollo* culture, with the meaning of the *criollo*, 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—something admirably noted by Simon Rodriguez: the awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a *criollo*; and the *criollo* spirit is itself a baroque spirit. (ibid., 100)

He uses the definition of the marvelous as something extraordinary, stating that the extraordinary does not necessarily refer to something lovely or beautiful. The marvelous is neither beautiful nor ugly; “rather, it is amazing because it is strange” (ibid., 101). Everything strange, everything amazing, everything that evades the established norms, is marvelous. Ugliness, deformity, all that is awful, can also be marvelous. Everything that is strange is marvelous (ibid., 101–2).

Carpentier compares magical realism and the marvelous real, calling the former only “Expressionist painting [sic]”. He believes that what Roh calls magical realism was just painting where real forms are joined in a way that does not imitate daily reality (ibid., 102). He compares surrealism and the marvelous real using Breton’s definition: “All that is marvelous is beautiful, only the marvelous is beautiful” (ibid., 103). The difference between the marvelous in Latin America and surrealism is that in Latin America the strange is ordinary, and always was ordinary (ibid., 104).

“Magical Realism in Spanish America” by Angel Flores had a great effect on scholars who were dealing with magical realism. Identifying magical realism as a trend, Flores notes that many “notable writers of the First World War period came to rediscover symbolism and magical realism” (Flores 1995, 111). He refers to Proust and Kafka as examples of such writers and calls their style a rediscovery. In short stories such as “The Judgment” and “Metamorphosis,” Kafka addressed the difficult art of blending his plain reality with the illusionary world of his nightmares (ibid., 112).

Flores defined magical realism as “the amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (ibid., 112). Realism and fantasy entered Latin America separately, the former in the 1880s and the latter during modernism (ibid.). Flores considers 1935, a year in which Jorge Luis Borges published his collection *Historia universal de la infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*), as a starting point for magical realism. He notes that Kafka influenced Borges, who was a discoverer with a group of excellent stylists around him (ibid., 113). Regarding Camus’ *The Stranger* and Kafka’s *The Trial* and “Metamorphosis,” Flores remarks that in these fictions “[t]ime exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality” (ibid., 115). He writes that the events happened and were accepted by the other characters as nearly normal events (ibid.).

We can find these generalizations about magical realism in Flores’ article. The practitioners of magical realism grip reality so that they avoid

their fiction including only myth. The narrative continues in well-prepared, progressively strong steps, and this finally may lead to one great uncertainty or confusion. The magical realities do not satisfy a popular taste; rather, they address themselves to the refined. Their plots are formed in a logical way.

Flores' ideas were criticized by Luis Leal in his article "Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature" in 1967, mainly for not presenting a formal definition of magical realism (1995, 119). He disagrees with Flores' definition of magical realism and argues that the writers Flores includes are not all magical realist writers. Moreover, he argues that magical realism started in 1935 with Borges and flourished between 1940 and 1950. Uslar Pietri was the first to use the term "magical realism" in Latin America, and Carpentier introduced the term "the marvelous real."

Leal contrasts magical realism with similar genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and superrealism. So he claims that magical realism, unlike superrealism, does not use dream motifs; does not mislead reality or create imagined worlds in the way the writers of fantastic literature or science fiction do; and does not put emphasis on the psychological analysis of characters, in order to provide a reason for their actions or their failure in expressing themselves (Leal 1995, 121). Leal suggests that magical realism is not an aesthetic movement like modernism, which tended to create difficult structures. He adds that in fantasy, the writer tries to validate the mystery of events and the supernatural attacks a world run by reason. Magical realism does not wound reality like surrealism does, but rather grabs the mystery that takes breaths behind things (*ibid.*, 123). Leal defines magical realism as an approach toward reality that can be conveyed through popular or cultural forms, through elaborate or rustic styles, through closed or open arrangements. In magical realism, the writer challenges reality and tries to disentangle it, to learn what is mysterious in things, life, and human acts (*ibid.*, 121).

### **C. Magical Realism: The Third Moment**

After its initiation in Europe, its flourishing in Latin America, and later development as a global literary genre, magical realism has attracted the attention of critics. They have attempted to define magical realism as a mode or a genre, classify it, define, and redefine it. Critics have associated magical realism with postmodernism, due to its development in the 1960s, and with postcolonialism, due to its emergence in postcolonial Latin American countries.

Cuban writer Roberto González Echevarría divided magical realism into two types: ontological and epistemological. Bowers states that epistemological magical realism results from features of knowledge rather than from cultural belief, and does not depend on the existence of a tradition of belief (Bowers 2005, 126). As she writes, ontological magical realism can be described as magical realism that has “as its source material beliefs or practices from the cultural context in which the text is set” (ibid., 86). For example, in Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World*, Mackandal can change shape at will and can take animal form.

Hegerfeldt discusses how Echevarría suggests three distinct phases for the development of magical realism. After describing the history of the term, how it flourished in the 1920s through Roh’s work, and its translation into Spanish in 1927, she outlines how *realismo mágico* first arrived in Latin America. She also mentions that the term did not enter the arena of critical discourse until what is described by Echevarría as magic realism’s second moment. He describes the second moment as appearing around 1948 with the works of Uslar Pietri and Carpentier (Hegerfeldt 2005, 109). Due to the difficulty in defining magical realism, Echevarría suggested eliminating the term. However, Warnes argues that this approach neglects the fact that the persistence of the term is mostly a consequence of its explanatory value (Warnes 2009, 2). This leads Echevarría to suggest the idea of moments—three distinct phases of the development of the term. The idea also is applied in this research as a way to divide the accounts of magical realism.

In “Magical Realism: A Typology,” Guatemalan writer William Spindler notes that Flores’ definition of magical realism as the amalgamation of realism and fantasy departs from that of Roh, but Leal’s definition is closer to the latter’s: the writer of magic realist texts is concerned with objective reality and tries to discover the mystery that is present in objects, life, and human actions without turning for aid to fantastic elements (Spindler 1993, 77). Spindler presents two definitions of the term: the original one, which talks about a type of literary or artistic works that offer reality in an unusual view without surpassing the limits of nature, but which engenders in the reader a sense of unreality; and the current practice, which describes text where two opposing views of the world are offered as if they were not opposing, which turns for assistance to the myth and beliefs of particular ethnic groups for whom this conflict does not exist (ibid., 78).

Spindler regards these two definitions as the same. He refers to three different types of magical realism: metaphysical, anthropological, and ontological. He finds metaphysical magical realism close to Roh’s

definition. Examples of this type are texts in which a familiar scene is represented as if it were something new and unfamiliar, but without dealing obviously with the supernatural (*ibid.*, 79). Spindler places European magical realism in this category. The anthropological type allows the narrator to have two distinct voices and to show events from both a rational point of view and a believer's point of view. In these texts, "the word 'magic' is taken in the anthropological sense of a process used to influence the course of events by bringing into operation secret or occult controlling principles of Nature" (*ibid.*, 80). The author disturbs the hierarchy which exists between a "magical consciousness" in the characters and Western rationalism, presenting them as equally important. Like anthropological magical realism, ontological magical realism represents both a rational point of view and the magical interpretation of the events, but it does so without referring to any particular cultural perspective or any particular pre-industrial community. The supernatural is introduced factually, as if it did not oppose reason, and no clarifications are given for the unreal events in the text (*ibid.*). The narrator in ontological magical realism is not troubled or puzzled by the supernatural; rather, he or she accepts it as if it were part of everyday life. This type of magical realism is the opposite of metaphysical magical realism, because "instead of having only a subjective reality [...] the unreal has an objective, ontological presence in the text" (*ibid.*, 82). Spindler concludes that his typology is by no means comprehensive but can be helpful in giving some theoretical manageability. He also believes that naturalization and supernaturalization are in fact at the "root" of two different definitions of magic realism. In Roh's magical realism, ordinary objects are provided with a sense of the unknown and the non-real, while today's magic realism results from the naturalization of fantastic events (*ibid.*, 60). Spindler aims to combine the "painterly and the literary concepts" (*ibid.*), but he reduces the value of magic realism to its matter-of-factness.

Jean-Pierre Durix places a postcolonial reading of magical realism in the context of what he calls "new literatures." He finds this to be a more suitable term than "postcolonial" for literature created in countries that were once colonized. Aldea states that Durix uses "hybrid aesthetics" to explain these new literatures: novelists who undergo various and contrary realities perceive the need to deal with these from several viewpoints. Thus, they create intermingled or hybrid genres. Durix indicates that magical realism is one of the best-known forms of this general hybridity. He distinguishes between the use of the fantastic in the literature of Europe and new literatures (magical realism) in European literature, in which the fantastic protests against the "autocracy of fact" (Aldea 2011, 6).

Durix declares that geographic division of the fantastic is problematic, as it is debatable “whether one can still speak of ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ in the postcolonial version of the genre” (ibid.). As reality in the new literatures mediates between Western emblems and an uncomfortable approval of ancient spirituality, works of this type cannot really be called fantastic, because the fantastic depends on the existence of a separate unreal. Instead, Durix states, these texts are magical realist. In the European fantastic, real and unreal are inclined against each other, but in magical realism there is not only an intermingling of the realistic and fantastic modes but also an implied inquiring into the split on which such terms are based. In this case, types of reality are offered in a less inconsistent way. Durix clearly relates the “resolution of antinomy in the magical realist text to a postcolonial cultural hybridity,” indicating that the magical realist text offers a resolution of reality faced in the postcolonial world (ibid.). According to Aldea, the resolution of the antinomy of real and magic, for Durix, is “key, but he also narrows his definition of magical realism by stressing that it must have a thematic engagement with the conflict between a local community and an imperial authority” (ibid.). He sees García Márquez and Rushdie as exemplars of magical realism, but he excludes Borges and Cortázar since their works do not have this characteristic.

Durix also notes elements of the grotesque and picaresque as typical of magical realism in addition to the postmodern characteristics of self-reflexivity, metatextuality, playfulness, and irreverence toward established cultural forms. Aldea believes that these elements are not fully integrated in the definition of the genre that Durix provides. Similar to Durix, Homi K. Bhabha finds magical realism a postcolonial mode. In *Nation and Narration* Bhabha states that “‘Magical realism,’ after the Latin American boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (Bhabha 2003, 7). Bhabha, one of the leading voices in postcolonial studies, based his studies on Said’s concept of orientalism and the Other. In *The Location of the Culture* (1994), he discusses the concerns of the colonized. The individual who has been colonized has two different views of the world: that of the colonizer and that of the colonized. To Bhabha, apparently neither of the cultures feels like home (Bressler 2007, 241). Bhabha calls this “unhomeliness,” being caught between two opposing cultures or “a double consciousness” (ibid.). Bressler states that this view of rejection by both cultures leads the colonial subject to become a “psychological refugee” (ibid.). Because each psychological refugee distinctively combines his or her two cultures, no two writers who have been colonial subjects will present their culture(s) as accurately alike.

Therefore, Bhabha argues against the inclination to “essentialize third-world countries into a homogenous identity” (ibid.).

Bhabha proposes an answer to the colonial subject’s sense of unhomeliness: the colonized writer must create a new discourse by rejecting all the established transcendental signifieds created by the colonizers. Such a writer must also embrace pluralism, believing that no single truth or metatheory of history exists. To accomplish such goals, Bhabha consistently uses the tools of deconstruction theory to expose cultural metaphors and discourse.

According to Aldea, the essential problem with postcolonial readings of magical realism is the confusion caused by unsuitable approaches to the genre, such as considering it as Third World literature (Aldea 2011, 107). Bhabha states that magical realism is the “literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (Bhabha 2003, 7). He calls for reading magical realism in terms of hybridity, which is “the property of being informed by differing social and cultural positions” (Booker 1996, 489). Postcolonial critics such as Bhabha emphasize that the colonial encounter between European and non-European cultures influenced each culture. Aldea maintains that Bhabha’s statement seems the same as the conclusion drawn by Jameson: “magical realism is to be read as Third World literature if the Third World is seen as that part of the world which has ‘suffered the experience of colonialism’” (Aldea 2011, 107).

For Slemon in “Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse,” magic realism is a troubled notion for literary theory. He states that magic realism in its applications to literature has not positively differentiated between itself and neighboring genres such as fabulation, metafiction, the baroque, the fantastic, the uncanny, or the marvelous. This may be the reason that some critics have abandoned the term. Slemon finds magic realism in Latin America, the Caribbean, India, Nigeria, and Canada. He believes that putting Canada in this category is surprising, since, unlike the other areas, it is not part of the Third World (Slemon 1988, 9). Examining two Canadian novels, Jack Hodgins’ *The Invention of the World* and Robert Kroetsch’s *What the Crow Said*, Slemon locates “the concept within the context of post-colonial cultures as a distinct and recognizable kind of literary discourse” (ibid., 10). Dealing with the term, he states that “the term ‘Magic Realism’ is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy” (ibid., 10). He finds a battle in the narration of magic realist texts. This battle is between two oppositional systems, each of which creates a different fictional world. These fictional worlds are deferred,