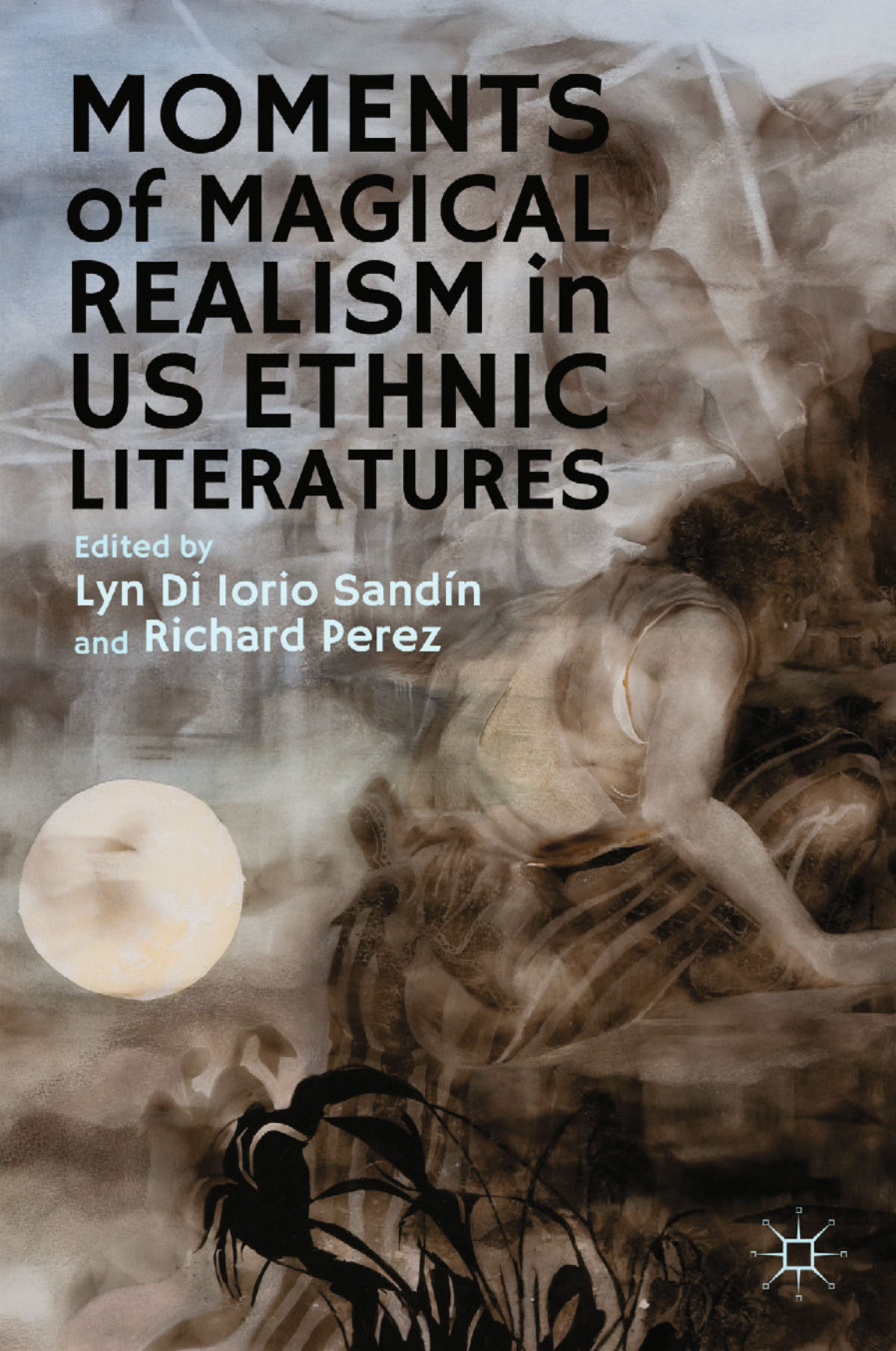
MOMENTS of MAGICAL REALISM in US ETHNIC LITERATURES

Edited by
Lyn Di Iorio Sandín
and Richard Perez



Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures

Also by Lyn Di Iorio Sandín:

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Also edited by Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez:

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For Xavier, Jose, Kevin, and Laura for
their belief in the magic of their minds.

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Contents

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INTRODUCTION

Tracing Magical Irruptions in US Ethnic Literatures

Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez

Moments of Magical Realism in American Ethnic Literatures examines how magical moments appear episodically in the otherwise realist fiction of contemporary US authors of so-called ethnic derivation—that is, authors who are members of the largest minority groups in the United States, determined either by ethnicity or national origin. The critical essays in this anthology shift away from privileging magical realism as a monolithic category in the literatures of the Americas. Yet the critics see that magical moments or irruptions deepen narrative meaning and signal breaks with the hegemonic constitution of everyday American reality, which often hides colonial histories of race, class, and sexuality behind a realism that promises a straightforward representation of the myriad situations and conditions of contemporary life in the United States. Thus many US ethnic narratives negotiate between an often fetishized magical realism and a realism ideologically coded by the conceit that it faithfully represents the world(s) it narrates. As US ethnic writers understand, these two positions equally conceal and flatten many of the social complexities inherent in the lives of US ethnic or minority subjects perceived as not having completely blended into the so-called melting pot. This anthology claims, therefore, that US ethnic or minority writers insert magical moments in otherwise realist texts to highlight certain spectral realms within our midst with, as Avery Gordon puts it, a "seething presence" that interrupts certain "taken-for-granted realities" that illuminate "that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life."[1] Consequently, to say that a given text contains magical realist moments, or even to say that it contains a ghost, differs from saying it is a work of magical realism. The subject apprehends the almost fleeting effect, or moment, as "magical." The magical realist moment, effect, or irruption, then, represents a place of both opacity and illumination in an otherwise realist text where a forgotten or repressed history or discursive formation intrudes or appears for the US subject in a manner that is

catalytic. Our critical approach on these magical, nonrealist moments or effects focuses on the work of writers from the largest ethnic and national origin groups in the United States, such as Latino, African American and Asian American writers, as well as other significant writers who are members of American minority groups, such as Native Americans, Jewish Americans and Iranian Americans. Although we do not consider all US "ethnic" or "minority" groups here, we do address most of those whose work delves in such magical realist effects.

This compilation brings together groundbreaking essays by both established experts on magical realism and figures in US ethnic and trans-American literatures—as well as younger rising literary theorists interested in exploring the diversity of texts that lie just outside the bounds of realism. Although there have been many critical works that focused on magical realism—and some famous anthologies that brought together the best global criticism on the mode—there has never been an anthology that explored nonrealist moments and tendencies in works written mostly from a US minority or ethnic perspective. Because the book's focus is on the confluence of nonrealist literary effects and texts written by US ethnic writers, many (although not all) of the critics in this anthology also actually come from these backgrounds.

Most works that deal critically with magical realism, be they anthologies or single-author texts, are concerned with the history of the development of the term and with defining exactly what magical realism is. The definitive anthology on magical realism *Magical Realism: History, Theory, and Community*, edited by Wendy Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora,[2] details the history of the term and offers different definitions, ranging from its first use in German postexpressionism to its famous Latin American formulations to finally a more global perspective. The most recent anthology on magical realism *A Companion to Magical Realism*, edited by Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang,[3] brings the focus on magical realism to the work of new writers, but like Faris and Parkinson Zamora's book, it retains a focus that is global. This is laudable in terms of showing how vibrant the mode is, but it does not examine the mode in great depth as a vital presence in the United States. The first anthology ever to evaluate US ethnic literatures is *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*, edited by Jesus Benito, Ana María Manzanas, and Begoña Simal-González,[4] whose essay on Asian American literature graces this anthology. However, many of the writers on whom it focuses—Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, Gloria Naylor, and Amy Tan—are writers whose work we believe features the breaks and irruptions we just described—for example, the past into the present—but who do not create texts that are magical realist in the style of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, *The Kingdom of This World* by Alejo Carpentier, or *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo, the primary Latin American examples of magical realism. Interestingly most of the just-named US minority authors themselves have often stressed in repeated ways that they are either emphatically, or largely, NOT magical realist writers. The fact that *Uncertain Mirrors* does not address the divergence between Latin American magical realism and the type of magically

inflected realism evident in the work of US ethnic writers is a flaw in an otherwise admirable work of criticism.

A critical sensitivity to magical effects, we argue, offers uncanny entries into the layered consciousnesses of minority, ethnic, and postcolonial subjects in the United States, whose psychic recesses are often compulsively concealed under the facades of systems of power such as capitalism, colonial histories, and social marginalization. If in their most general sense magical irruptions are horrific and seductive residual manifestations of socially unconscious forces, it is the mandate of fiction, and all New World artistic production, to conjure these invisible presences and translate them into a narrative form. In the New World, then, artistic production becomes a body or receptacle possessed in a sense that refers to the syncretic Afro-Caribbean religious concept of being "mounted," or inhabited, by the ghostly content of race, class, and gender. Hidden stories and erased memories emerge in the imagination of minority writers in the Americas like a "flash of the spirit,"[5] to use Robert Farris Thompson's phrase, imposing their narratives on those initiated writers and readers, creating in these spectral encounters what Margarite Fernández Olmos calls "spirited identities."[6] Implied here is a very particular reading and writing process that taps into an initiated hermeneutics sifting through the density of experience to recall history-histories-stories.[7] An attunement to spectrality, as this study shows, requires a very particular sensibility, an openness to, as Toni Morrison puts it, "invisible things" that are "not necessarily 'not-there.'"[8] Thus fiction, New World writers teach us, is where the ghostly and magical images and voices emerge, develop, appear, and speak.

Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures recognizes that while magical realist, supernatural, and gothic effects, figures, and moments may appear in a text, the text may not necessarily be a fully nonrealist text. One of our claims is that often such texts are erroneously categorized as "magical realist" when, in fact, what they mainly display are momentary yet very significant *irruptions* of nonrealist tendencies into a realist text. We take the phrase "irruptions" from the Caribbeanist critic Édouard Glissant's influential and rich work *Caribbean Discourse* in which he discusses how multiple, and sometimes contradictory, literary effects exist in texts by Caribbean or minority writers. According to Glissant, this reflects the fact that these writers are experimenting "all at once" with this multiplicity of literary techniques and thus practicing a principle of "Diversity" that spreads "through the dynamism of communities."[9] This notion of diversity emerges against the "sublimated difference" of "Sameness, which is ultimately saturated by sheer historical complexity and like a liquid overflowing its vessel, has everywhere released the pent-up force of Diversity."[10] This process describes the irruptive impact of magical moments in US ethnic literatures. For pent up within the realism of a narrative is a traumatic kernel that effectively curves the space of fictional description and tears at the very fabric of its form to reveal a series of identificatory, social, and historical meanings released through a seismic irruption and interruption, providing a deeper understanding of a violence otherwise covered over, contained, repressed or dismissed. Thus the turn to an imagery and vocabulary of so-called magic calls attention to an incomprehensible

or difficult-to-approach aspect of reality that must be rendered in different terms so the diversity of experience colored by a history of violence is represented not by a consistently magical or realist portrayal, but deformed by irruptive moments indicative of terrible colonial truths underlying the nature of New World realities and appearing in unexpected moments and locations.

For Glissant, Caribbean and minority texts often "irrupt into modernity"[11] or experience irruptions because they have not been able to pass through the longer period of development more typical of older literary traditions, such as European ones. As a result, they are forced to compress multiple thematic concerns into one narrative work. Glissant explains, "They must include all at once struggle, aggressiveness, belonging, lucidity, distrust of self, absolute love, contours of the landscape, emptiness of the cities, victories, and confrontations."[12] This confluence creates a narrative tension, a set of contradictory impulses that signal an othered presence. In this sense, US ethnic literatures reopen wounds to emphasize a historical dimension and advance through a "polyphony of dramatic shocks, at the level of conscious and unconscious, between incongruous phenomena or 'episodes' so disparate that no link can be discerned."[13] Through momentary and infrequent "dramatic shocks" of magic, US ethnic writers expose a fundamental discontinuity in communal versus institutional memory, bringing to the fore the violent foundations of social life. It is as if the shock of magic lies in the revelation that reality, as is, is an insufficient barometer of lived experience. No, there is something else, some other meaning that a smooth realistic surface hides. For that, which surface order and logic belie, is almost erased; thus invisible presences encountered in US ethnic literature through a fictional sixth sense tune in to the sensuous incongruities accumulated in time and space. Dramatic shocks of magic are irruptions of perception and reveal a sensitivity to ineffable signs neatly organized within realism, which rub against each other, creating a spark or short circuit of truth that forces its way into the narrative with epiphanic potency.

In this sense, the writers analyzed in this study turn to magical irruptions as informative moments of knowledge production that help them decipher the traumatic traces and symbols that have been veiled from social and historical view. The minority or postcolonial writer in the United States accesses this alternative ontology through a hermeneutic and phenomenological sixth sense that experiences itself in a hallucinatory, dissociated, and out-of-body manner. It is what Toni Morrison will call, for example, "playing in the dark"—that is, imaginative forays into "the corners of consciousness" where unexpected presences provide "a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom."[14] This socially symbolic dimension is an imaginative response to brutal social and historical marginalization, eliciting spectralized levels of subjectivity. The ethnic American subject, then, is haunted doubly: historically, by an inscrutable past that he or she must learn to read through the hints and fragments that remain, and socially, through his or her own ontological location in the Real where s/he is rendered ghostly by violent and systemic exclusions. It is these tensions, unbearable and unabsorbable, that give rise to narrative irruptions in ethnic American literatures.

The work of fiction, as Cathy Brogan argues, is to translate these magical effects into a knowledge-producing form of fiction. Brogan states, "The saving movement from reenactment to enabling memory is represented as a movement from traumatic silence into language. Through acts of narrative revision—which are often presented as acts of translation, linguistic or cultural—the cycle of doom is broken and the past digested. Translation functions like an exorcism because it frames cultural inheritance, rendering the past in the terms of the present."[15]

In October 1988, Morrison delivered a talk at the University of Michigan outlining what constituted a "black" work, though her comments could be extended to US ethnic writers in general. Her analysis responded to many of the canonical arguments taking place in the late 1980s. Morrison's focus moved from literature and its place in the academy to spectral forms of history and storytelling. This shift is evident in her title choice for the talk, which she said was initially "Canon Fodder" and ultimately became "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." For Morrison, the phrase "Canon Fodder" is suggestive of a constituitive violence underlying the seemingly neutral debates linking aesthetics to historical phenomena. First, the phrase "Canon Fodder" "reminded" her of "young men—black or 'ethnics' or poor or working class—who left high school for the war in Vietnam and were considered by war resisters as 'fodder.'"[16] In this sense, literary fodder also echoes a political "something," the war, dead bodies, and protestors hidden behind the tempered ideological language of the state. The instrumentality of the word "fodder" allows the state to play out a necropolitics, as Achille Mbembe has put it, for "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die."[17] This sense of power, Morrison continues, is found in the etymology of the first word in the phrase "Canon Fodder," which means "tube, cane, or cane-like, reed" and "body of law, body of rules, measuring rod": the image reflecting the "boom of power announcing" the "officially recognized set of texts."[18] And I want to add that this "boom of power" also has a historical dimension, announcing what and how archives should be approached and read. What is officially "recognized" is not just a "set of texts" but also a set of specified memories, narratives, and hermeneutics. In the archive, the power to decide "who must die" and the power to interpret (or what Edward Said called the "permission to narrate") ideologically combine to elide "undigestible" events. In this violent exchange, the ethnic Other is rendered socially dead and often conceals within his or her consciousness "eaten"—that is, suppressed—histories, knowledges, and populations. This is why Morrison changes the essay's title from the more realistic "Canon Fodder" to the magical phrasing "Unspeakable Things Unspoken." Highlighting the unspeakable and the unspoken calls for an imaginative intervention by US ethnic literatures into the ideologically layered language of race, ethnicity, and nationality, effectively unlocking an unspeakable ontology and an unspoken history through irruptions of magic.

US ethnic and minority writers recuperate and access these events and moments through the imaginative power of their fiction. Thus, as Morrison

argues, "canon building" is inextricably linked to "national defense" and "empire building," which in turn connects back, in an enclosing circularity, to issues "of criticism, of history, of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, and the recuperations of the humanistic imagination."[19] At the heart of such an enormous productivity are unspeakable and unspoken presences. A historical presence not necessarily chronicled but left over to be interpreted and imagined by US ethnic artistic endeavors and "serious scholarship."[20] Where must such an effort begin? Where is its "point of entry?" "What intellectual feats" have to be performed by the author and critic to extrapolate this seething historical and social presence? For Morrison, the opacity suggested by absent presences is where ethnic writers must find magical traces of themselves. She argues,

> We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; that a void may be empty but not be a vacuum. In addition certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighborhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. Looking at the scope of American literature, I can't help thinking that the question should never have been "Why am I, an Afro-American, absent from it?" It is not a particularly interesting query anyway. The spectacularly interesting question is "What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that performance had on the work?" What are the strategies of escape from knowledge? Of willful oblivion? . . . The exploration I am suggesting is, how does one sit in the audience observing, watching the performance of Young America, say, in the nineteenth century, say, and reconstruct the play, its director, its plot, and its cast in such a manner that its very point never surfaces? Not why. How?[21]

The essays in this anthology trace the study of presences "not necessarily 'not-there.'" The "oblivion" of ethnic otherness is willfully enacted in the United States' very historical portrayal of itself, in its national and social tenets (freedom, democracy) that place whiteness as the symbolic expression of these ideals. Whiteness, in this sense, is the universal marker of a being whose enlightened constitution lies in itself—an impossible conflation of ideals and flesh, knowledge and morality, ontology and history. Interestingly, for Morrison, America is "young" not because, as Ralph Waldo Emerson argues, we live in the influential shadows of European culture, but because it marginalizes "Diverse" segments of its own culture. Emerson's ambivalent obsession with Europe is juxtaposed to his active turning away from Africa and other parts of the Americas.[22] The result is a surplus presence of whiteness that must be described in the same language Morrison uses to describe black absence: whiteness is "so stressed, so ornate, so planned" that its presence aims to "arrest us with intentionality and purpose." It attempts to "escape" the contamination of knowledge by presenting itself as the exemplary embodiment of the human. Enter, in this "performance" of race, the specter—not of Hamlet's father, as Jacques Derrida has it, nor of Europe as Emerson fears, but of blackness, brownness, yellowness, redness, and all the color

gradations and ways of being that are sublimated by whiteness. Enter, moreover, another conceptual understanding and location where archival events happen and storytelling functions as an imaginative corrective of history. In the construction of "Young America," the "void" of history is populated with "invisible things," "unspeakable" events, and "unspoken" stories. Perhaps the very point of ethnic literatures is to locate certain pressure points that tap into invisible social depths so as to elicit and bring to the surface artifacts of knowability. These spectral pressure points (or dis/joints) are those locations in the national body that give, bend, and contort the veiled poses of authority.

For Morrison, imagination and the past merge into a convoluted process of rememory. Rememory begins from a fundamental disbelief in the linearity of time. As her protagonist Sethe describes it,

> I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened . . . Someday you will be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who was never there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you."[23]

History, image, and memory form, outside of the tenets of traditional or archival time, the presence of pictures engraved into the landscape by degrees of intensity. In this sense, a rememory is an unintended integration of invisible "places" and events into an active consciousness. Morrison is not talking about a site focused on an event, as Alain Badiou conceives of it, where the empirical truthfulness of a historic event transforms those who come in contact with it, getting them, by its sheer force, to follow its social consequences.[24] In *Beloved*, the image or "thought picture" is an unconscious connection that alters or bumps the subject out of the now and intermixes it with the nonarchived and nonrealist history of place. The event and place (of "something," of slavery, reservations, colonial wars, and diasporas) repeats itself, touching and infiltrating the being of those who exist in its perpetual presence: "The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there waiting for you." For Morrison, then, rememory impels one to "reconstruct the world these remains imply"[25] through an "imaginative act" "to yield up a kind of truth."[26] As she argues, "feelings . . . accompany the picture," making visible and unspoken a historical nervous

system, in Michael Taussig's sense, where history reveals itself not just through "thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning" but through "awe and reverence and mystery and magic."[27] The phenomenology of magical irruptions, of the historical pictures that bump, without warning or pretext, into those in their midst, creates a "nervous condition," a heightened sensitivity, accessed through the act of writing itself. Taussig compares this ineluctable relation of writing and magic to historical nerves:

> Those who have had to abandon that sort of magic are left with a different wondering; namely how to write the Nervous System that passes through us and makes us what we are—the problem being, as I see it, that every time you give it a fix, it hallucinates, or worse, counter your system with its nervousness, your nervousness with your system. As far as I'm concerned, and I admit to going slow with these NS matters, this puts writing on a completely different plane than hitherto conceived. It calls for an understanding of the representation as contiguous with that being represented and not as suspended above and distant from the represented . . . that knowing is giving oneself over to a phenomenon rather than thinking about it from above.[28]

Being and knowledge of traumatic histories are not an archival supposition but an openness to certain "phenomenon" wherein a sixth sense, a New World nervousness, signals the imminent arrival of a magical sensibility, whose irruptive presence forces us to be attentive to a "completely different plane than hitherto conceived."

Perhaps the question, as Gayatri Spivak has rightly claimed, is not who will speak but who will listen?[29] Magical irruptions in ethnic literatures shift the emphasis of authority from the unitary speaker to those who are receptive, who listen to and feel what Leslie Marmon Silko has called "howls for justice,"[30] the echoes and incongruities embedded in national realities. Magic in this sense is indicative of a foreign element and mode of perception. What is foreign or strange or hidden sits at the center of New World histories, offering in Gloria Anzaldúa's words, "a new consciousness."[31] For identity in the Americas begins with a series of questions suggested by the magical irruptions, foreign sights, and ghostly appearances, which the writers who are the focus of this anthology are fictionally concerned with. Queries that make the boundaries of the self tremble: Who or what are you? What forms of knowledge does magic propose? How will we coexist? What is our future? That ghostliness, that foreignness in the American who hears and responds to the magical summoning him or her to both the past and the future, is the subject of this book.

There are 13 contributors in this anthology. The anthology is organized into four parts: Part I: "Traumatic Inheritances: The Psychic Life of Magic"; Part II: "Sensory Irruptions; Magical Sensibilities"; Part III: "Prophetic Practices; Mythic Knowledges"; and Part IV: "Antinomies: Magic, Memory, and Space." The anthology begins with coeditor Lyn Di Iorio Sandín's essay "Trauma, Magic, and Genealogy," in which she yokes together magical realism and trauma theory, two modes of literature and of reading literature that have been compared by only

one other critic.[32] To trauma theory's idea that the traumatized only begin to heal when they can tell the story of their trauma to others, she adds the notion that it is often precisely the presence of the magical that reveals that a story about psychic trauma is being, or needs to be, told. In this sense, magical realism is the sign of discursive formations long repressed and exhibits features that subsist only in traumatic memory and cannot be fully reconstructed. Moments of magical realism, then, are the traces of these lost, forgotten, or suppressed discursive formations. She also looks at the function of the magical in novels such as the Puerto Rican American's Dhalma Llanos-Figueroa's *Daughters of the Stone* and Caribbean American author Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* to show how subjective and gradual genealogies and reconstructions of pasts and presents filled with psychic trauma can be set in motion by a spectral figure, which observers tell themselves could not have been real, and an object such as a stone that releases dreams, visions, and acts of magic.

Caroline Rody's essay "Jewish Post-Holocaust Fiction and the Magical Realist Turn" argues that magical moments in contemporary Jewish American fiction serve "the imaginative will to reanimate buried histories, to memorialize and even resurrect the dead." Her essay contends that in contemporary Jewish American fiction, a recent turn to magical realism coincides with a profound, imaginatively generative turn to the Jewish past. Departing from realist plots of assimilation to engage in a quest for origins, writers including J. S. Foer, Joseph Skibell, Steve Stern, and Nicole Krauss use literary magic in ways consonant with, yet distinct from its use by postcolonial and other ethnic writers. Modern Jewish fiction, Rody argues, has long drawn on the magic and miracles of Jewish folklore, scripture, and mysticism. Though positioned quite differently from magical realism's practitioners in the "third," decolonizing world, assimilated, middle-class Jewish American writers influenced by magic's global rise assert a kindred "view from the fringe of dominant European cultures," and use magic, too, "to express . . . a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement."

In "Flying to Save Her Life: Bad Luck, Bad Choices, and Bad Mothers in Gina B. Nahai's *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*," Ibis Gómez-Vega shows how the Iranian American Nahai uses moments of magical realism and the flawed relationships of mothers and daughters to create a textured and multigenerational story of loss and betrayal. Throughout the novel, Gómez-Vega contends, Nahai examines how women play a prominent role in the oppression of women even when they are themselves oppressed as women within their community and as members of a small Jewish community restricted to a ghetto in Iran, a Muslim country. The women in Nahai's novel strike out against other women, especially their daughters, for no apparent reason, and very few escape the sorrow created by a mothering so uncharacteristically lacking in sympathy that girls must develop their own coping mechanisms to escape it. Magic, in the form of women sprouting wings and flying away, provides an escape for the embattled daughters of mothers who harm their own offspring, even if generations of bad luck, bad choices, and bad mothering leave their mark on the women who must live down the curse of the women who leave.

In Part II, "Sensory Irruptions; Magical Sensibilities," coeditor Richard Perez explores how a New World aesthetics is born by attaching itself to the negative—that is, the productive possibility that arises out of painful experiences, not only as fodder for the production of art, but as a way of envisioning an alternate or magical real future. In Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the reader, Perez argues, is confronted by a hemispheric curse that acts as a ruthless agent of destruction. This curse, embodied in the novel by Rafael Trujillo, the brutal dictator of the Dominican Republic, emerges out of a history of violence, from the plantation to present-day militarism, and comes to represent a predatory masculinity, which infects and deforms the social fabric. This violent backdrop informs a set of close readings of the novel's two main characters Hypatía Belicia Cabral and Oscar Wao. If violence pervades their lives, barring the possibility of love, then what remains of their tragic circumstances is magically documented for posterity. It is in the written (as magical) that a "zafa" or counterspell emerges. This essay, titled "Flashes of Transgression: The Fukú, Negative Aesthetics, and the Future in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz," argues that Díaz confronts the curse by establishing an aesthetics steeped in the negative, thereby delineating, through the act of writing, a vision of the future.

In her essay "Searching for Rhythm and Freedom: African American Magical Realism and the Creation of a Home Country," Angela Francis argues that political critique, tied to the appreciation of one's culture and the folk, is often found in magical realism, where social and political motivations lie beneath the disorienting glimmer of the magical. She finds in magical realism a desire for the existence of a "separate raced space," which celebrates the grotesque and carnivalesque. Examining texts such as Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Ralph Ellison's "A Coupla Scalped Indians," and stories in Touré's *The Portable Promised Land*, she argues that this space, which lays "like a palimpsest over the US landscape," constitutes an African American "Our America" (generated from writer and Cuban patriot Jose Martí's rich notion) that enables African Americans, disempowered by Jim Crow and segregation, to reassert themselves as agents through the magic of artistic self-expression and self-fashioning in ways that the American mainstream cannot control or subvert.

Begoña Simal-González, one of the authors of U*ncertain Mirrors,* has written an essay on the intersections between magical realism and Asian American literature. In her essay, Simal-González traces the different types of magical realism in Asian American texts, including those written during the ethnic revival of the 1970s and later novels by Amy Tan, Alvin Lu, and Karen Tei Yamashita. In her exploration of magical realist moments in those texts, she uses William Spindler's taxonomy to show how these works exemplify the metaphysical, anthropological, and ontological types of magical realism. According to Simal-González, while most magical realist fiction written by Asian American writers (most conspicuously Tan's novels) falls under the rubric of "anthropological magic realism," following Spindler's typology, Simal-González contends that this is not always the case and that a dangerous simplification (of an essentialist nature) underlies such

an approach, the same simplification that has plagued the work of Latin American and postcolonial practitioners of magical realism and which accounts for the fact that some of those writers have either condemned or shunned the label "magical realist" in recent times.

In the book's third section, "Prophetic Practices; Mythic Knowledges," one of the pioneers in magical realism criticism, Wendy Faris, coeditor of the groundbreaking and seminal anthology on magical realism *Magical Realism: History, Theory, Community*, mentioned previously, and the author of *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*,[33] pursues the figure of the shaman across texts by US ethnic and Latin American writers. The essay, titled "'We, the Shamans, Eat Tobacco and Sing': Figures of Shamanic Power in US and Latin American Magical Realism," points to the similarities between the shamanic power to bridge the gap between empirical reality and mystical worlds and the similar ability of magical realism to bridge realities. For Faris, magical realist narrative resembles the activities of a shaman who bridges the world of everyday community life and that of the spirits to whose realm s/he is imagined to journey in search of special power. Therefore, magical realism as a genre is "shamanistic." As Faris argues, it is the sense of "interworldly congress" that unifies the practice of shamanism and the narrative mode of magical realism. In this context she discusses several figures of shamanic power in US and Latin American magical realist fiction, including Macandal and Ti Noël in Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*, Susana San Juan in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, the narrators of Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl" and Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, Melquíades in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Toto and Joel in García Márquez's story "Light Is Like Water," Denver in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, la Loca and Caridad in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*, and the title figure in Téa Obreht's story "The Tiger's Wife" (which is now a novel). To analyze magical realism in this way, she contends, implicitly places it within ancient traditions in both Europe and America, illustrating common cultural elements as well as explaining some of its tenacity and power in contemporary fiction.

Lori Burlingame's essay "Mythic Realism, Dreams, and Prophecy in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*" posits that although the dreams of Native American characters seem to be a momentary disruption in an otherwise realistic text, the dreams are linked to traditional Native American stories. So both the natural and what Westerners call the supernatural are one in Native American ideologies. James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* chronicles the struggle for personal and cultural survival faced by Charging Elk, a young Oglala Sioux man who visits Marseille, France in 1889 as part of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, and is hospitalized with influenza, mired in senseless bureaucracy, and unable to leave France for 16 years. With the exception of Charging Elk's flashbacks to his youth in America, Welch's novel follows a linear, realistic plot progression. However, through Charging Elk's dreams about the Ghost Dance and the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee and his recollections of Bird Tail's dream about the return of the buffalo, the novel introduces elements of mythic realism and prophecy. The presence of these dreams in the novel illustrates Charging Elk's spiritual connections

to his people at home. Taken together, Charging Elk's and Bird Tail's dreams function as prophecy and offer hope for the survival of the buffalo and the Oglala people and their traditions, even in the midst of assimilation.

Allison Brown's contribution nicely supplements Burlingame's article. "Blood Re(a)d: Native American Literature and the Emergence of the Mythic Real" points to the way Native American writers and critics have preferred to discuss Native American literature as mythic realism, largely ignoring the links between American Indian or Native American literature and literatures from elsewhere in the postcolonial world, particularly Latin America. She argues that the supernatural moments in several works by Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko and Sherman Alexie often take the form of a spectral Indian figure or the specter of an Indian past in American writings both by *and* about Native Americans. This literary figuration of Native Americans and their writings as ghostly or otherworldy is prevalent throughout American literature, from the colonial era to the present, and erupts whenever Native peoples and issues come to the forefront of the mainstream American national consciousness, whether through the direct political action of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries or through the Westward colonization centuries prior. The dual classification of Indian texts as both Native American and magical/mythic realist links them with other postcolonial texts from around the world while simultaneously placing them within a pan-Americas tradition of hybridized, myth-based oral and literary culture.

The book's fourth and final section is called "Antinomies: Magic, Memory, and Space." In "Lifting 'the Weight of the Continent': Magical Realism on the North American Landscape," Shannin Schroeder, herself the author of an excellent and important book on magical realism called *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas*,[34] argues that the Native American writer Thomas King, the Mexican American Ana Castillo, and the Canadian Thomas Kroetsch formulate a new North American magical realism wherein "the supernatural reveals both the actions of and *upon* the margins throwing off the stranglehold of Old World sensibilities." She contends that the magical realism of the United States and Canada frequently manifests itself as an extension of the "Other" of Western culture and society, as illustrated by the revision of accepted religious, historical, and even supernatural beliefs by authors Thomas King, Ana Castillo and Robert Kroetsch, whose texts are inhabited by a wide spectrum of marginalized peoples. In making use of magical realism, King, Castillo, and Kroetsch, offer comparativists an opportunity to uncover new ideas about what "Americanness," borders, frontiers, and magical realism signify. According to Schroeder, Kroetsch and King reinvent a frontier ripe with settlers and cowboys and Indians who invert the order of the knowable, mapped West; while Castillo and Kroetsch translate the border into a realm where the supernatural can challenge the assimilative tides of religion or the brutal realities of an uninviting cultural or physical landscape. Ultimately, Schroeder argues, magical realist literature allows revisions that make powerful statements about North America as both the First World and as "Othered." For Schroeder, these New World/postcolonial experiences originate in the American West.

Donald Reilly's essay "*Mama Day*: Where Gothicism and Magical Realism Meet" uses descriptions of the African American Gothic and magical realism to examine how Gothic tropes are appropriated by Gloria Naylor, an African American writer, in order to test the "nature and limits of the knowable." As Reilly notes, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* focuses on two major spaces: New York City and Willow Springs. Willow Springs is a mysterious place, a barrier island that exists off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina but claimed by neither. The inhabitants of Willow Springs pay no state taxes, and do not vote in state elections but do vote in national ones. It is an island that is connected to the mainland by the most tenuous of bridges, one that has to be rebuilt after severe storms. Because of it nebulous existence, Willow Springs is an example of an alien world that "irrupts into modernity," in Glissant's phrase, through the actions of Cocoa, another important character in the novel and a native of Willow Springs. This essay explores the dynamics of the meeting of symbolic spaces, and the role played therein by gothic and magical realist elements that aid Naylor's writing against white American hegemony.

Román de la Campa's essay "Latinos and Magic Realism: Promised Land or Convoluted History" argues that despite the derisive arguments against magical realism by the Chilean-born writers Roberto Bolaño and Alberto Fuguet, magical realism still persists in the dream-like atmospheres of Bolaño's and US Latino writer Junot Díaz's work. De la Campa addresses both the ideological limits of magical realism and its literary potentialities in what he specifies as the "nonreal," where imaginative forces take into account the "the flow of the unintelligible." In this sense, magic irrupts, almost casually, into the narratives, emerging against the very will of the narrations themselves. So despite the authors' resistance to magic, the trace of magic nonetheless impacts the symbolic economy of their fiction and infects the way the texts makes meaning. Additionally, de la Campa also notes that, although the celebrated Bolaño is not a US ethnic writer, his most ambitious works, *2666* and *The Savage Detectives*, focus on towns in the Sonora desert between the United States and Mexico and on the murdered bodies of brutalized women found there. In this sense, de la Campa's essay provides an excellent conclusion to the collection, as it interrogates both the nature of nonreal literary irruptions and the borders circumscribing US ethnic writers.

Ultimately, *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures* shows that writers in the United States who explore ethnicity often incorporate moments of magic in order to reanimate the buried, suppressed, forgotten, or not well understood histories of Native Americans, African Americans, US Latinos, Jewish Americans, and others, finally finding an idiom different from traditional Latin American magical realist texts to tell contemporary traumatic stories, rememory (in Morrison's phrase) the dead, and from the gaps, fragments, absences, and ruins recreate new histories and subjective genealogies and point toward a more hopeful future. In its deepest sense, this project on magical moments and irruptions unabashedly reveals a denial in the historical, social, and imaginative records. It therefore is concerned, at its root, with justice. As Clinton in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* puts it, "Yes, the Americas were full of furious, bitter spirits; five hundred years

of slaughter has left the continents swarming with millions of spirits that never rested and would never stop until justice had been done."[35] In the literature of US ethnic writers, these spirits are housed and transposed through stories so that their erased images, murmurings, and actions can be glimpsed, heard, listened to, and acted on.

Notes

1. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 8.
2. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: History, Theory, and Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
3. Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang, eds., *A Companion to Magical Realism* (Suffolk, UK: Tamesis Books, 2010).
4. Jesus Benito, Ana María Manzanas, and Begoña Simal-González, *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures* (New York: Rodopi, 2009).
5. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), xiii–xvii.
6. Margarite Fernández Olmos, "Spirited Identities: Creole Religions, Creole/US Latina Literature and the Initiated Reader," in *Contemporary US Latino/a Literary Criticism*, ed. Lyn Di Iorio and Richard Perez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 63–92. As Olmos puts it, "For the initiated or privileged reader" the spectral elements of the story stand out and become clues to "another—spiritual—reality."
7. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989), 61–95.
8. Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 123–63, 136.
9. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 98.
10. Ibid., 99.
11. Ibid., 100.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 106–7.
14. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 6–7.
15. Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 10–11.
16. Morrison, "Unspeakable Things," 123.
17. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Mientjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11–40.
18. Morrison, "Unspeakable Things," 123.
19. Ibid., 132.
20. Ibid., 133.
21. Ibid., 136–37.
22. Ibid., 133–46.
23. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 35–36.
24. See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2005), 173–261.

25. Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 302.
26. Ibid., 307.
27. Ibid., 302.
28. Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10.
29. Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. S. Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59–60.
30. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 723.
31. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 99–113.
32. Eugene Arva in his laudable and comprehensive recent book, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011).
33. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004).
34. Shannin Schroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).
35. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 424.

PART I

Traumatic Inheritances

The Psychic Life of Magic

CHAPTER 1

Trauma, Magic, and Genealogy

Moments of Magical Realism in *Daughters of the Stone* by Dhalma Llanos-Figueroa and *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid

Lyn Di Iorio Sandín

Two modes of literature—and more particularly, of reading literature—have rarely been compared: trauma theory and magical realism. Particularities of postcoloniality and neocolonialism visited on peoples of Afro-Caribbean heritage in the islands and in New York can be examined by looking at magical realism from a new angle: traumatic realism, thereby underscoring that characteristics of trauma narratives are also features of magical realist texts, as is the case in *Daughters of the Stone* by Dhalma Llanos-Figueroa and *Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid.

In *Daughters of the Stone*, the traumatic effects of slavery are passed on from mother to daughter among a group of black Puerto Rican women and are mended by the New York descendant of the line and her recuperation of stories from the past through a family heirloom, a stone, which produces magical realist effects that include allowing women in the line to dream about their ancestresses, and other aspects of the past in Africa that intrude momentarily into the present.

From *Autobiography of My Mother*, I examine the fleeting but important magical realism manifesting itself in a figure who might or might not be an African goddess and the ambiguous results of her mysterious appearance.

I am interested in the effects and emotional charge of the object—the stone—and the mysterious figure—the lady in the water—that bring magical realism into these otherwise realist texts as momentary irruptions and ruptures. In both texts, magical realism manifests momentarily to indicate that certain infrequently encountered objects or events have a catalytic effect on those who've suffered a history of trauma, and the forgetfulness, dissociative, or fractured memory patterns that often accompany the traumatized. The magical moment

is a symptom of something larger—possibly a whole history—that subjects no longer remember—and which is now the social unconscious of the subject and, in these texts, the community. When the moments of magical realism irrupt, the subject—immersed in a present in which modernity has suppressed belief in what is now coded as the magical, may not recognize its catalytic importance. The importance instead is encoded strangely in brief, infrequent, and uncommon instances, figures, and objects—illuminating and mystifying, occluding and revealing alternate readings of history and community.

Trauma Theory and Literary Analysis

Trauma theory responds to the uncovering and naming of the experiences of continued psychic distress undergone by Holocaust survivors; colonial and postcolonial subjects; female survivors of physical abuse, rape, and incest; and survivors of war, in particular wars characterized by atrocities on a grand scale. Trauma theory also addresses psychic trauma on individual and collective levels. After the publication in 1996 of Cathy Caruth's now classic text *Unclaimed Experience*,[1] trauma theory became an accepted lens with which to examine literature. It is a particularly instructive way of thinking about literature because it stresses the therapeutic nature of the narrative—that is, the telling of the story of what happened as a way of better understanding the trauma and, also, as a way of possibly overcoming the most devastating effects of the trauma. Clinicians and researchers in the field of trauma distinctively contrast the mindset of the individual after he or she has experienced a traumatic event and the mindset of the individual after he or she has been able to work through the trauma and can tell a story about it.

In their essay "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," Bessel Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart note that from a clinician's perspective, for the posttraumatic subject "under extreme conditions existing meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate frightening experiences which cause the memory of these experiences to be stored differently and not be available for retrieval under ordinary conditions: it (the memory) becomes dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control."[2]

Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart use the term *dissociation*, borrowed from the work of Pierre Janet, one of the nineteenth-century predecessors of Freud and psychoanalysis, to describe the way in which traumatic memories are not available to regular memory functioning. Janet stressed narrative in his discussion of the effects of trauma on memory: "The subject is often incapable of making the necessary narrative which we call memory regarding the event: and yet he remains confronted by a difficult situation in which he has not been able to play a satisfactory part, one to which his adaptation had been imperfect, so that he continues to make efforts at adaptation."[3]

Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, and other theorists, building on the extraordinary work of Janet and, of course, Freud's monumental legacy, emphasize that the overwhelming experience that is trauma often cannot be integrated well enough into cognitive meaning schemes so that individuals can put it in narrative

relation to their other memories. He or she either cannot recall the experience or remembers fragments that are frightening and confusing.

Conversely, a traumatic memory is so overwhelming that it takes over completely and an individual comes back to it repeatedly in flashbacks and nightmares. In fact, as Caruth, working through Freud's insights, reiterates in the haunting introduction to *Unclaimed Experience*, an individual may find him or herself unwittingly in situations that recall the original trauma.[4] That is, the individual may find him or herself in the process of what trauma theorists call *reenactment*. This compulsion to reenact the original trauma puts the traumatized individual at risk for continued psychic trauma. Traumatic memory, then, tends to be fragmentary and repetitive, and tends to hold the full experience of the trauma at bay so that it ultimately is not well integrated into the rest of the individual's memory and experience. This happens because the traumatic experience is so difficult, painful, and often horrific, that it cannot be assimilated at once. In fact, as Freud and Caruth have pointed out, the reenactments of the original trauma may often serve to allow the individual to better understand the nature of the trauma. Dissociation, then, is a productive psychic strategy for those suffering from severe trauma, as it protects them from some of the damage of the original event, until they are able to work out a narrative about the trauma. Traumatic memory, according to Van Der Holk and Van Der Hart, is also inflexible and invariable, has no social component, and is addressed to no one. It is a solitary activity. As well, traumatic memory can create a state in traumatized individuals wherein they experience life in a kind of split reality. They live in the present but they also live in constant connection to the past traumatic event.

In individuals who are not victims of trauma, the ability to integrate present experiences with past memories essentially is the ability to create narrative memory. In therapeutic contexts, patients are geared toward integration of the dissociated traumatic event and the ability to finally create narrative out of the traumatic event. Inasmuch as the traumatic event can be recounted as a story from the teller to a responsive receiver, narrative memory, then, according to Van Der Holk and Van Der Hart, is a social act.

The presence of a receiver, a listener who can bear witness to the story of the trauma, is crucial, as Shoshana Felman has shown both in her commentaries on trauma narratives ranging from Holocaust survivor accounts to literature that represents traumatic events.[5] What becomes particularly clear in Felman's and Caruth's writing is that the story of trauma in some way depends on the presence of the listener or witness. Felman's provocative account of how her graduate seminar on trauma at Yale was thrown into a crisis simply through bearing witness to videotapes of Holocaust survivors also suggests that bearing witness to trauma allows the stories of trauma to be told through the listeners' willingness to experience a momentary wounding as they bear witness to stories of heart-rending traumatic events that befell other people.

Janet and others have pointed out that the healthy response to stress is mobilization of adaptive action. Janet went so far as to view memory itself as active. "Memory is an action: essentially, it is the action of telling a story."[6] It is narrative

memory that is therapeutic. Once the traumatized individual turns fragments into a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, and can tell the story in a social context to other people, the trauma starts "losing its power" over current experience.[7] For Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, the flexibility of memory is all-important. They note that it is crucial for victims of rape and other forms of overwhelmingly violent events to imagine having agency and being able to respond to the perpetrator.[8]

Here I'd like to note the distinction between the notions of individual and collective trauma. Individual trauma, according to Kai Erikson's essay "Notes on Trauma," is a wound to the psyche that breaks through the subject's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that the subject cannot react effectively to it. Erikson notes that, on the other hand, collective trauma is a blow to the fundamental structure of social life that damages the bonds uniting people and impairs their sense of collectivity. Because of its wide-ranging and diffuse nature, collective trauma may not have the sudden impact often associated with individual trauma. Its impact is more gradual and tends to affect a group of people who were once a community with the realization that their social body no longer exists as a means of support.[9] It must be recognized, however, that in certain communities, the notion of community itself may depend on an original trauma as one of the factors that created the community. So for example, for members of the African diaspora, the Middle Passage functions as an originary trauma by uprooting prior communities, and also as a locus of identity for a new imagined community. Likewise, for Puerto Ricans on the island and in New York, the four hundred year period of Spanish colonialism (which included genocide of the native populations in the Caribbean as well as enslavement of Africans) and the shorter period of colonialism under the United States become starting points for discussions about colonialism as a communal trauma for Puerto Ricans as well as locus points for a relatively new definition of community (a community marked by trauma).

If earlier social bodies no longer exist as a means of support, then the effort to create a narrative out of traumatic memory generates certain moments coded as "magical" that may serve to connect alienated and traumatized subjects to the rest of the sundered community and to a past history, even if many details about the past community have been forgotten.

Magical Realism and Trauma

The phrasing of the term "magical realism" posits that the literary mode it describes yokes contrary, even paradoxical, perspectives on the world.[10] In this equation, empiricism, with its emphasis on the independent existence of objects that can be perceived through observation, meets another vantage point whose conditions of belief frequently contradict realism and empiricism. The Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1949, tr. 1957) established the Latin American, and arguably the best known, variant of magical realism. Carpentier himself termed it "*lo real maravilloso americano*"[11]—not magical

realism but, in my extrapolation, "the marvelous real of the Americas." Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, and many critics interested in magical realism, have pointed out that the nonrealist perspective is frequently that of those who have experienced subjugation and colonialism, and that the realist, empiricist perspective is frequently that of those who are the colonizers and oppressors. Hence magical realist narratives are frequently stories that resist the philosophical conditions of master narratives. These classical magical realist narratives very often create a split between the perspectives of empiricism and the nonrealist perspective, but they also blur the boundaries between those split perspectives to show how contrary worldviews mix and affect each other.

In order to highlight what he perceived to be a mode that arose out of the unique collisions of the perspectives of conquistadors and native peoples, as well as black slaves and their descendants, and to differentiate the marvelous real from other nonrealist modes such as surrealism, Carpentier also emphasized that those who partake of the marvelous perspective really do believe in it: "To begin with, the phenomenon of the marvelous presupposes faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with the miracles of saints"[12] Carpentier's magical realism proposes that the denizens of the Americas, who believe in places, practices, and visions that outsiders view as "magic," see these things as the product of their specific perspectives and their faith in not just the magical manifestations but in their histories and contexts.

The *Kingdom of This World fe*atures Macandal, the historical leader of an early slave rebellion in colonial San Domingue or Haiti.[13] Macandal initially escapes his captors but is then recaptured and burned at the stake. The masters see that the man indeed burns at the stake, but the slaves, by contrast, "see" their leader escape ("The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves.").[14] They do not acknowledge that he is recaptured and executed at the stake.[15] Instead, inspired by their belief in the Afro-Caribbean religion of Voudoun, the slaves understand that Macandal metamorphoses into different animals. Instead of going to heaven, he stays with them as a spirit, capable of carnal incarnations—hence the title of Carpentier's book, which forcefully underlines the difference between Christianity, which tells believers to look forward to happiness after death in heaven and a different sense, stemming from Afro-Caribbean religious practice, that spiritual metamorphosis happens closer to home and closer to the human body in the earth where people have lived their lives.

One can read this moment through the lens of trauma theory as well. Macandal's escape causes pandemonium and confusion. This sense of confusion, and the fear in which the slaves live on a daily basis under French colonial slavery, adds to their psychic trauma. Additionally, once Macandal is caught and finally burned at the stake, many of the already psychically wounded slaves do not see their leader burn because they dissociate from the traumatic event. Ultimately, one can argue that they make a narrative about the event that enables them to live with some of its horrific effects, such as the folk story that Macandal

transformed into a bird or a butterfly and flew away and the powerful Voudoun belief that Macandal remained among his people as a helpful spirit inhabiting animals and human beings. It was this type of story that helped the Haitian slaves to start a later rebellion that led to the Haitian revolution. Additionally, the Afro-Caribbean religio-magical system of Voudoun highlights "possession," or the "mounting" of human believers by the "old" Gods from Dahomey as well as newer ones that date to the time of the Haitian revolution. In this sense, as Joan Dayan has brilliantly observed in *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, believers in Voudoun are frequently possessed not just by the gods but by historical characters and, in a sense, by history itself.[16]

Dissociation and other psychic responses related to trauma account for the folk and literary depictions of Macandal's death and protect the slaves from the most painful effects of the traumatic burning of their hero, thereby ensuring their survival. Ethnocentric readings of such folk tales, and of magical realism itself, might see the creation of an alternative "magical" narrative to be pathological, believing that the trauma victim cannot heal until the "real" event is integrated into narrative memory. By contrast, the stories of Macandal taking flight at the moment when he was to be burned at the stake—which is told in both Haitian folk tales as well as in Carpentier's seminal magical realist text—show how magical realism, which some contemporary critics read as escapist, responds to trauma in a distinct manner and can be the result of turning traumatic memory into narrative memory. Indeed, it's hard to think of a famous magical realist work, from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to *The Tin Drum* to *Beloved*, that is not about trauma, and catastrophic communal trauma at that.

Besides myself, only Eugene Arva, has written explicitly about the confluence of magical realism and trauma theory in his wonderfully comprehensive, detailed, and necessary study, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction*. Arva comes to a similar conclusion regarding magical realism's ability to represent traumatic experiences: "Through magical realist writing, the traumatic imagination transfers to narrative memory events that have been precluded from narrativization by trauma."[17] Arva's choice of words highlights the fact that the oppositional nature of the term and mode of magical realism reflects a similar, although not congruent, relationship between traumatic memory and narrative memory. The "magical" perspective shows that there is a point of view different from and oppositional to realism; however, both these perspectives coexist in a sometimes uneasy relationship and, taken together, often reflect the experience of non-Westerners, or the colonized, or women, or war veterans, or those who have had experiences that seem to put them beyond the bounds of "normal" reality.

Similarly, traumatic memory and narrative memory coexist in those who have experienced trauma; what lies beyond narrativization in realist and factual accounts of traumatic experiences can "transfer," in Arva's phrase, effectively and poetically to narrative memory with the help of a "magical" view of the event. If a traumatic event exceeds what can be expressed in a fact-based account, the traumatized individual can trust to dreams and imaginings that help flesh out what

memory may resist. Of course, this can be done by telling a realist story as well as a nonrealist story. Nonetheless, magical realism can aid in the construction of stories based on traumatic details that seem fantastical in and of themselves because they are so excessive. So the excessive violence of the burning of Macandal gives way to equally excessive accounts of his flight, not just by emphasizing that, incredibly, he escaped his bonds as he was about to be burned, but by recounting his metamorphoses into insects, gannets, and other creatures, which broadens his liberty in a world dominated by white men who wished to enslave and later murder him and other black and brown peoples. Magical realist imagery, then, often emphasizes a freedom beyond a boundary, and is especially productive for the imaginaries of the formerly enslaved and their descendants, the colonized, and anyone who has experienced psychic trauma.

In the next section, I examine two such instances in which an object, or a figure, fleetingly mobilizes magical realism, reflecting and deflecting a history of psychic trauma.

Vanishing Point: The Woman in the Water in *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*, features Xuela, the daughter of a Carib woman who dies in childbirth in the early twentieth century in Dominica, a small island in the eastern Caribbean with a history of occupation by most of the major colonial powers, including Spain, France, and Britain. The loss of her mother is a traumatic event that affects Xuela on the individual level and reinforces the collective trauma she and her fellow islanders suffer from, such as poverty, internalized racism, and alienation—all elements of a postcolonial traumatic syndrome that Xuela critiques, often corrosively, in her first-person narration.

There are several moments in the text that are emblematic of the islanders' internalization of colonial attitudes, and Xuela's resistance to colonization of the mind. Most of these have received critical notice. However, there is a moment in the text, which I have not seen examined in the now-solid critical commentary on the book. This event occurs as Xuela and her classmates are crossing a river near the point where it meets the sea as part of their customary sojourn to and from school. They suddenly see a woman in the water whose beauty is distinctly African and who is surrounded by luscious mangoes floating on the water. One of the schoolboys, whom Xuela describes as wearing the "male mask of heedlessness and boastfulness that [she has] come to know," swims out, in the arrogant way Xuela detests in island males, to grab the fruit and, possibly, the lady.[18] However, the beautiful lady moves away from the boy, and as he continues to swim toward her, she keeps moving further and further away, and he pursues her until he drowns. He disappears so completely even his body is never recovered. The woman too disappears into the water.

The woman in the water creates a polarizing effect among those who see her. The effect is similar to that created by the burning at the stake of Macandal in Carpentier's representation of it in *The Kingdom of this World*. The magical realist

narrative of Macandal's escape and metamorphosis into different animals has the effect of creating a more vibrant reality for the slaves, a world where the spirits of tortured and murdered slaves remain among their fellows in the guise of strange animals, objects, and signs. This belief in a different world, "*Guinée la-bas-en-eau*," or "Africa under the water" of the Voudoun belief system, creates a sense of strong community among the slaves to the extent that they are later able to start the Haitian revolution, as previously discussed. The masters believe the opposite, namely the real fact that Macandal burned; they lack access to the faith the slaves have in Macandal as a spirit that protects his community.

In Kincaid's book, however, the polarizing effect does not happen on black and white or slave versus master lines. Rather, the children who witnessed the event were all islanders of color. As Xuela notes in her narration, as adults the other islanders who witnessed the event recount this story with doubt, as if they are unsure that the event even happened, or, as Xuela suggests, because they no longer believe it: "I know of friends who witnessed this event with me and, forgetting that I was present, would tell it to me in a certain way, daring me to believe them . . . because they no longer believe what they saw with their own eyes, or in their own reality."[19] Unlike the slaves who see Macandal burn and whose account that he escaped his bonds becomes a narrative that helps the slaves survive the horrific event, and slavery itself, the early twentieth-century denizens of Dominica who saw the apparition of the lady in the water in effect deny "their own reality"—the magical, or in Carpentier's phrase, the marvelous real—and adhere to the realism of their colonizers. Xuela underlines that the belief in the apparition is indeed oppositional to that of the European colonizers in that it is the "belief of the illegitimate, the poor, the low," and bravely asserts both her resistance to the colonizers and her ability to believe in the reality of the colonized, former slaves, however strange, by believing in the seemingly fantastic figure of the woman in the water: "I believed in that apparition then and I believe in it now."[20]

Now the young boy's seduction to a death by drowning by swimming after a mysterious woman who comes out of the water and then disappears is clearly traumatic, so the difficulty the different members of the community experience in recounting the event is surely ascribable to the traumatic aftermath of the experience. In effect, the trauma of witnessing the boy's strange drowning and the even stranger appearance of the woman in the water combines with the social trauma of colonized minds that have been told all their lives that reality must always be described empirically and that authoritative knowledge about reality is held by European white people. The other adults eventually deny the reality of the event; that is, they deny the narrative of it and, instead, arguably still harbor traumatic memories. In affirming that she saw something happen that seems impossible by the empirical standards of the postcolonial Caribbean, Xuela, on the other hand, creates a rich and revealing narrative out of a traumatic event.

The death of Xuela's mother is pertinent here as Xuela projects onto the woman in the water ambivalent traits that she associates with her mother. That is, there are positive traits that Xuela associates with her mother, as an object

desired and revered; but there are negative traits as well since Xuela's mother has absented herself, and Xuela is angry about this, as she is angry about her father's coldness and his absence from her life. In fact, as a child, Xuela is cared for by a laundress who is not a relative and who is incapable of showing Xuela affection or tenderness. All the lack in Xuela's life may explain why the woman in the water is presented with ambivalent traits that are excessive. Her positive trait of beauty, for example, surpasses human beauty in Xuela's eyes: "She was a beautiful woman, more beautiful than any woman we had ever seen, beautiful in a way that made sense to us, not a European way: she was dark brown in skin, her hair was black and shiny and twisted into small coils all around her head"[21] What is negative about her is that she lures the boy who swims after her to his death. In this sense, she connects with Xuela's understanding of her mother as a figure who is not available for intimacy, because she is dead. Xuela's mother appears in a ghostly way only in dreams where Xuela can see just her feet as they disappear in the air above Xuela. The woman in the water is strange but is more corporeal for Xuela, striking her senses more emphatically than the dream images of her mother: "She opened her mouth and a strange yet sweet sound came out: it was mesmerizing; we stood and stared at her."[22] Most important of all, the woman in the water punishes the arrogant boy wearing the male mask of heedlessness and arrogance that Xuela also describes as belonging to her father, whose neocolonialist impulses Xuela claims often destroy the lives of the impoverished islanders. In this sense, the woman in the water is a kind of mother figure who punishes males whose behavior matches that of Xuela's father, whom Xuela distrusts. The woman in the water is a kind of fantasy born of trauma; but in the narrative told by Xuela, the woman is real within the world of the story.

In Kincaid, as in Carpentier, and to a certain extent García Márquez, the magical is associated with affirmative belief and faith. Xuela believes as strongly in the appearance of the woman in the water as the slaves do in Macandal's survival in *The Kingdom of this World*. And in Kincaid's book, as in Carpentier's, the magical is associated with a kind of naturalism that reflects organicity and authenticity. Macandal starts to develop as a Voudoun priest of great power when, after losing an arm in the grinders of a sugarcane mill, he starts to notice Caribbean animals and plants he had never seen before. The plants become the materials for his spell making and his concoction of the poisons that start his revolt. In *The Autobiography of My Mother*, the woman in the water's appearance is associated with nature and organicity as much as it is with magic, as she appears at the nexus of water and ocean and is surrounded by a bounty of mangoes. This also has an added Afro-Caribbean religio-magical valence, as in Afro-Caribbean religions this nexus is a sacred place, a place where magic can happen, since it brings together the waters of the river goddess Oshún, whose favorite fruit is the mango, with the domain of the patroness of the ocean, Yemayá.[23]

Xuela's narcissistic self-focus allows her to cope with the originary loss of her mother, as Laurie Vickroy and others have eloquently discussed.[24] Later in the book, in learning to value her body and the pleasure that her body can give her in masturbation or sexual encounters, Xuela cares and focuses attention on herself,

which demonstrates her willingness to love herself when few will (as the story shows that after her mother's death, as a child, Xuela receives very little care from her father and others). However, her narcissistic self-focus is such that Xuela also is unable to give unfettered love to anyone else and mistrusts others, especially when she sees that they continue in their neocolonial behavior patterns. Thus the woman in the water may be a kind of double for Xuela herself, a figure that collapses Xuela's qualities of beauty, seductiveness, and a kind of embracing of what others may perceive as negative—that is, a narcissistic self-focus. As well, the double in the water actively revenges herself against the arrogant archetype of the Caribbean male, represented by the boy, and thus does what Xuela would like to do, because Xuela, for all her critique in the book of arrogant or overprivileged males, only acts against them in a passive aggressive way, such as when she withholds love from her white husband to such an extent that she destroys him and their marriage. It is the apparition's capacity to act powerfully, even if destructively, that Xuela likes, as well as the fact that the woman in the water is beautiful in a way that is African, and thus is an emanation of the reality of the islanders and not the imposed values of the white colonizers. As such, despite the negative qualities of the apparition and the overall experience, Xuela embraces as being real and important what the other islanders experience as being unreal, confusing, and negative, while also recognizing that the apparition is magical: "That woman was not a woman; she was something that took the shape of a woman. It was almost as if the reality of this terror was so overwhelming that it became a myth, as if it had happened a very long time ago and to other people, not us."[25] As in Carpentier, the horrific event creates a mythical, magical story and also involves dissociation, especially of temporal features, as Xuela and the others, by Xuela's account, feel that the experience happened a very long time ago. Some of them take refuge in the protective powers of dissociation to the extent that they feel the event happened to other people and not themselves. Their dissociation allows them to cope with their feelings of terror and the idea that the woman in the water may not have been human.

However, in Kincaid's book, this moment of magic, interestingly enough, also contradicts the idea of magical realism as one way in which a traumatized community becomes stronger through the agency of a special type of storytelling. Instead, the appearance of the possible water goddess supports Xuela's own growing sense of being set apart from others, of being an individual who can see and process events that her traumatized community cannot process. However, her shift in the use of plural pronouns indicates a shift in her understanding of how she resembles the others. At first, she refers to the others who witnessed the event in the third person ("they") and thus with some distance, but then a sentence later she joins herself to the others by narrating in the first-person plural: "This is no longer without an explanation to me. Everything about us is held in doubt and we the defeated define all that is unreal, all that is not human, all that is without love."[26] Her self-inclusion in this community does not really make her feel committed to it; rather, it reflects her sadness and anger about its damaged nature, damage she recognizes in herself. So, contrary to the Macandal story in

Carpentier, the appearance of the woman in the water does not enable the community to trust itself as a force for positive change. What does happen is that Xuela recognizes her kinship with the negative features of the others.

Although Xuela remembers the apparition and the drowning more clearly than the others (or she says she does), she tenders an explanation for their inability to create a narrative out of the event by noting that the trauma that has disabled the others has also affected her, even though she, unlike the others, can create a narrative out of a traumatic past. She does so for herself and for the mother who died in giving birth to her, as she repeats constantly throughout the novel, like a litany that helps her in coping with her mother's death in childbirth. Repetition, of course, is a hallmark of traumatic memory, and Xuela's repetition of the fact of her primary loss is telling. It shows that she might be seeking for someone she can trust to listen to the story of her loss of her mother. However, we never see her actually tell the story of her loss to another character in the book; she only talks to the reader.

As pertains to the traumatic event regarding the woman in the water and the death of the boy, and despite her strongly stated belief in what happened, Xuela also seems unwilling and unable to share the specific story of her belief in the woman in the water with others on the island, a critical component, as I have discussed, in the narrativization of trauma. Her critique of the others as unwilling to believe what they themselves have seen and experienced is part of her larger critique of colonialism and its effects. She seems unable to see or admit that her own passivity is a problem inasmuch as she is unwilling to try to change the attitudes of the islanders through a dialogue, and the action of collaborative witnessing, in which she could emphasize that they have all seen something that, while difficult to explain with the educational tools passed down by the colonial masters, is indeed true to their lived experience and that she knows is true because she also saw it. If creative narrative memory is an action, and if talking about the event of trauma to engaged listeners is a crucial part of this action, then Xuela has not completed the action. This inability to complete the action of making a narrative by entering into a dialogue with the others seems to mark her not just as a victim of the historical debacle of colonialism but as one of those who decides purposefully to take a stance that distances her from the suffering of the community. If talking to others about the traumatic event can effect healing through a better understanding of the event and through the creation of a mutually reinforced belief system, then Xuela fails miserably at witnessing in the way that Felman describes how teaching itself can be like testifying, not just in the transmittal of knowledge, but in "making something happen."[27] Xuela omits mention of whether she had affirmed her belief in the appearance of the woman in the water to the others at any point. Such an omission also underscores her unreliability in narration, accusing the others of uncertainty and despair in recounting the story to her, but not telling us what her response was to them.

To be fair, this is also evidence of course that Xuela, like the others who saw the event, has not properly integrated the experience into narrative memory. The fact that she is speaking through dissociation and has created a magical realist

account suggests that she is still working to integrate the event, has indeed created a narrative, but has not reached the stage in which she can talk to the others about what she saw, as well as bear witness to what they saw. One of her coping strategies may be to choose not to speak to the others about her own private belief that what appeared in the water was not a woman, but a magical being taking the guise of a woman.

This moment of magical realism, the appearance of the woman in the water, which fails to generate among the observers a sense of a shared community in which positive action is possible, or a sense of faith and privileged revelation as Carpentier describes, is however exemplary in its episodic nature and its smallness. If magical realism irrupts here into the bleak and stark realism of the postcolonial Caribbean, this moment is also a rupture with magical realism. In fact, magical realism may be the significant reirruption of a discursive formation long repressed and subject to features that subsist only in traumatic memory and are, therefore, not fully reconstructible, even via revolution, as we can see in the trajectory of the Haitian revolution, an important subject of *The Kingdom of This World*. The appearance of the woman in the water is a moment in the Kincaid text where we see the sudden appearance of a past belief system rooted in African culture; a narrative of a community; of faith; of a female soothsayer of Macandal's stature; of the goddess Oshún, patroness of rivers, and of Yemayá, the Yoruba patroness of the ocean; the narrative of the meeting of Yemayá and Oshún at the sacred place where the river meets the ocean; the narrative, also, of Mami Wata, the deity of waters who combines traits of the African water goddesses with imagery of Asian snake charmers who performed spectacles in Europe in the early twentieth century and who has become a popular icon in postcolonial African and diasporic communities;[28] the narrative of Xuela as a spiritual healer; of Xuela as an obeah woman; of Xuela as witness to the stories of the others who saw the woman in the water; of Xuela as the supplicant to the mother of the waters who devours the boy whose "mask" of arrogance recalls the fact that Xuela's father, whom she identifies with neocolonialism, also wears this mask; and, finally, the narrative of Xuela's conversation with other islanders who respond with interest and belief to Xuela's story that she saw the apparition of the woman in the water. These form the irruptive formations that delimit the colonialists' discursive formations. All these stories irrupt in this moment, even as they also disappear. It is a rupture in the text in which we see the other possible stories that are not permitted birth, much as Xuela in the course of this novel does not permit herself to give literal birth. It is also a moment where a possible genealogy of Afro-Caribbean magical realist literature flickers and then disappears like the inability of Xuela and the other witnesses to the strange event to testify to each other's stories and thereby engender a proactive community.

The Puerto Rico That Never Existed: *Daughters of the Stone*

In *Daughters of the Stone* and *Autobiography of My Mother*, the women are traumatized because the heritage of the racialized master–slave relationship from the

days of slavery is acted out to some extent in their family relations—between mothers and daughters in the former book and between the father and his daughter in the latter; and because of continued conditions of racism and social and economic marginalization in both Dominica and Puerto Rico, and later New York, that shape the women's attitudes toward themselves and their environment.

Daughters of the Stone begins with the slavery period in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico narrated from a limited third person, which privileges the perspectives of each of the women characters from previous generations, starting with the first one, the slave Fela, brought from West Africa to Puerto Rico. The final hundred pages of the book switch to the first-person subjectivity of the New York descendant of this line of women. *Daughters of the Stone*, then, is a text that seeks to construct a genealogy of the family of the present-day Afro-Puerto Rican New Yorker, Carisa Ortiz. It is clear that, in this genealogy of Afro-Puerto Rican identity, the collective trauma of slavery is an origin for Carisa. However, the main focus of the book is not on the slavery period per se but on the way that trauma carries over through the generations in ways that cause damage but ultimately also create a fragile but resistant identity, both individual and collective.

Rigid Catholic attitudes on the island have the effect of making the generations of women in *Daughters of the Stone* think that there is something wrong with their dreams of "the lady Oshún" and something even more problematic with anything that counters the empirical methods they are taught in school—that is, any action that is meant to affect people in a way that cannot be explained empirically or rationally. The second-generation ancestress in the book, Mati, was denigrated to some extent as a witch, or *bruja*, and folk healer. All the other women internalize to a certain extent the knowledge that they have a certain visionary quality that the outside world disdains. Therefore sometimes they end up repressing their dreams or any kind of sense impression or perception that can't be explained rationally.

How internalizing beliefs stemming from four hundred years of Spanish colonialism and slavery as well as mainstream culture in the United States, and even apparently helpful educational attitudes, can be destructive is illustrated in an episode at the end of the book in which the child Carisa brings the stone passed down from her ancestresses to a show-and-tell class at school. In the class, she tells stories about the stone, which the teacher discredits. The teacher wanted Carisa to tell true stories about her family instead of stories based on "superstitions."[29] This inhibits the little girl and alienates her from a tradition that her family has tried to pass on, albeit with some difficulty. Carisa grows up emphasizing her rationalist impulses and distanced from the stone, which represents not just the difficulties experienced in recovering the past, but the capacity of people to imagine a past that has been erased. The stone is also a touchstone to visions, dreams, and stories that the women tell about a past that for them is hard to understand. The exact history of what happened to the family members who came before Fela is unknown to them through the conventional channels of historical and genealogical names and facts. But through the stone the characters literally dream up a genealogy. In his essay on surrealism, Walter Benjamin noted that old buildings

and objects in Paris could help the surrealists arrive at "profane illuminations"—that is, "materialistic, anthropological inspiration[s]"[30] that exceed rationalist and empiricist observation and also differ markedly from Christian mystical revelations. According to Benjamin, the surrealists had these kinds of illuminations when beholding objects, ruins, and fragments that recalled the past yet provided striking, fleeting contrasts with the modern cityscape. Through their art, according to Benjamin, the surrealists were able to "bring the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these objects to the point of explosion."[31] Like surrealist objects in a cityscape, the stone yields both sacred and profane illuminations for the women of Carisa's line who have no other way to construct their stories. This shows how objects can function to generate moments of illumination not otherwise available for those who have experienced trauma. These moments bring to the fore understandings gleaned from dreams, nightmares, and sudden leaps of imagination. A charred book that survived a fire that killed an uncle, a necklace left behind by an otherwise unknown grandmother, the stone that allows the descendants of Fela to dream and tell stories about her—these are all objects yielding up potential magical realist genealogies. The magical realist object, then, is not just a feature of a fantastical tale; it can be a real-world object that becomes the source and touchstone of narrative memory.

Beyond its capacity to ignite profane illuminations, like a surrealist object, the stone also has a specific history, and the specific history, which the women know very little about, plays into new reenactments of traumatic events. For example, a rift usually happens between mothers and daughters from generation to generation. At the center of these succeeding rifts is the claim that starts with the first two generations that the stone that Fela brought with her has magical powers that allow the women to actually access memories of Africa and Yoruba ancestor worship, a tradition about which the women otherwise have no real-world knowledge. But central to the rifts that develop between mothers and daughters from generation to generation is the accusation and fear, learned from Catholicism, that the stone and all it represents is a kind of *brujería* or witchcraft. And part of the polemic from generation to generation has to do with the women attempting to recuperate from the colonizing mindset that views this kind of tradition as anti-Catholic and thus evil.

Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, and Laurie Vickroy, whom I previously cited when discussing Kincaid, both suggest that domestic spaces and the relations between mothers and children produced therein provide exemplary contexts for examining the traumatic consequences of living in colonized situations. Vickroy, citing Bhabha, emphasizes the point that postcolonial domestic space can be a place of "historical invasion"—where home and world collide and become confused.[32] In *Daughters of the Stone*, this becomes particularly clear when Mati, the second-generation daughter of the original Yoruba slave in this narrative, takes on a full engagement with the Lady—that is, the goddess Oshún who comes to her in her dreams and who "spoke in a language Mati had never heard before and yet Mati understood everything she said. The Lady Oshún spoke about a long-ago village, about Mati's mother Fela, and father, Imo . . ."[33]

In increasing control of her inherited magical abilities, Mati is able to wrest the plantation house of its master, who was her father, from the unprincipled neighboring landowners and the priest who had attempted to steal it from her. She does this by using her magic—which in the book's conceit, as we see from the passage just quoted, is intuitive rather than learned—to make these enemies fall ill to the point of death. Then she offers to cure them if they will give her back her land. However, this seemingly otherworldly power ultimately frightens away her husband who feels that Mati is a witch, a *bruja*. What collide are the social forces, which have enslaved and curtailed black people at different times, and the Afro-Caribbean family. What become confused are Mati as daughter, mother, and wife and Mati as a woman resisting the white plantation owners in Puerto Rico. It is particularly confusing for Mati because her father was both a plantation owner whom she barely knew and a father who ended up leaving her the plantation house. Mati derives strength from healing folk practices that make her important to her community, but the alienation she feels from father and husband reflects the tension and strangeness of plantation history.

Eventually Mati's daughter, Concha, also distances herself from the legends and magical practices associated with the stone and opts for a career as a nurse. Both Mati's husband and her daughter are Afro-Puerto Ricans who have internalized colonial notions regarding African religious and cultural practices. The fact that the daughters frequently feel that they have to choose between the African folk-oriented practice of using the stone for soothsaying, and education in the public sphere on the island, of course has everything to do with colonization. This first occurs in Puerto Rico among the very Catholic white-centered Hispanic milieu, which looks down on Puerto Ricans of African descent. Later in New York, a similar ambivalence on the part of Carisa, the New Yorker and the last of the genealogy depicted in the book, will relate specifically to the colonial denigration of Afro-Puerto Rican folk practices that Carisa learns from her school teachers. The women, first in Puerto Rico and later in New York, have to deal with the devaluation of their identities in colonial and neocolonial frameworks, so that their identities become split or conflicted in ways that Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* and W. E. B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk* have discussed extensively.[34]

How the split identification caused by the colonial mentality, and the internalization of colonial attitudes, cause trauma on both the collective and individual levels becomes particularly apparent after Mati dies violently during a hurricane. Concha, who had been estranged from her mother, Mati, because she saw her mother as a *bruja*, reacts to the trauma of her mother's death through dissociation. Her dissociative state allows her to cope with the pain of Mati's death, but it also removes her from the functions of her everyday life, and she ends up in a mental hospital. A persistent therapist and Concha's own daughter, Elena, bring up the stories of the stone. Over the long course of five years, Concha turns from silence in the mental hospital to at first tentative memories of the stories of her mother and her grandmother and the stone. She then recovers and is able to leave the mental hospital. She turns from the fixations and passivity of the state

induced by the traumatic death of Mati, and the hurricane itself, to a point where she is able to connect the present with the past—that is, she is at long last able to create narrative memory.

So the stone in *Daughters of the Stone* is almost a kind of mnemonic device that helps the women in this line actually produce a narrative out of what would otherwise be fragments or a void of memory. The stone allows the women to balance narrative memory against traumatic memory by acknowledging the trauma undergone by their ancestors as part of the social trauma of the slave trade and by balancing that against the heritage of the stone, which begins to turn the traumatic and unknown past into a series of experiences—dreams, conversations, stories—constructing a narrative. Many of these experiences work through magical realism. In *Daughters of the Stone*, it is the particularly visionary quality of the stone, its capacity to allow the women to hold it and then to have a dream about some aspect of their past or present realities, that generates narrative.

Interestingly, stones form a crucial aspect of worship in Afro-Caribbean religions. In *Santería*, for example, stones representing the major Afro-Caribbean deities are collected in natural places—rivers, beaches, forests—associated with the features of the Afro-Caribbean saints or *orishas*. Consecrated to these deities, the stones are "fed" by offering them honey, blood, and other sacrificial offerings. These stones or *otanes* are said to hold vital energy called *ashé*, and are the locus of the power of the *orishas* or deities associated with them. As Miguel de la Torre notes in *Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America*, the stones are thought to be infused with the presence of the ancestral Yoruba gods, who are called orishas in the diasporic religion of Santería:

> Stones, known as *otanes*, are also crucial to the rituals of Santería. Without them the santero or santera would be impotent. According to legend, when the orishas left their community of Ilé-Ifé, what remained were stones resonating with their ashé. Today these stones can be found scattered among ordinary rocks, and by "listening" carefully the devotee of Santería can discern which stones are alive with an orisha's presence . . . Wherever they are found, they will fill believers with the sudden urge to pick them up and take them home. Indeed, keeping their *otanes* safe and with them was so important that when the Yoruba were deported to Cuba as slaves, they would swallow them in order to ensure the orishas' presence at their new destination.[35]

Rachel Harding also notes that the *otanes*, "once identified and collected for ritual purposes, are specifically consecrated with songs, sacrifices, prayers, and words of blessing and power from the community's priestesses and priests. Most *otanes* are consecrated for individual devotees, linking their personal spiritual energy with that of the orishas who protect them and signifying that link through the stone."[36] Now, neither the narrator nor the characters in *Daughters of the Stone* ever call the stone an *otan* or seek out knowledge of the ritual functions of the *otanes* in African or Afro-Caribbean religions. The characters do not seek out priests of Santería for information, so they never learn the crucial ceremonial role and meaning of the stone. What's interesting, though, is that, despite the

characters' lack of knowledge, the stone in the story continues to function as if it is alive with the spiritual energy that both De la Torre and Harding describe. The stone, in a poetic sense, *still knows and carries out its function*. The stone is the only material object that remains of the past in Africa; consequently, it is still a powerful fragment of a larger (if unknown) history and a touchstone of memory making and storytelling. Even though the women in the story have forgotten that the power of their line is concentrated in and consecrated by the stone, which is a ritual object, and they no longer make the requisite sacrifices, they do, however, continue to receive dreams and visions linked to the stone. The women may no longer remember why the stone was important in Africa, but it recovers a new meaning for them, and arguably one that is just as visionary. Although dreaming and storytelling are certainly not the only means by which the women can construct their genealogy, they are particularly suggestive ways, as the stone, besides being a fragment of the past, is also a metaphor for an investment of psychic energy. It concentrates psychic and creative energy, both in the lore of Afro-Caribbean religions and as an everyday found object. In Carisa's family, the stone is a touchstone for alchemizing traumatic suffering that has endured through the generations into narrative memory.

Nonetheless, Carisa is driven by a hunger to understand her identity in all ways possible. As an adult, she tries to reconstruct the past by traveling to Puerto Rico. One of the best parts of the book, in fact, is the short segment at the end pertaining to this first-generation New Yorker's Carisa's journey to Puerto Rico and her encounters there. This section is written in the first person, and seems closer to the author's own experiences while growing up than the previous sections narrated in third person. My favorite character in the book appears in this section. She turns out to be not one of the "family" women but a character called Maria Luisa Campos, a tall Afro-Puerto Rican from the island who is a photographer. In one of the book's most candid exchanges, this straightforward character tells Carisa that the Puerto Rico she is looking for doesn't exist and moreover probably never did: "You're looking for your parents' memories of Puerto Rico, their truth, sugarcoated with years of nostalgia. That Puerto Rico probably never existed, not even twenty or thirty years ago when they left. It certainly doesn't exist now. Our reality will kill a large part of your dream."[37]

According to this smart, talented, no-nonsense character, the process of going back to the island to find one's roots, looking for the past based on a perhaps uninformed nostalgia and "sugarcoated" memories, then has to give way to a reality based on one's present experience as a subject. The reality reveals the problems of poverty, political intrigue, corruption, and sociological and historical denial that will drive home the hard-won truth that the Puerto Rico of the tourist commercials we see all the time on TV—which for many Puerto Rican Americans might also be the same as the Puerto Rico of our nostalgia for clear and definite origins—doesn't exist and never existed.

But the trauma of the past motivates a narrative in which Carisa substitutes for the Puerto Rico of tourism commercials (the one we see every week on television, which shows pristine beaches and light-skinned bomba-dancing beauty queens),

her conversations with islanders such as Maria Luisa and the elders in her family who still live on the island. While she is on the island, Carisa also visits with her grandmother Concha and her grandmother's older friends who tell her stories of life in postplantation days and of the depredations of the hurricanes. She learns from her friend Maria Luisa's recovery project of taking photographs of the ruins of old plantation houses, and she learns from the efforts of young professors at the University of Puerto Rico. Ultimately, Carisa decides to accept a fellowship that will take her to Africa where she will continue her explorations in identity. Like Gabriel García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, who uses magical realism to create a genealogy of those who have been erased from history, *Daughters of the Stone* uses the stone (and the stories about its magical effects) to create a genealogy of stories about the traumatic history of this line of Afro-Puerto Rican women. But in constructing this genealogy not everything can be recovered. In fact, much has to be rejected, as Maria Luisa warns Carisa. So Carisa starts to construct her genealogy with names and historical facts but also with encounters, stories, dreams, and emotions—such as Maria Luisa's anger.

In his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Michel Foucault says that genealogy as he conceives of it opposes itself to the search for origins. Instead genealogy "must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized."[38]

The stone in Llanos-Figueroa's book is one of these at first seemingly "unpromising places," a small fragment whose real origins lie unrevealed in Africa. And, as I have noted, in the book many of the communal rituals of the Afro-Caribbean religions are lost to subsequent generations. The stone is said to be magical, but the stone's real magic lies not in the powers the women tell their daughters are associated with it. The stone is associated with the power to allow the women to dream of erased history or intuit the future. But again, its capacity to inform the women through dreams is not its most important effect. What is important about the stone in fact is that it might strike most people as an item without history, as Foucault notes. It is its smallness, its intimate and fragmentary quality, that allows Carisa to recognize that she can finally find the genealogy of the women in her line in gaps, absences, unrealized moments, moments that have been blurred by trauma. Through this realization, Afro-Puerto Rican women, and others in similar situations finding that their stories have been made marginal or absent, can use their imaginative capacity to create a new genealogy made of fragments that acquire meanings from new contexts and juxtapositions. Through literature, creativity, and genealogical care, the most damaging effects of trauma and the internalization of harmful colonialist attitudes can irrupt into productive moments of magical realism, the signs of narrative memory.

Notes

1. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
2. Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart, "The Intrusive Past and the Flexibility of Memory," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 160.
3. Pierre Janet, *Les edications psychologiques*, vol. 3 (Paris: Societe Pierre Janet, 1984). Quoted in Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, "Intrusive Past," 160.
4. See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 1–9.
5. See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
6. In Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, "Intrusive Past," 175.
7. Ibid., 178–79.
8. Ibid.
9. See Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.
10. For excellent discussions on the history of the term *magical realism* and the mode itself, see Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, ed., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Wendy Faris *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004); and Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism (the New Critical Idiom)* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
11. See Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*.
12. Ibid., 86.
13. Carpentier's text dramatizes aspects of some events in more than one hundred years of Haitian history, including some episodes in the Haitian revolution.
14. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 51–52.
15. This scene has been read exhaustively by, among many notable critics of magical realism, Faris in *Ordinary Enchantments*; Christopher Warnes in *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Donald Shaw in *Alejo Carpentier* (Boston: Twayne, 1985); and Donald Shaw again in "The Presence of Myth in Borges, Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo, and García Márquez," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005).
16. See Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Dayan also makes the provocative and controversial claim that the relationship between gods and believers possessed by the gods is like the relationship between masters and slaves in colonial San Domingue. This allows contemporary believers to both perform and revise these relationships while they are "possessed." This type of ritual possession, of course, besides being the central spiritual event of many Afro-Caribbean religions, is also a stunning trope for the way past history continues to inhabit the present.
17. Eugene Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011), 281.
18. Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother* (New York: Penguin Plume, 1997), 36.
19. Ibid., 37.
20. Ibid., 38.

21. Ibid., 35.
22. Ibid.
23. While Oshún or Yemayá are, to be precise, the Yoruba and Santería versions of the river and ocean goddesses, the other Afro-Caribbean religious versions of these goddesses, found in Voudoun, Palo Monte, Candomblé, and others, are very similar.
24. Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).
25. Ibid., 37.
26. Ibid.
27. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 52.
28. See Henry John Drewal, *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and its Diasporas* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum, 2008).
29. Dhalma Llanos-Figueroa, *Daughters of the Stone* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2009), 253.
30. Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1986), 179.
31. Ibid., 182. In an essay on magical realism and genealogy, it is important to note that surrealism is an often rejected parent of magical realism, however, the parental relationship is undeniable. In "On the Marvelous Real in America," cited in note 11 of this chapter, Carpentier, as I observe in the body of the article, indicates that the marvelous real is superior to surrealism as the former arises from both faith and a natural relationship to the landscape unlike surrealism, which Carpentier apprehends as artificial. Yet the function of objects, in classic magical realist works such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, reveals the parentage of surrealism. And in US ethnic literatures, the surrealist heritage makes an even more marked appearance in the momentary, disjunctive, irruptions of magical objects and events.
32. Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival*, 37.
33. Llanos-Figueroa, *Daughters of the Stone*, 67.
34. See W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008) and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
35. Miguel de la Torre, *Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 135.
36. Rachel Harding, "You Got a Right to the Tree of Life: African American Spirituals and Religions of the Diaspora" (essay commissioned by the Spirituals Project website, 2005), http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/Religion.
37. Llanos-Figueroa, *Daughters of the Stone*, 297.
38. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage, 2010), 76.

CHAPTER 2

Jewish Post-Holocaust Fiction and the Magical Realist Turn

Caroline Rody

If magical realism has come to be understood as "the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world,"[1] what can be said about the recent efflorescence of narrative magic in contemporary Jewish American fiction? Surely American Jews—largely middle-class, culturally assimilated metropolitans—inhabit a different geopolitical position from that of magic realism's practitioners in the "third," decolonizing world, and surely history has granted them a dissimilar imaginative legacy. What possible relationship, then, could the rise of magic in this lively body of contemporary fiction have to postcolonial experience, aesthetics, or textuality?

This essay will argue that what links the Jews to a global, postcolonial vision is their imaginative responses to history. In magical realism, Wendy B. Faris writes, "history is the weight that tethers the balloon of magic," and magical realist fictions often hinge on the "idiosyncratic recreation of historical events," especially "officially sanctioned accounts."[2] The impulse to rewrite history is key to the new Jewish magical realism, which arises within a symbolically resonant turn to the past across contemporary Jewish literature. Departing from the midcentury norm of realist plots about assimilating Jewish Americans, and building on magical renderings of Yiddishkeit (European Jewish culture) in the work of their great immigrant precursor Isaac Bashevis Singer, as well as magical links to Jewish tradition in the stories of Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick, and surrealist and fantastic Holocaust representations by the graphic novelist Art Spiegelman and the Israeli writer David Grossman, a contemporary generation of Jewish writers uses magic to fuel impossible, paradoxical, elegiac recuperations: postmodern, post-Holocaust plots of quest for origins. This essay seeks to understand this eruption of fictional magic, raising to view its consonances with and differences from the magic in fiction by postcolonial and other ethnic American writers.

The literary historical trend of return to the Jewish past evinces a cultural impulse common among ethnic Americans since the late 1960s: a post-civil-rights-era identity politics that ripened into multicultural-era affirmations of "difference" and "diversity." The cultural logic in which revived traditional languages, identities, aesthetics, and communal practices become valued parts of a reimagined ethnic Americanness made obvious emotional sense for postwar American Jews, whose strongly assimilist trajectory had been altered by a new sense of safety and freedom in the waning of normative US anti-Semitism, along with the unprecedented jolt of cultural pride arising from the formation of the State of Israel. In the literature of the post-60s decades, stories of acculturating American Jewish families came increasingly to be textured with tales of pre-American ancestry and allusions to "the Jewish past's imaginative reservoir . . . of myths, symbols, stories, motifs, images, tropes, [and] commentaries,"[3] as well as to the enormous historical library of Jewish texts, sacred and secular, to which contemporary Jewish writers can claim to be heir.

While the post-60s rise in ethnic American self-definition fueled the emergence of new historical fictions across the ethnic spectrum, a paradox of this body of work is that writers newly gaining the sense of cultural authority and safety needed to rewrite their peoples' histories have often had to perform a psychological descent, reentering scorched and haunted historical terrains, imagining abused, tormented ancestors.[4] The historical attention of contemporary Jewish fiction sometimes ranges through the centuries, following the Jews around the world on their migrations, but it is preoccupied above all with the Holocaust, the recent, looming trauma that still shapes Jewish consciousness some seventy years on. The impulse to write about this massive, unfathomable event gives poignancy to the ethnic roots quest, for as the Holocaust decimated a vast, heterogeneous European Jewish population, it also wiped out the site of American Jewish origins, turning what was once the old-country matrix of this culture into a Jewish wasteland, a ruin of memory.

To examine a literature that dares to introduce magic into this scene of devastation, this essay must consider recent literary historical developments in Holocaust writing, specifically the emergence, after the initial dominance of witness testimony and realist renderings, of an antirealist, even a magical realist aesthetic. Christopher Warnes posits that every case of magical realism has its own reasons, deriving from distinct cultural, literary, and political contexts.[5] This essay's investigations into the meaning of eruptions of magical realism in recent American Jewish fiction about the Holocaust will range from magic in Jewish literary traditions, to the problematics of Holocaust writing, to the implications of a Jewish affiliation with the vibrant energies of world magic realism today; in its second half, this essay examines forms of magical impossibility in two recent post-Holocaust fictions.

Magical Realism, the Postcolonial, and Jewishness

To describe the astonishing spread of the magical realist mode in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century fiction, Wen-chin Ouyang deploys a witty metaphor: "Magical realism . . . has now become global, invading and setting up colonies in the literary and visual landscapes of, additionally, Africa, Asia, and Australia. There is no stopping it. It is everywhere. It is in Arabic, Chinese, English, German, Italian, Japanese, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish, Tibetan, and Turkish, to name but a few languages."[6] Ouyang underscores the contemporary critical consensus that this is a representational mode expressive of modernity in the aftermath of European colonization, a global trend inseparable from the historical experience of imperial conquest.[7] Though magical realism's "most characteristic feature is that it naturalises the supernatural, integrating fantastic or mythical features smoothly into the otherwise realistic momentum of the narrative,"[8] its play with realities must be understood to derive from the lived knowledge of reality clash, of the violent imposition of one culture's worldview on another's. Thus, for Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, magical realism is not merely a "mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic" but also the embodiment of a specific politics: "Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures,"[9] to "totalitarian discourses of all kinds."[10]

Surely the unexpected magical intersection between contemporary Jews and postcolonials has something to do with a mutual impulse to subvert the monologic structures of violent imperial or totalitarian narratives. This link can be glimpsed if we attend to the way that, for magical realism's scholars, "Europe" is identified as source of and signifier for the oppressive narrative conventions that magical realism resists. As Faris explains, the fact that realism—and "its mimetic program, its claim to fashioning an accurate portrait of the world"—derives from Europe, has often tended to identify it with imperialism, "endowing it with an implicitly authoritarian aura for writers in colonial situations."[11] And discussing Gabriel García Márquez and others, Warnes sees the antirealist and antirationalist impulse of this mode developing from the "urgent awareness of the literary possibilities of asserting difference from Europe and all it stood for" in favor of one's people's "provincial world-view."[12]

Warnes suggests we ask of any case of magical realism, "What is the source of the supernatural in this text? What kind of dialogue does it enter into with the text's more realistic elements?"[13] Observing contemporary Jewish magical realism, one cannot help but note that the supernatural entering dialogue with the real derives from the cultural forms of a now-disappeared life that was located not a sea-voyage away from, but precisely inside, Europe. It might be argued, indeed, that Jewish magical realism has a more intimate relationship—or struggle—with Europe than do most other regional or ethnic varieties one could name. The crux of the matter is suggested in a remark by Alfred J. López, interrogating the canonical term: "'Magical realism,'" he muses, "A European term applied to a

'non-European' literature, a literature which . . . retains its irreducible difference, its marks of radical alterity."[14] Though López refers to the geopolitical contexts of Latin American and other Third World texts, we find a striking salience in his words for the Jewish instance. His phrase "non-European" becomes a poignant, even a tragic one when imported to (Ashkenazi) Jewish literature, which is after all a literature once but no longer European, one that grew up with its alterity twined in Europeanness, created by and for a people many of whom had understood themselves to be fully European, only to be declared in the Nazi era irrevocably "non-European," and so cast out or destroyed.

In this sense, I would argue that post-Holocaust Jewish writers share what Elleke Boehmer has called postcolonials' "view from the fringe of dominant European cultures" and their use of literary magic to describe "a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement."[15] At the same time, this literature seeks, like that of other magical realists', to "imagine reestablished communities" after massive disruptions.[16] The magical texts that seek to reanimate the "radical alterity" that was European Jewishness reopen and complicate the construction "non-European." Or, to borrow Faris's words, Jewish magical realists are among the "postmodern storytellers [who] may need magic to battle death."[17]

Magic in Jewish Culture

From its nineteenth-century beginnings, modern Jewish fiction has drawn on the "magical" strands of the Jewish textual heritage: the miraculous supernaturalism pervading the holy texts, from Genesis to the Talmudic legends known as midrash and aggadot; the mystical beliefs and practices of late medieval kabbalism, and the tales of miracles produced by seventeenth-century Eastern European Hasidism,[18] and besides these a large, varied oral folklore that is as full of magic as any such literature in the world. As folklorist Howard Schwartz puts it, "Tales of magic and wonder can be found in every phase of Jewish literature, both sacred and secular," though "what other fairy tales attribute to magical causes, the Jewish vision interprets as a demonstration of the power and beneficence of God,"[19] giving magical Jewish literatures a distinctly ethical cast, and tending to blur the distinction between the scriptural miraculous and secular magical. We can locate the roots of contemporary Jewish magical realism, then, in a magical play of moral forces indigenous to traditional Jewish culture, just as scholars note specific peoples' folk magic underlying the fiction of García Márquez, Ben Okri, or Toni Morrison, albeit hybridized with Western fictional form, to produce expressive critiques of the possibilities of European realism.

The key transitional figure in the career of Jewish magical realism is Isaac Bashevis Singer, the best-known American to write in Yiddish, and that nearly vanquished language's single Nobel Laureate. Born in Poland in 1902 into a rabbinical family—seven generations on one side—Singer was steeped in the scriptural and folkloric supernaturalism of traditional Jewish culture, especially Kabbalah,[20] but was exposed in youth to the rationalist intellectual ferment

of continental philosophy as well as literature—"Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Heine, Goethe, Flaubert, Maupassant."[21]

Immigrating as a young writer to the United States in 1935, Singer over the course of his prolific career made the oscillation between a supernatural and a realistic figurative vision essential to his art. Though sometimes called a magical realist,[22] he is usually treated as a modernist who raised to the highest literary level the tragicomedy of an anciently yearning, exilic people, positioned between the realities of belief and doubt. For Hugh Denman, Singer "hovers uneasily between skepticism and mysticism . . . and . . . always returns to a *sui generis* Jewish agnosticism."[23] In introductions to his story collections, Singer stresses creative synthesis and describes his arrival at a syncretic aesthetic: "Genuine literature . . . has the magical power of merging causality with purpose, doubt with faith, the passions of the flesh with the yearnings of the soul . . . [the] realistic and [the] mystical."[24] A protomagical realist, Singer stands among those moderns whose art reforges a people's traditional world in the crucible of modernity.

Singer's dramatic, often erotic plots sometimes build on kabbalistic tales, or show the deep influence of kabbalistic myth and symbol, such as those having to do with cosmic brokenness, repair, and redemption.[25] In stories set in one or another rural, Eastern European shtetl (Jewish village), characters are unsurprised to encounter the supernatural amid ordinary events.[26] Traditional Jewish magic arises within these realist fictional worlds to probe and trouble religious certainty, to open up cosmic mysteries; demons appear to challenge characters' belief, to trouble readers' hold on truth and reality. Stories set in urban Europe or the United States, by contrast, sometimes give characters psychic powers that are explained so as to accommodate both rational and supernatural readings.[27]

Singer's most famous story, "Gimpel the Fool,"[28] affirms simple faith in cosmic goodness and truth in a world of cynicism. Gimpel is a man in whom archetypal Jewish faith extends into a gullible belief in the word of all those around him ("What's the good of not believing? Today it's your wife you don't believe; tomorrow it's God Himself you won't take stock in" [9]), a dupability that wins him from his mocking shtetl a lifetime of scorn and abuse. A climactic moment arises when Gimpel is visited at night in his bakery by the Spirit of Evil, who urges him to repay the village's deceit with an evil deed of his own, pouring urine into the bread dough the whole town will later eat. There's nothing to stop him, the devil tells the fool, when "there is no God," but only "a thick mire" (13). And though Gimpel initially acquiesces, he recovers his foolish faith, buries the tainted bread, and ends his story in old age as a "mystical wanderer" and "saintly storyteller,"[29] whose closing lines blur the boundaries of the real and the imagined:

> I wandered over the land, and good people did not neglect me . . . I heard a great deal, many lies and falsehoods, but the longer I lived the more I understood that there were really no lies. Whatever doesn't really happen is dreamed at night. It happens to one if it doesn't happen to another, tomorrow if not today, a century hence if not next year. What difference can it make? Often I heard tales of which I said, "Now this is a thing that cannot happen." But before a year had elapsed

> I heard that it actually had come to pass somewhere . . . No doubt the world is entirely an imaginary world, but it is only one removed from the true world. (14)

If the mention of inconceivable events coming to pass suggests that this pre-Holocaust character was written, in 1944, with the Holocaust very much in mind, the fact is poignantly underscored by Gimpel's closing lines on death: "When the time comes I will go joyfully. Whatever may be there, it will be real, without complication, without ridicule, without deception. God be praised: there even Gimpel cannot be deceived" (14). Singer's best-loved hero is one who continues to believe in the possibility of a world of truth and goodness despite rational evidence to the contrary.

A hero of a very different sort narrates "The Last Demon,"[30] one of a handful of Singer's stories to employ the startling strategy of narration by a demon who regales us with his attempts to tempt and damn pious shtetl Jews, much as Gimpel was tempted. The last demon is such because he actually becomes witness to the Nazi destruction of the village he was sent to deceive; his old-fashioned, person-by-person evil stratagems are outdone by the genocidal designs of the Jews' human enemies. What makes this story salient for later Jewish magical realist writing is that, after the disaster, the post-Holocaust village still contains one Jewish remnant vulnerable to the work of the devil: a book, a secular Yiddish storybook, the Hebrew letters of which—being, themselves, sacred—retain the sparks of holiness he can still attempt to pervert. Singer amazes both his demon and his readers with the magical power he shows still pulsing in surviving Jewish books.

Following Singer, many American Jewish writers emulate his liberal incorporation of supernatural Jewish elements within mimetic fictions. Their practice accords with what Warnes calls a "regional" "strand of magical realism . . . which strives to affirm specific cultural modes of perception,"[31] not unlike a writer such as the Nigerian Ben Okri, creating a "place for the cultural modalities of those who have been . . . excluded from the products and benefits of modernity."[32] The connection may seem strained, but for American Jews those excluded would be their traditional, religious great-grandparents, the Jews of Europe, whose "cultural modalities" are nearly vanished.[33] Unlike many ancestral peoples evoked in postcolonial magical realism, however, modern Jews' ancestors were long devoted to the practice of seeking moral truth in books, a habit of mind and heart that their writing descendants specially—sometimes magically—foreground. American Jewish writers after Singer, many raised on his popular children's stories and all deeply cognizant of his work and fame, continue to highlight the capacity of the literary text to bear a Jewish spiritual and cultural legacy into the future.

Between Singer and the current generation of Jewish magical realists stand two important literary influences: the midcentury magical realism of American-born writers Bernard Malamud and Cynthia Ozick, and the formidable, international body of Holocaust narratives. Malamud and Ozick, born ten and twenty years after Singer, write stories with a distinctively American Jewish character that sometimes use magic to evoke Jewish tradition. Malamud frequently centered his tales on an ordinary, often assimilated American Jew's encounter with

a surprising, archetypal figure of Old World Judaism or Jewish culture. When the ordinary Jew, in search of a wife, a cure for a dying father or spouse, worldly success, or just a peaceful home life, is surprised by the entrance of a rabbi who claims to be able to save the dying by fashioning a magical silver crown; a talking Jewish crow who just wants an indoor place to stay; or a black man from Harlem who claims to be a Jewish angel come to heal the suffering, and who asks only charity, brotherliness, or belief in him, Malamud's stories assert the uncanny persistence in drab, secular, American life—for those willing to risk the anachronism of faith—of access to the transcendent.[34]

In several stories, Ozick animates mythical figures to dramatize the complex inner lives of modern Jews. In "The Pagan Rabbi,"[35] an American rabbi torn between Jewish and Hellenic ideals—the love of Law and of Nature—is enticed to his death by love for a dryad straight out of Greek myth, whom he seeks out in a New York City park. And in the even more extravagant "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," a New York bureaucrat named Ruth Puttermesser revives the mythical Jewish figure of the golem—a magical, humanlike creature formed of earth by a learned Jew for a holy, redemptive purpose—in this case, not to save the Jews but to save the entire city of New York from corruption, degradation, and pollution. The golem's magical ministrations bring about a new era: with Puttermesser as mayor, New York becomes (if briefly) a city of gardens, education, politeness, cleanliness, honesty, and industry. Like Malamud, Ozick reaches into Jewish tradition for magical access to transcendence in America: her reinvention of this Jewish archetype in New World feminist form dramatizes the great faith—cherished by so many Jews—in America's potential for good.[36]

Several decades later, beginning in the late 1980s, young American Jewish writers have taken up Singer's magical legacy to new ends. In a later moment more inclined to look back to the disaster of the Holocaust and more comfortable writing about it, younger writers have followed Malamud and Ozick in invoking traditional Jewish magic, but they use that magic above all to create uncanny, arresting literary figurations of the work of writing the Holocaust. Traumatically distanced from the actuality of the Jewish past, but somehow sure of their right to mythify it and project for it a future, these postmodern writers represent a self-consciously belated, elegiac claim to inherit Jewish magic, and with it an impossible fullness of Jewish culture. Like postcolonial writers, they not only recast a history of violent conquest through magical means, but they also work imaginatively to restore lost histories and sundered human ties. Half a century after Singer's "Gimpel the Fool," what the narrative magic of the shtetl's American descendants is for is to evoke and approximate premodern Jewish spiritual culture—a life of seamless faith and wonder, as it is imagined—on the part of postmodern Jews who live after it and wish to cathect, mourn, and reanimate it in writing. Like other narrative magic, it "promises," in Warnes' words, "somehow to reconcile the modern rational, 'disenchanted' subject of the West with forgotten but recoverable spiritual realities."[37] More particularly, in a postmodern Jewish way, it reasserts an undying connection, through imaginative writing, to the spirit and values of a murdered culture.

Holocaust Representation

Two issues dominate discussions about literary representation of the Nazi Holocaust of Europe's Jews: the challenge of how to represent a nearly unrepresentable subject, and the ethics of creating art from such devastation. Described by Saul Friedlander, the first problem is that "we are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits'"[38] For other scholars, the Nazi "Final Solution" strains our limits because to try to grasp it is to diminish our sense of ourselves. It was "a mockery of the very idea of culture";[39] it confronts us with "a huge and ominous mystery of the degeneration of the human character,"[40] and, in short, "the mind rejects it, casts it out": "We want to say, 'It is inconceivable,'" though we now know that it is not.[41] As for literary treatments of the subject, what eludes the mind also may elude narration. Friedlander asks, "Does an event like the 'Final Solution' . . . foreclose certain narrative modalities? Does it perhaps escape the grasp of a plausible narrative altogether?"[42]

Discussions of the second problem, that of ethics, inevitably cite Theodor Adorno's declaration of the barbarity of any writing "after Auschwitz."[43] Though this echoing injunction has been violated for decades by artists of many kinds, a certain hesitance persists about such productions—especially by artists not immediately involved in the disaster—in that they might "fail to convey the full horror or might anaesthetize audiences grown callous" about too-familiar Holocaust artifacts that may seem to profit "from grievous losses."[44] In part because of such concerns, for the first several decades after the calamity, only the most strictly realist sorts of texts, created by those who had undergone or witnessed the events, found general approval: "documentaries, testimonials, diaries, and histories—eyewitness accounts—but not poetry, fiction, drama, or visual works composed by" nonwitnesses or survivors.[45] We can well understand the preference for accounts that stay as close to the facts and take as little imaginative license as possible in the immediate aftermath, when the pursuit of truth and legal remedies was the highest priority. And in recent nonfictional Holocaust writing, historical accuracy can remain an urgent principle.[46]

But in the realm of literature generally, realism gradually came to seem an inadequate mode of Holocaust representation. Critics since the 1970s have tended to favor work that eschews "straight, documentary realism," producing instead "some sort of *allusive or distanced realism*."[47] As Geoffrey Hartman suggests, while realist depictions may leave audiences foundering in the inexplicable, a "more abstract or mythical art might escape our discontent" by its very flaunting of "artifice," its "reflection on representation limits."[48] The testimonial model of Holocaust narrative gradually gave way to texts that foreground the very problem of inheriting and reimagining the Holocaust, texts self-consciously written across the "gap between the ghastly 'then' of genocide and the safe 'now' of retrospection,"[49] by writers who know themselves to be belated, distant, and inadequate tellers. Writing not out of personal witness, but rather from "oblique access to events nevertheless formative in their individual development and in Western

culture's unfolding," Susan Gubar writes, these authors "filter" their visions of the Holocaust "through their perplexity about how to approach that subject, given . . . its remoteness as well as the inappropriateness of poetic or cathartic reactions."[50]

Over the past few decades, readers have been presented with ever more strange and elaborate antirealist Holocaust fictions. A key text in this literary history is Art Spiegelman's 1986 two-volume graphic novel *Maus*,[51] which uses cartoon cats and mice to represent hunting Nazis and hunted Jews; Spiegelman's work is not only about his parents' horrific story of Auschwitz and survival, but also about the translation of that story into the pop-cultural medium congenial to the belated, alienated imagination of their American cartoonist son. The text that powerfully initiates the magical realist mode in post-Holocaust fiction is Israeli novelist David Grossman's *See Under: Love*, also published in 1986. *See Under: Love* flaunts its fictionality, its "immense preoccupation with the difficulties of writing about [the Holocaust], and the extravagant fiction spun from its thread,"[52] in bizarre sequences that include a reappropriation of the imaginative life of the surrealist writer and Holocaust victim Bruno Schulz in the figure of a swimming salmon, and the fabulation of a Scheherazade-like relationship between Jewish storyteller and Nazi listener inside the gates of Auschwitz. Collating and embracing other Jewish texts and writers and paying homage to the titular concept of "love" in many forms, Grossman's novel still manages a lyrical affirmation of the singularity of the individual, who must assert him or herself against the crush of the salmon-school, whose death would mean, as the Talmud says, the destruction of an entire world—or as Grossman says, echoing Schulz, the destruction of "a uniquely idiosyncratic work of art which can never be reconstructed," and who deserves, like Gimpel, a death of dignity and singularity, rather than one meted out impersonally and mechanically, as was Schulz's.[53]

Spiegelman and Grossman stand behind the daring narrative constructs as well as the improbably redemptive fictional magic found in the work of contemporary American Jewish writers. Like postcolonial magical realists, they express the truths of a fissured, displaced culture over against a conqueror's rationales and discourses. But beyond such revisionary ambitions, the magical Holocaust fictions discussed in the following sections set out, impossibly, to resurrect entire vanished worlds.

A Blessing on the Moon

From its first words, Joseph Skibell's *A Blessing on the Moon* (1997)[54] is an exercise in magical revivification of the dead: a deeply odd, "macabre,"[55] and beautiful requiem for the author's great-grandfather.[56] In contrast to most Holocaust fictions, the book begins, rather than ends, with death. Its first words—"It all happened so quickly. They rounded us up, took us out to the forests" (3)—narrate a horrific, familiar massacre: an entire village is forcibly marched to the woods and shot over an open pit, then hastily buried. The narrator, Chaim Skibelski, a

refiguration of the author's great-grandfather, is a reanimated corpse, who, upon climbing out of a mass grave, is at first unaware that he has died with the rest of his village, feeling a strange, nearly giddy ecstasy (4). A reader may move through the first pages in wary apprehension that this performance of impossible, postgenocidal narration may have crossed the boundaries of appropriate respect, even decency. But somehow, Skibell quiets this discomfort, engaging us with the address of a fictional narrator unlike any we are likely to have encountered. Chaim describes the surprising reflection of his face, glimpsed in a pond: "One side is entirely missing, except for an eye, which has turned completely white. Barely hanging in its socket, it stares at itself in an astonished wonder. My grey beard is matted thick with blood, and broken bits of bone protrude here and there through the raw patches of my flesh" (11).

Forced to find a level of comfort with this gruesomely disfigured narrator, we gradually accept the premise of the text—"I will never be anything but a dead and mutilated Jew" (115). We become interested to know what can be reaped from the resurrection of a victim of a Nazi *aktion*, who finds himself oddly ambient, conscious, and at first, joyful to be so. We may even be amused by jokes about the deadness of the speaker, as when Chaim thinks he is about to be set upon by wolves, and says, "Quickly, I recite the Vidui, as one must before one dies. Of course, if I am already dead, the prayer may be superfluous" (91). Chaim may be the kind of invented Holocaust literary figure Susan Gubar has called a "proxy witness"—only he is a postmortem version of such a witness, weirdly, for his real-world namesake.

Our wonder at the novel's audacity, its bizarre premise, and the odd way it yokes a bleeding corpse to a sensitive consciousness, stays with us as we follow Chaim, who, curious about what could happen to him after death, accompanied by the town rebbe—transformed into a black crow—wanders home and takes up invisible residence among the extended Polish family that has occupied his dead family's house. He later follows the rebbe to resurrect the entire pit full of dead Jews and goes on to numerous dismal yet hopeful adventures, in some inexplicable Beckett-like trial of clueless waiting after death, to find entrance into the "World to Come" (5).[57]

A Blessing on the Moon has been called "an allegory of the experience of European Jews during the Holocaust,"[58] and in its labor of imaginative revival, it might, in truth, be more readily described as a fantastic fable than as a realist text punctuated by magical moments.[59] It trades the horror a realist text would try to convey, the nearly inconceivable truths that survivors and others have found so hard to describe and with which we have become all too familiar, for different impossibilities that expressionistically convey the unnatural, terrifying facts of the author's family's deaths. So, for example, in Skibell's novel no murdered Jews are cremated in concentration camp ovens; instead, at a fine German hotel, bakers in tall hats take Jewish guests, members of Chaim's family who are expecting a steam bath after dinner, and bake them to death in the restaurant kitchen (18). Such absurd, defamiliarizing moments link this novel to the many post-Holocaust texts, especially poems, that resist logical coherence in favor of "spurts

of vision, moments of truth, baffling but . . . powerful pictures of scenes unassimilated into an explanatory plot" by which they can suggest a history of horror they cannot claim to comprehend.[60]

Moreover, like Spiegelman's cartoon cats and mice, or Grossman's wild fabulation, the narrative of the dead Chaim (whose name literally means "life" in Hebrew) reminds the reader constantly of the artifice of fiction—in its absurdity and potential offensiveness, in its self-conscious distance from anything resembling documentary realism. Still, there is enough of the "real" behind this tale impossibly told by the dead—its historical premises (mass graves, soldiers, Polish squatters in murdered Jews' homes, and names of actual people), and its realistically depicted scenes (the layout of a great hotel and complex mechanical equipment)—to surprise us continually with the rubbing of the magical against the real. In one scene, for example, the hero's entire family is seated at a table in that hotel, each amazedly tasting, Willy Wonka–style, his own (dead) mother's soup; in another scene, powerful machinery is assembled and employed to hoist the moon back up to the sky, from where it has been buried under a mass grave of Jews.

What keeps one reading through Skibell's strange, alienating plot, I think, is the endearing, novelistic character he makes of his dead Jew ("the dead Yid!" exclaims the Pole who takes over his house, suspecting the presence of his ghost [64]). Skibell resurrects his great-grandfather not as a continually grieving or suffering Holocaust victim, but as a man with the spirited inner life of a traditional shtetl Jew, one with the soul God gave him. This resurrection can grant the brutally murdered ancestor love, charity, wonder, and the capacity to induce these in others. An early episode has Chaim kindly befriending a daughter of the Polish family now claiming the Skibelskis' home, the only living person granted the empathic capacity to see the hero and the blood he trails. We also see Chaim being humane to the severed, talking head of the German soldier who killed him (and who was later killed himself); Chaim carries this head with him on his journey for some time until the head shows its own humanity, asking for Chaim's forgiveness.[61]

One startling scene even risks a comical humanization of the mass-massacred. How can a descendant of Holocaust victims respond to the information available about mass graves into which the Nazis shot and dumped thousands of Jewish people, or to documentary photographs of such graves, some of which might contain one's relatives? Skibell's text performs a surreal, deeply ironic absorption of such textually mediated horror, staring right through the photographed facts to restore Jewish personhood and cultural traits to an assembly of the murdered. When Chaim and the crow-rebbe magically liberate the village from the grave, readers are shown "thousands of men and women, their dark-circled eyes blinking against the too-dazzling light," their bodies showing "evidence not only of rot, but also of mutilation" (76–77). Gruesome details are offered as corpses hold themselves together and climb, with prayerful joy, into "their confusing freedom" (79). But going to sleep that night in a freezing field, the Jews break into

camps: Bundists, Zionists, Communists; "Even dead, their bitter disagreements continue unresolved" (82). In a particularly outrageous moment,

> A group of women are grumbling already of how they miss their grave, so secure and warm were they beneath the earth.
>
> "Of course, it was dark, with all sorts of horrors, but at least we were together, without this constant bickering."
>
> "We had bickering in the pit," her companion dares to contradict her.
>
> "We had no bickering."
>
> "We had plenty of bickering!"
>
> "Such nonsense!"
>
> "You don't know what you're talking about."
>
> "All right, so we had bickering, but at least it wasn't petty."
>
> "It was petty."
>
> "All right, it was petty, but at least we knew where we would sleep each night." (82)

The audaciousness of this scene's conception, mixed with the familiarity of Jewish comedic style, points up the complex ironies of this text's historical project—its will to retrieve ordinary humanness from dehumanizing murder by means of an affectionate but hopelessly inadequate backward glance from a place and time where Jews are safe, comfortable, and still bewildered by grief. Sometimes Chaim himself figures our own guilty survival of these events, as the one murdered Jew who is somehow immediately able to climb out of the grave: "*Why did I not help anyone on the day we were shot?* The thought . . . won't go away. It curses my sleep . . . *How could I just leave them?*" (88). The novel's belatedness is dramatized again near its end when, after years of wandering and haunting Europe, Chaim finds himself in his old town but in our present, confused by modern buildings, streets, vehicles, TVs, and so on (198). Skibell's imaginative resurrection of his ancestor makes this old man of the mid-twentieth century a person out of time, accidentally animate in the twenty-first. A forebear the author cannot let die, Chaim seems the ghost of irresolvable, calamitous Jewish history; non-Jewish characters in the novel are able to die in a final sense, but "only we Jews seem desperate to haunt this long continent, wandering its lengths, until God, in His wisdom, decrees otherwise" (113).

For what symbolic purpose does literature extend his living hell? The answer is apparent in two kinds of recuperations performed in Skibell's ending, one by and one for Chaim. First, he encounters two absurd, folkloric surviving Hasids with interchangeable names and minds who have been waiting for him for fifty years to help them find the moon—which has apparently disappeared since the Holocaust—and restore it to its place. It seems the moon has gone away with the Jews because, as one Pole says, "They're the only ones who ever used it" (26), for Jews traditionally keep a lunar rather than a solar calendar. Chaim and friends work to raise the moon back into the sky out from under the corpses of dead Jews, building scaffolding out of Jews' bones to lift and haul it up (232–33). But once aloft, the moon shows itself to have become "mottled, as though with dark and purple bruises," having "drawn the [Jews'] blood into itself" (243). Though

the men "scrub and [they] rub . . . the stain is too deep," and Chaim laments, "Forever now, the moon will appear this way, no longer the smooth and gleaming pearl I remember from my youth" (244). After fifty years in a mass grave, the moon—the Jews' ally—becomes their memorial, eternally bearing the stain of their deaths. So the heavens register cosmic witness, cosmic knowledge of the Jews' having been and having perished.

Any imaginative restoration, Skibell of course knows, is as unstable as is the Jews' hold on safety, on continuity, on the fullness of memory, on love. Once the moon is lifted beautifully back into place, Chaim observes, "I cannot say I experience much joy . . . Curious, after all this work." For "'how can we be sure,' one Hasid whispers fretfully," with a realistic knowledge of the moon and the sublunary world, "'that it won't wax and wane and disappear again?'" (252). Skibell has written about a return trip to his family's Polish town, in which he intended to make "a tikkun, a spiritual repair for the souls of our murdered relatives . . . to let them know that something survived, that something remains."[62] But in this novel, Skibell suggests that a great-grandson's imaginative restitution cannot do more than gesture toward retrieval of the beauty, dignity, and rightness of ancestors' lives for our time.

Still, in the novel's closing pages, Skibell makes the simple gesture of restoring to a human being his name. When the rebbe announces "The pangs of the grave have ended," our dead hero dies at last; losing almost all sense of the past, returning to blissful infancy in a mother's arms, he says, "I find I can still, without difficulty, remember my name. Chaim Skibelski" (256). In these ending scenes the descendant thus gives the ancestor, in the well-known phrase, "a memorial and a name"—the phrase that names the main Israeli Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem.[63] Skibell's magical fiction finally revives the murdered ancestor to grant him a different death from the one history gave him: as Singer's Gimpel puts it, a death "without complication; without ridicule, without deception" (14), one dignified by the recitation of his individual name, one that literature can make heard by any human listener.

Everything Is Illuminated

Among contemporary Jewish American novels, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002)[64] is, par excellence, the text of a belated writer's impassioned, but distant, necessarily inventive engagement with the Holocaust. Notably indebted to Grossman's *See Under: Love*,[65] Foer's text, too, is a darkly, sometimes giddily comic working out of an authorial relationship to this traumatic, essential story, and a key moment in the trajectory of evermore surprising, more elaborately framed Jewish fictions about the Holocaust. Foer shares with Grossman the reverent yet parodic incorporation of earlier Jewish texts and even a postmodern narration-by-encyclopedia, and like Grossman he marries the impulse to retell Holocaust history with a contemporary protagonist's plot of *Bildung*. But unlike Grossman, Foer sets out to retell, along with the death of Eastern Europe's Jews, a long story of the people's life.

Everything Is Illuminated is magical and realist in a couple of senses; first, in that it combines a magical and a realist plot strand. The contemporary realist plot sends a young American Jew to Ukraine to search out his ancestral home and family history. This protagonist shares his author's name, Jonathan Safran Foer, but is often called by the mock-heroic appellation "the hero," which ironizes the heroism of his quest and points up Foer's own inadequacy as a Holocaust teller, even while suggesting his sincere aspiration to be one. In Ukraine "the hero" meets a tour guide of his own age named Alex, an awkwardly charming, self-revealing character whose attempts to write English with the help of a thesaurus create much of the book's hilarity and poignancy both. Foer's text presents itself as the record of the two young men's correspondence and the collaboratively authored book-in-progress about their shared quest.

The other plot strand is a several-centuries-spanning, fabulistic, magical realist tale of the lives of the hero's ancestors in the shtetl of Trachimbrod. If the most moving element of the book is the evolving voice of the realist character Alex, the extravagantly imagined Trachimbrod chapters are the locus of the book's cathexis of tradition, and they raise their own kind of wonder through an aesthetic of mélange and encyclopedic ambitions, of lyricism and absurdity, and of tragicomic play with archetypes from the storehouse of Jewish culture. Foer's readers find themselves within a nostalgic, elegiac, yet parodic reanimation of the archetypal Eastern European shtetl—crossbred, perhaps, with Gabriel García Márquez's magical Macondo, the village introduced in the first lines of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a place of wondrous newness, destined to give way to violent death. The remarkable first sentence of Márquez's influential novel reads, "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." The novel continues, "At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point."[66] Also opening his saga in a remote town on a river's bank, Foer stakes out just such an epic range and cosmic horizon, like Márquez beginning in miraculous newness a story that readers know can only end in tragedy, and like him, too, sandwiching in between the two the history of a whole community.[67]

Trachimbrod (Trochimbrod) was once a real place in Ukraine, the home of some of Foer's ancestors, obliterated by the Nazis in 1942. But in this book it is restored, not realistically, but as the mythic village of every Ashkenazi Jew's origin. American Jews generally cannot tell long histories of their families' residences in any one European home, much having been suppressed, forgotten, or lost over generations of displacement. Foer, starting with a chapter called "The Beginning of the World Often Comes," gives his namesake hero's family miraculous mythic origins, but in a village whose name bears the trace of communal loss. When, after a 1791 horse-and-wagon accident that apparently drowns a man named Trachim and his family in the river Brod, a fantastical "rising life-debris" surfaces from the water—"wandering snakes of white string, a crushed-velvet glove with

outstretched fingers . . . rasp-and boysenberries, feces, frillwork," "a packet of seeds, "a faded map of the universe" (8–9)—and this "curious flotsam" made of all the stuff of the world becomes the site of a new genesis: "In the middle of the string and feathers, surrounded by candles and soaked matches, prawns, pawns, and silk tassels that curtsied like jelly-fish, was a baby girl, still mucus-glazed, still pink as the inside of a plum" (8, 13). In a scene that fuses the Birth of Venus with that of Moses, Foer miraculously ushers forth the newborn heroine who comes to be named Brod, after her river, and who is the hero's first-known ancestress. Besides her magical birth, Brod later demonstrates the supernatural power to read the future, and both she and her husband—who spends the last several years of his life with a magical realist disk-saw blade stuck in his head—become postmortem presences who help and console the living. Essential to Brod's magic is her mythic "Creation" in this particular spot, this river, her identification with her native, natural landscape of Poland (of which Trachimbrod was then a part), which gives her and thus the hero's family (and by extension, the Jews) a natural rootedness in the Eastern European soil that law, history, and custom never granted them. They become as "regional" as any characters in global, Third World magic realism, and the American novel about them seems to restore the authentic local magic of displaced natives.

In Trachimbrod, Foer seems to want to revive a culture whole; lived Yiddishkeit is affectionately and comically evoked, as is the wonder and value of a worldview saturated with religious feeling, something a secular American Jew can affirm without endorsing orthodox belief or practice. Notably, Foer's recreation of the shtetl is an unabashedly intertextual one, cobbled together, apparently, from multiple texts of Jewish literature, learning, and popular culture. Prayer and market dealing go on; marriages are arranged and rabbis consulted. The stories of I. B. Singer, clearly a major influence on Foer's work,[68] stand behind these plot elements, as they do behind the shtetl's aura as a dramatic stage for erotic and metaphysical struggles. Borrowings from other Yiddish writers such as Sholom Aleichem are also detectable, especially from the popular musical film developed from one of them, *Fiddler on the Roof*, which surfaces, among other places, in the singing of "Yoidle-doidle" and "Biddle biddle biddle biddle/bop" by a band of happy men escorting a groom to his wedding (141).

The shtetl, according to David G. Roskies, was already a mythified, idealized, sometimes caricatured "invention of the Jewish literary imagination" in nineteenth-century Yiddish literature; to treat it as "the source of collective folk identity" is to follow a long tradition.[69] But Foer's magical realist recreation of the shtetl raises such reverent or reductive figuration to the level of parodic carnivalesque.[70] Especially rich is his satiric take on traditional religious practice: the mutual hostility of the "Upright" versus "Sloucher" congregations (evoking tensions between American Jewish Reform versus Conservative and Orthodox practice); the silliness of the Uprights' traditional observances (they scream rather than recite their prayers, while hanging from pulleys near the ceiling, all for well-justified reasons of faith); and the division of the town into a parodic "Jewish Quarter" and "Human Three-Quarters" that apportions sacred and secular

activities—except that the synagogue and its holy ark were built to straddle the two, and in the ongoing reanalysis of the Jews, "as the ratio of sacred to secular shifted, . . . so did the fault line . . . And so was the synagogue lifted and moved . . . in 1783 . . . wheels were attached, making the shtetl's ever-changing negotiation of Jewishness and Humanness less of a schlep" (10).

A key revision of shtetl life in Foer's Trachimbrod is that the books over which his Jews pore, day by day, are not the conventional sacred texts of the Torah and Talmud. Rather, the Slouchers—whose esprit the novel clearly shares—compose and revere their own new, collaborative texts: *The Book of Recurrent Dreams*, in which they record and continually reread their own human dreams, and *The Book of Antecedents*, a massive compendium of shtetl history, wit, and wisdom, ranging from "a record of major events" and "a biennial census," to matters absurdly minor, personal, and eccentric, including marital squabbles, jokes and definitions, and breakfast menus of choice (196). These invented, collective texts constitute reimaginations of Jewish sacred texts at a far greater distance from the divine. What they sacralize is human life itself, and in them, the human activity of writing becomes the privileged, sacred act, precisely because of its fidelity to human life: "*The Book of Antecedents*, once updated yearly, was now continually updated, and when there was nothing to report, the full-time committee would report its reporting, just to keep the book moving, expanding, becoming more like life: We are writing . . . We are writing . . . We are writing . . ." (196). Foer's readers come upon a page and a half in which this last phrase repeats itself, over and over. When the village is tragically decimated by the Nazis—deniers of Jewish humanness—these inset books-within-Foer's-book, the texts that recorded their aliveness, outlive them.

Notably, the trope of the book-within-the-book presents another connection to global magical realism, which, perhaps because it is so self-consciously a revisionary mode—a kind of fiction about writing the world differently—often offers "metafictional dimensions": "The texts provide commentaries on themselves, often complete with occasional mises-en-abyme—those miniature emblematic textual self-portraits."[71] The famous ending of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* features such a text, a magical parchment telling—like the novel—the epic story of the many generations of the Buendía family, placed in the family house a hundred years earlier to be deciphered by the family's last member, as he reads of his fate in the parchment's last words, in the novel's last words, in the instant before he and the entire town are destroyed by a whirlwind.[72] Along with Foer's *Everything*, several other recent magical Holocaust fictions feature magical inset texts, among them Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* (2005); Myla Goldberg's *Bee Season* (2000); Dara Horn's *In the Image* (2002); and Steve Stern's "Bruno's Metamorphosis" (1983). But I would argue that the inset texts in these recent Jewish post-Holocaust magical realist fictions are endowed with a magic that is, notably, opposite to the one that closes *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: the power to remake a world lost to the whirlwind of history.

More often than not, these inset books also help effect a profound movement in the narrative from historical grief to a communion of love. We might

think here of Toni Morrison's monumental trauma-witness novel, *Beloved*, in the historical imagination of which, the authorial descendant casts love backward in time to become the very name of the lost baby ancestor. In the contemporary Jewish fictions under discussion here, love is positioned as the essence of the Jewish culture and tradition that grieving descendants claim to recover. In the titles and central tropes of Grossman's *See Under: Love* and Krauss's *The History of Love*, and in Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*, in which love is the second thing, after writing itself, that can overcome time and death, the essential act that magical writing is imagined to perform is the recovery of transcendent love from a history of violence. For lack of space to treat Foer's extensive meditations on love,[73] let one of his conceits about love stand in for the rest:

> From space, astronauts can see people making love as a tiny speck of light. Not light, exactly, but a glow that could be mistaken for light—a coital radiance that takes generations to pour like honey through the darkness to the astronaut's eyes.
>
> In about one and a half centuries—after the lovers who made the glow will have long since been laid permanently on their backs—metropolises will be seen from space . . . Smaller cities will also be seen, but with great difficulty.
>
> The glow is born from the sum of thousands of loves . . .
>
> Some nights, some places are a little lighter. It's difficult to stare at New York City on Valentine's Day, or Dublin on St. Patrick's . . . Trachimday is the only time all year when the tiny village of Trachimbrod can be seen from space, when enough copulative voltage is generated to sex the Polish-Ukrainian skies electric. *We're here*, the glow of 1804 will say in one and a half centuries. *We're here, and we're alive.* (95–96)

This wondrous fable, a kind of adult Dr. Seuss tale (with shades of *Horton Hears a Who*) is not complete until some pages later, in a modern American scene in which "the hero's" immigrant mother and grandmother are imagined watching the TV broadcast of the first man's walk on the moon. "*Get en heyar*! . . . *Hurry!* . . . *Look et diz*," the grandmother calls to the mother, and soon they hear "*That's one small step for man . . .*" and "stare at a blue marble floating in the void—a homecoming from so far away" (98). "*Etz vunderrful!*" the grandmother exclaims, and as the two women "cry together, cheek to cheek . . . neither of them hears the astronaut whisper, *I see something*, while gazing over the lunar horizon at the tiny village of Trachimbrod. *There's definitely something out there*" (99). In the marvelously circular work of this scene, the writing grandson takes the reverence of Eastern European Jewish immigrants for the triumphs of America, epitomized by the moon landing, and passes it on to Neil Armstrong so that he turns and admires their shining origins on Earth. Preserving the love of Trachimbroders not only in its text but also as a projection into outer space, Foer's novel makes the shtetl community of 150 years earlier visible to belated Americans—readers, astronauts, and heroes all. And like Skibell's forever-bloodstained moon, Foer's notion of the copulative light visible to astronauts makes the heavens bear witness to the now-perished Jews of Europe. From a cosmic perspective, there's definitely something still out there: the love they once loved.

Warnes observes that the faith conveyed by magical realism can be, beyond a given people's spirituality, "more importantly, faith in the capacity of literature to represent" the complex realities lived after empire.[74] Similarly, I have argued elsewhere[75] (in a discussion of African American women's magical realist fictions) that we should understand fictional magic, no matter where on the globe it arises, not only as an affirmation of folk beliefs within complex, culturally hybrid postcolonial visions, but also as an assertion of the imaginative power of the formerly dispossessed. Foer's post-Holocaust magical realism expresses the power of the surviving descendant-author to write a book about a grievous event and give it a luminous imaginative afterlife.

A long tradition takes tragic events in the history of the Jews and turns them into writing: sacred texts or, in modernity, texts that seem inevitably to evoke, repeat, and circulate around the culture's holy writings. If we recall that even the sacrilegious Yiddish book read and reread by Singer's "last demon"—a nonsacred text set *en abyme* within another nonsacred text—is said to bear within it a holy power inherent in its very letters (somehow conveyed to us even in English translation), then we can grasp the way that contemporary, secular Jewish fictions by writers remote from Jewish religious orthodoxy can be seen to aspire to sacralize life, and lost lives, in that way. Not everything about the vast tragedy that destroyed the lives of millions can be illuminated, not by historians and witnesses, and not by literature. But a book can cast back on history its particular imaginative radiance, can rewrite death in a vision that celebrates the power of love, and—as with Foer's tender, thesaurus-challenged Alex, after creative collaboration with his friend "the hero" to uncover a mutual past—can reconsider events long gone and ask, "But how does this make you feel, Jonathan, in the luminescence of everything that occurred?" (6).

Jewish Magical Realism in the World

The magic recently surfacing in contemporary American Jewish post-Holocaust fiction joins the magical realism of the postcolonial world in articulating a traumatic, modern collision and fissure of realities. But in the distinctly belated and distanced condition it expresses, American Jewish writers exert the imaginative will to cross the enormous gap that separates them from the world they would seek to reclaim, the dead they would seek to memorialize and even resurrect. Several generations after the Holocaust, and after many decades of assimilation to America (and its particular sense of European heritage), it seems remarkable that a generation of writers has set out to magically reanimate the "radical alterity" of the Jews that had been so odious to those Europeans who set about exterminating them, and which several generations of American Jews had largely tried to shed. Equally interesting, I think, is the way that in reclaiming "non-Europeanness," American Jewish writers suggest a desire to join the rest of the non-European world in infusing the European-descended novel with the magic of their own people's alterities.

For it may perhaps be argued that to employ magical realism now is automatically to invoke a transnational aesthetic. Indeed, we might consider the magical impulse of this body of fiction a self-conscious, willed joining of a global, postmodern, literary mode—that is, a global mode that self-consciously mourns the horrors of the twentieth century and does so in a fully interethnic consciousness. As I have argued elsewhere at length, contemporary literature is now widely characterized by an urge toward encounter with ethnic difference and heterogeneity, older forms of ethnic vision giving way to an interethnic literary imagination.[76] Foer's cathexis of the Ukrainians stands emblematic here. *Everything Is Illuminated* features three "proxy-witnesses": the aged, Jewish Holocaust survivor Lista, who transmits to the two young male heroes an agonizing eyewitness account of the end of Trachimbrod; the Jewish survivor's questing American grandson Jonathan; and the Ukrainian Alex, who must translate and thus reshape Lista's every word, empathically passing on, editing, and sometimes transforming the story by the labor of his Ukrainian heart, a process later repeated when he must translate and grapple with his own grandfather's terrible narrative, for the listening Jonathan. Gubar has remarked that "proxy-witnessing" in Holocaust writing, "dependent precisely on the idea of disparity" (261), allows unusual forms of boundary-crossing empathy between characters of different kinds (such as Jews and non-Jews, the dead and the living, etc.), and delivers a reading experience that also models such empathic stretches.[77] The plot of Alex and Jonathan's growing, loving friendship and the gradual unveiling of the wartime story of Alex's grandfather creates for readers the surprising realization—unusual, to say the least, in Jewish Holocaust fiction—that that wrenching history is not solely the Jews' story: it turns out to be a family story Alex himself must come to own, largely because of a long-buried secret about a loving Jewish–Ukrainian friendship in the worst moment of local history.

Though the magic in these novels certainly derives from Jewish tradition, it is also clearly enabled by García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and global company, and in this sense, the body of fiction under examination here pays homage to that cross-cultural affiliation, that fellowship. Contemporary Jewish American writers seem to say about the world's literature—to borrow again from Morrison, speaking of the lovers Paul D. and Sethe at the end of *Beloved*—"We want to put our story next to theirs." For Warnes, magical realism is "not so much a new globalised aesthetic, nor a will-to-power on the part of a privileged set of migrant intellectuals, but rather an historical conjunction of literary and cultural tendencies that speaks powerfully to our need for literature to explore the limits of definition, and to provide models of identity that confirm or contest notions about the nature of modernity and the place of the postcolonial subject in it."[78] If we substitute for Warnes's "postcolonial subject" all globally displaced or historically hybridized subjects, then we see that history has bequeathed the Jews, together with many subjects of modernity, the need to create narratives that explore, contest, and magically remake the stories of their own modern becoming. Over against many apparent differences, and against exclusivist takes on the Holocaust as incomparable with any other disaster, these writers participate

in a collective movement of the imagination, one that absorbs and transmutes the violence of human history in a body of literature that honors many peoples' stories, and renders them opportunities for world witness.

Notes

1. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 1–7.
2. Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 169–70.
3. Alan Mintz, "Fracturing the Zionist Narrative," Margin: Exploring Modern Magical Realism, accessed August 14, 2012, http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/margin/Mintzreprint.html.
4. On this dynamic in post-1960s African American fiction, especially Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, see Caroline Rody, *The Daughter's Return: African American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–26.
5. Christopher Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural: Faith, Irreverence, and Magical Realism," *Literature Compass* 2 (2005) 20C, borah books.e Word files is arbitrary and mostly for our internal purposes to aid us in easily identifying elements while co 106: 1–16, 9.
6. Wen-chin Ouyang, "Magical Realism and Beyond: Ideology of Fantasy," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, England: Tamesis/Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 15.
7. The 2005 volume *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, signaled a coming of age in magical realism critique, a point when, beyond a focus on magical realism as an exclusively Latin American phenomenon or, alternatively, a concern with precise definitions in the wake of the European genealogy of the term, critics came to concur in treating magical realism as a global, postmodern mode with many local variations, all of which express the clash of realities arising from colonial situations. For Elleke Boehmer, "the proliferation of postcolonial migrant writing in English has become so closely linked to the runaway success of magic realism that the two developments appear almost inextricable" (235).
8. Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 151.
9. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 5–6.
10. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 180.
11. Ibid.
12. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, 151.
13. Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 9.
14. Alfred J. López, *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 143.
15. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 235.
16. Lois Parkinson Zamora, "Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in US and Latin American Fiction," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 542.

17. Faris writes that magical realists resist a modern kind of death that is distinctly "depersonalized," for even more than most contemporary writers, "they inherit the literary memory, if not the actual experience, of death camps and totalitarian regimes." Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 163–64.
18. Howard Schwartz, *Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 12. On this subject, see Tamara Kaye Sellman, "Jewish Magical Realism: Writing to Tell the Tale," Margin: Exploring Modern Magical Realism, accessed August 14, 2012, http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/margin/nonficSellmanJewishMR.html.
19. Ibid., 1, 3.
20. Chava Turniansky, "On the Sources of Isaac Bashevis-Singer's Der sotn in Goray," in *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World*, ed. Hugh Denman (Boston: Brill, 2002), 247.
21. Isaac Bashevis Singer, introduction to *Gifts* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 6.
22. Tracy Mishkin, "Magical Realism in the Short Fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 22 (2003): 1–10.
23. Hugh Denman, introduction to *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World*, ed. Hugh Denman (Boston: Brill, 2002), 11–12. In the collection *Gifts* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), Singer offers an autobiography that moves from faith, to skepticism, to syncretism. "I have lived through a number of epochs in Jewish history," he begins. "I was brought up in a home where the old Jewish faith burned brightly. Ours was a house of Torah and holy books." As a young man, though intrigued by rationalist philosophy, the young Singer could yet see, amid the catastrophes of revolution, pogroms, and World War I, that "the world that was revealed to me was not rational" (3, 5). Therefore "the overthrowing of one regime and the replacing of it with another did not seem to me to be the crux of the matter. The problem was creation itself" (6). Singer thus developed for himself "a kind of religious skepticism" (10). On the existence of God, Singer has written, "There is a God but He never reveals Himself; no one knows who He is or what His purpose is. There are an infinite number of universes, and even here, on this earth, powers exist of which we have no inkling . . . God is the sum of all potentiality . . . Yes, God was a Creator, and that which He created had a passion to create" (10–11).
24. Isaac Bashevis Singer, author's note to *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), viii.
25. Bilhah Rubinstein, "Narrative Constructs in the Works of Yitzkhok Bashevis-Zinger and their Relationship to Kabbalah," in *Isaac Bashevis Singer: His Work and His World*, ed. Hugh Denman (Boston: Brill, 2002), 265–66, 270.
26. Mishkin, "Magical Realism in the Short Fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer," 2.
27. Ibid., 2, 4. For example, in "The Cafeteria" (*The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, 287–300), a female Holocaust survivor claims to have seen Hitler and his henchman holding a meeting in a cafeteria on upper Broadway in the 1950s, on the very night the cafeteria burned to the ground, and is told by the Singer persona, "You had a vision . . . The past is not lost. An image from years ago remained present somewhere in the fourth dimension and it reached you just at that moment" (297). In this sense, the supernatural in Singer's American stories is not "naturalized," as Warnes puts it, but always remains eerie, the subject of remark; as when a man in the story "Powers" (*The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, 317–29) describes to the Singer persona his phenomenal psychic powers over women, and is told "It's good to meet a person with such powers. It strengthens my own faith" (328).

28. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Gimpel the Fool," in *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, 3–14.
29. Ruth Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 64.
30. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Last Demon," in *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, 179–87.
31. Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 8.
32. Ibid., 11.
33. We might compare the magical literary incorporation of these ancestral modes and the resurgence of affect—longings, memories, hopes—that they evoke to similar effects in the paintings of Marc Chagall (1887–1985), whose traditional Jewish figures of rabbis, lovers, and children sail in the skies over now-destroyed villages.
34. See, among other Malamud stories, "The Angel Levine," "The Last Mohican," and "The Magic Barrel," in *The Magic Barrel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), 43–56, 152–83, 193–214; "The Jewbird," in *Idiots First* (New York: Delta, 1965), 101–13; and "The Silver Crown," in *Rembrandt's Hat* (New York: Pocket, 1974),13–38.
35. Cynthia Ozick, "The Pagan Rabbi," in *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories* (New York: Dutton, 1983), 1–37.
36. Interestingly, Ozick's considerable forays into Holocaust fiction in *The Shawl* (New York: Knopf, 1989) and *The Messiah of Stockholm* (New York: Knopf, 1997) resist magic, if just barely; the first uses a surrealist narration, and the second, while it communicates a deep longing for the magical restoration of the masterwork of Bruno Schulz, the great Polish Jewish writer who was killed by a Nazi bullet, it stops short of allowing that desired fulfillment. Ozick has spoken of being unable not to write about the Holocaust though she does not feel authorized to do so; to use the redemptive power of magic in Holocaust fiction, it would seem, strikes her as overweening. Of a character in "The Pagan Rabbi" who was actually born in a concentration camp and then orphaned, and just barely escaped death on the electric fence (which consumes the child in "The Shawl"), Ozick writes, "She was an orphan and had been saved by magic and had a terror of it" (14).
37. Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 1.
38. Saul Friedlander, introduction to *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution*," ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2–3.
39. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 1.
40. Issac Deutscher, "The Jewish Tragedy and the Historian," in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, ed. Tamara Deutscher (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 164.
41. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Book of the Destruction," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution*," ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 322.
42. Saul Friedlander, "The 'Final Solution': On the Unease in Historical Interpretation," in *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 32. For Geoffrey Hartman, "What threatens the mimetic is, to put it bluntly, the infinity of evil glimpsed by our generation, perhaps beyond other generations" (329). Friedlander adds that the Holocaust "could well be inaccessible to all attempts at a significant representation and interpretation . . . In Walter Benjamin's terms, we may possibly be facing an unredeemable past" (Friedlander, "The 'Final Solution,'" 35). That

"unredeemable" quality poses a particular challenge to fictional plot in particular, not only because the Holocaust, as Hartman writes, "challenges the credibility of redemptive thinking" (Hartman 326), but also because, in its utter subjugation of individuality to the cause of murdering a "corporate collectivity (any and all Jews everywhere) [it] abrogates the individualized 'agency that shapes literary plot" (Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz: Remembering What One Never Knew* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003], 8, citing Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990], 147).

43. Theodor W. Adorno, "An Essay in Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms* (1955; repr., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 34.
44. Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz*, 4. "A Holocaust industry desecrates the dead," writes Gubar, not only because it might "exploit the Shoah for sensational or self-interested purposes," but also because it might "thus reduce it to an assimilable and frightfully admissible (or repeatable) phenomenon" (6).
45. Ibid., 5.
46. In Daniel Mendelsohn's *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), a memoir of his search to learn the truth about the murder of his relatives under the Nazis, when the author at last believes he is standing on the exact spot where two of them were shot, he writes, "I knew that I was standing in the place where they had died, where the life that I would never know had gone out of the bodies I had never seen, and precisely because I had never known or seen them I was reminded the more forcefully that they had been specific people with specific deaths, and those lives and deaths belonged to them, not me, no matter now gripping the story that may be told about them. There is so much that will always be *impossible to know*, but we do know that they were, once, themselves, *specific*, the subjects of their own lives and deaths, and not simply puppets to be manipulated for the purposes of a good story, for the memoirs and magical-realist novels and movies. There will be time enough for that, once I and everyone who ever knew everyone who ever knew them dies; since as we know, everything, in the end, gets lost" (502).
47. Friedlander, introduction to *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 17.
48. Hartman, "The Book of the Destruction," 321.
49. Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz*, 13.
50. Ibid., 14, 18.
51. Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Palgrave, 1986), and *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Palgrave, 1991).
52. Alan Mintz, "Fracturing the Zionist Narrative," 5.
53. David Grossman, *See Under: Love* (London: Vintage, 1999), 180; In the now-famous story Grossman's novel retells, Bruno Schulz was shot on the street of his native Drohobycz, Poland, when he went out to buy a loaf of bread on November 19, 1942, by an SS officer, Karl Gunther, who was the rival of Schulz's own Nazi employer, SS Officer Felix Landau. Afterward, "Gunther . . . went to Landau and said, 'I killed your Jew.' To which Landau replied, 'In that case, I will now kill your Jew'" (Grossman 101).
54. Joseph Skibell, *A Blessing on the Moon (*Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin, 1997).
55. Andrew W. M. Beierle, "Making Sense of the World," *Emory Magazine* 75, no. 3 (Autumn 1999), http://www.emory.edu/EMORY_MAGAZINE/fall99/skibell.html.
56. Skibell has described growing up knowing the grandfather and great uncles who were the only survivors of this family and who were entirely silent about those lost: "I realized later that it was just horrible, horrible grief" (Beierle). In writing this

novel, he recounts, "'What got to me personally was working with the characters of my great-grandfather's family,' says Skibell . . . 'I had pictures of them all over my desk, and I would just find myself weeping'" (Beierle).

57. Skibell has said, "'In the cartography of the Jewish afterlife, there is something called *gehenna*, which is where you purify your soul from whatever damage has been done to it over the course of your life . . . In some ways I think that is where Chaim is'" (Beierle).
58. Beierle, "Making Sense."
59. On the distinction between magical realism and the fantastic, see Amaryll Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 125–44.
60. Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz*, 7. Such a use of alienating effects provides the surreal logic of Judy Budnitz's fabulistic story "Hershel" (in *Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge*, ed. Paul Zakrzewski [New York: Perennial-HarperCollins, 2003], 183–91). Budnitz refigures the massive loss of children in the Holocaust in an allegorical tale of the deaths of all the "baby-makers" whose job it was to bake children into being in the ovens of "the old country" (183), after which disaster, new-world descendants are left to make babies on their own, couple by couple. Through indirection and inversion, through "the irony, in the Holocaust context, of bringing forth life from ovens" (190–91), by making nature strange and mass death seem to inhere in our own births, Budnitz follows Singer and Skibell in finding unexpected, haunting figuration for untellable, inherited human loss.
61. Skibell has said that his inspiration for these scenes comes from Jewish folk tales: "'I had been steeping myself in these stories for so long that it wasn't strange to deal with these elements or to think about them narratively. There are a lot of folk tales about the dead talking and people having to deal with things like this head'" (Beierle).
62. Joseph Skibell, "In the Invisible Courtyard of Chaim Skibelski," The Creative Writing Program at Emory University, http://www.creativewriting.emory.edu/faculty/JSPoland.html.
63. One thinks also here of the final page of Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, which features a drawing of a tombstone inscribed with the names and birth and death dates of his parents, the Holocaust survivors Vladek and Anja Spiegelman (Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 136).
64. Jonathan Safran Foer, *Everything Is Illuminated* (New York: Perennial/HarperCollins, 2002).
65. Foer has frankly paid such tribute, as has his wife, novelist Nicole Krauss, the two calling themselves "David's children" (David Grossman, in conversation with the author, October 29, 2008).
66. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Bard-Avon, 1971), 11.
66. Both of these novels accord with Faris's statement that magical realist narratives often appear "fresh, childlike, even primitive"; "Wonders are encountered largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted—presumably—as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection; they thus achieve a kind of defamiliarization that appears to be natural or artless" (Faris, "Scheherazade's Children, 177).
68. Foer has been said to keep a "lovely ink drawing circa 1940, an original self-portrait by Isaac Bashevis Singer" on a wall in his office. He has called "Gimpel the Fool" "probably my favorite short story," and he chose of all things to give as a gift to

a reporter writing a long *New York Times Magazine* portrait of him, a blank sheet of typing paper "culled from the desk of the late Isaac Bashevis Singer," from his extensive collection of such unused authors' papers (Deborah Solomon, "The Rescue Artist," *New York Times Magazine*, February 27, 2005, 42, 45).

69. David. G. Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 44, 57.
70. "A carnivalesque spirit is common" in magical realism; "language is used extravagantly, expending its resources beyond its referential needs" (Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 184).
71. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 175.
72. García Márquez, *One Hundred Years*, 381–83.
73. Inset books in *Everything Is Illuminated* are centrally about love. Of the seven hundred novels said to have been written by Trachimbroders in a three-year period in the mid-nineteenth century, the town librarian says, "They're all about love" (202). The dreams of the *Book of Recurrent Dreams* are substantially erotic, and in the encyclopedic *Book of Antecedents*, Foer privileges poignant, whimsical definitions of art and of sex (the latter of which the encyclopedia of Grossman's novel glosses with the phrase "*See under*: LOVE") (376). Questions about the meaning of love dominate the plot of Brod, her father, and her husband, as well as that of the ladies' man Safran, the hero's grandfather, a reanimation of Foer's actual male ancestor almost as audacious as Skibell's reinvented Chaim. Safran, with the crippled, useless arm that somehow makes him the most sought-after, busiest lover in the shtetl, embodies both historical wound (castration) and potency at once. A miraculous, paradoxical, tragic progenitor, he returns the loving historical regard of the novelist-descendant by falling in love most fully with his own daughter—a baby killed in the Holocaust.
74. Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 10.
75. Rody, *The Daughter's Return*, 65.
76. See Caroline Rody, *The Interethnic Imagination: Roots and Passages in Contemporary Asian American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). And on magical realism in African American and Caribbean women's fictions, see Rody, *The Daughter's Return*, 64–67.
77. Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz*, 243–44, 246.
78. Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, 153–54.

CHAPTER 3

Flying to Save Her Life

Bad Luck, Bad Choices, and Bad Mothers in Gina B. Nahai's *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*

Ibis Gómez-Vega

Gina B. Nahai's *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*[1] uses moments of magical realism and the flawed relationships between mothers and daughters to create a multigenerational story of loss and betrayal. The novel begins with the curse of a woman who leaves her family after daring to sing in the nude in the synagogue after years of being forced into silence. This original act of defiance sets up the curse of the women who leave, the mythology by which women are disciplined into submission in this particular family. Through this novel, Nahai examines how women play a prominent role in the oppression of other women even when they are themselves oppressed as women within their community and as members of a small Jewish community restricted to a ghetto in Iran, a Muslim country. The women in Nahai's novel strike out against other women, especially their daughters, for no apparent reason, and very few escape the sorrow created by mothering so uncharacteristically lacking in sympathy that girls must develop their own coping mechanisms to escape it. Roxanna twice sprouts wings and flies away to save her own life because she knows that no one else will help her. The first time, she flies to safety when her own mother, who is attempting to kill her, throws her off a roof. The second time, she flies away from her husband's home where her mother-in-law had started a reign of terror that included setting loose rabid guard dogs in the house. Roxanna flies away through an open window in the presence of her daughter, who never recovers from her mother's abandonment. Magic provides an escape for Roxanna who is twice saved by her ability to sprout wings and fly, but generations of bad luck, bad choices, and bad mothering leave their mark on the women who must live down the curse of the women who leave.

Early readers who reviewed the book for newspapers across the country noticed the use of magic in *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*. Their words appear

as blurbs in the opening pages of the novel, used by the publisher as evidence of the book's value and its connection to an established genre. A reviewer from *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland calls the novel "a supreme achievement. The magical realism so perfectly wrought by García Márquez has rarely been equaled" as it has been equaled "in Nahai's novel." A reader from *The Orlando Sentinel* claims that "Nahai's writing recalls that of Gabriel García Márquez and Amy Tan, yet her prose bears its own stamp of inventiveness and vivacity . . . A modern-day Scheherazade" (ellipsis in original). *The Portland Oregonian* claims that Nahai "works in elegant contrasts, the spellbinding extremes of the best of the magical realist tradition, conjuring a story that glows as if lit by a subtle, internal fire," and the reader from *The Commercial Appeal* in Memphis points out that Nahai "has created a truly lush novel" in which "she appears to have mastered the craft of sensuous, magical realism." Edward Hower, the reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review*, places the book "in the tradition of magic realist fiction" in which "winds from the spirit world often blow into the lives of ordinary people, touching them with unexpected joy or grief."[2] The use of magic in this text thus is fairly obvious, an integral part of a story that spans almost two hundred years, beginning with a curse that starts on Yom Kippur of the year 1800, but the comparison to Gabriel García Márquez's work is a knee-jerk reaction that borders on hyperbole.

Criticism on Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is extensive, and by now it is fairly obvious even to people who write book reviews for newspapers that his first novel sets the standard for what most people now recognize as magical realism. However, literary critics have developed standards with which to examine the meaning or the use of magic in a text, and most of the criticism has focused on García Márquez's landmark magical realist novel. Maggie Ann Bowers, in *Magic(al) Realism: The New Critical Idiom*, has specified that "there are three sources for García Márquez's magical realism: a confusion of time scales that suggests a mythic time; a mixture of superstition, gossip and exaggeration; and the shock of the new."[3] Other than the influence of superstition in the form of an ancient family curse, these "sources" for magic do not appear in *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*, where time is linear and nothing "new" ever happens. The closest this story comes to a "shock of the new" comparable to the "discovery" of ice in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the delivery of Alexandra's "enormous animal with shiny wooden skin and bare teeth into her house." The "enormous animal" was so strange to the people in this community that they "lined up for blocks to watch the spectacle" (*Moonlight* 18). Alexandra "put the animal in her 'drawing room' overlooking the street, unharnessed and cleaned it, then sat on a chair and put her fingers on its teeth. The beast let out a not altogether unpleasant racket" (18). Alexandra the Cat names the beast "a piano," and she makes it a habit to play her piano in front of the window so that the people who gather outside could hear the music, but the members of the community do not "accept" the beast as much as they react to it with fear. Eventually, they get over their fear of the beast, but they always consider it something strange, not something marvelous that enriches their lives. This instance provides the only "shock of the new" in a novel that so many people have compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Acceptance of magical moments determines whether a text can be considered magical realism or not. Amaryll Chanady argues in *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, one of the earliest studies of the genre at a time when it was still considered a mode, that "magical realism is thus characterized first of all by two conflicting, but autonomously coherent, perspectives, one based on an 'enlightened' and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality."[4] Chanady sees magical realism as "the amalgamation of a rational and an irrational world view"[5] in which "the practitioner of magical realism shows his interest in, and tolerance of, a different perception of the world."[6] Chanady explains that "what produces the ambiguous nature of magical realism"[7] is the apparent contradiction in the reader's awareness that "while the implied author is educated according to our conventional norms of reason and logic, and can therefore recognize the supernatural as contrary to the laws of nature, he tries to accept the worldview of a culture in order to describe it. He abolishes the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural on the level of textual representation and the reader, who recognizes the two conflicting logical codes on the semantic level, suspends his judgment of what is rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world."[8] Chanady calls this a "resolution of logical antinomy in the description of events and situations."[9] However, the only character in *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith* who "accepts" her sister's shedding of feathers during the night or her ability to fly is Miriam, who can also smell Roxanna from far away. The magical elements used in the novel are few and very controlled, usually associated with one character, Roxanna, and only Miriam, Roxanna's sister, actually "accepts" the magic that emanates from her sister.

Miriam became acquainted with Roxanna's scent during their childhood when the children slept together in a room that often "smelled strange: instead of the usual scent of skin and hair, of leftover food and old clothes and dry, unforgiving earth, Miriam the Moon smelled the sea" (10). Even though "nothing appeared out of place" in the room, Miriam noticed when she looked at Roxanna that "her hair was wet, her arms stretched to her sides, and she was afloat in a bed of white feathers" in which she looked "calm and beautiful . . . immersed in her dreams of faraway mountains and emerald seas" (10). Miriam hides the feathers from her mother for a while because she instinctively knows that their mother, Shusha, will not approve of the feathers, and she is right. When Shusha finds out about the feathers, she knows "that the feathers in Roxanna's bed came from her dreams, that in them Roxanna was flying like a bird, or an angel, over a sea that was vast and limitless and that led her away from the tight borders of their ghetto, that the wings and the sea air spilled over the edge of the night sometimes, skipping the line between desire and truth, and poured into Roxanna's bed to speak of her longings" (11). Shusha immediately associates the feathers in her daughter's bed with the early curse of women who long to leave, and she fears it. Thus the magic in this text is not ordinary and it is not accepted as a miraculous everyday event by the other characters in the story; at times, the magic works as a challenge to the rules by which the people in this story live, and this breaks one of the basic definitions of magical realism posited by Wendy Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora in

the introduction to *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. In this seminal work, Faris and Zamora state that "the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it *is* an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence—admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing. It is a simple matter of the most complicated sort."[10]

When Miriam smells the sea and sees the feathers in her sister's bed, she simply accepts them and notices that her sister looks "beautiful," but her mother Shusha fears what she sees and almost immediately realizes that she must kill Roxanna to put an end to the flowing feathers and her dreams of flying. She must put an end to the magic even though she thinks of her daughter as flying in her dreams "like a bird, or an angel" (11). Even the association of her daughter with something as positive as an angel does not influence Shusha's perception of what happens to her daughter when she dreams. Anna Free reads this moment as an example of "post-apocalyptic" discourse, "the moment that the 'doom' comes out of hiding as an apocalyptic revelation."[11] Free argues that "when, as a child, [Miriam] discovers feathers in Roxanna's bed she somehow knows to conceal them as she feels they are a portent" because she is one of those "women in Roxanna's family [who] have sensed the 'doom' that surrounds a daughter in each generation."[12] The moment in which Shusha discovers the feathers in her daughter's bed "is apocalyptic as it reveals and unveils the future according to the prophecy each mother makes about her granddaughter, that she will bring ruin and damnation to her family."[13] She adds that, "through Roxanna, the family [has] sensed the end, and it infects their lives."[14] Free disregards the moments of magic in the text in order to argue that this novel reads as an example of the apocalypse. She later adds that "the reunification of Roxanna and [her daughter] Lili means . . . a new existence for the family, where the legacy of the Crow is not a shadow of doom, but a dance to her song,"[15] but she ignores the fact that the reunion of Lili and her mother is only possible because Lili, who has spent years alone in California, exiled from her homeland and her family, has somehow developed a capacity to forgive. For Lili, being an exile means that she grows up without the damaging influence of her family history, the weight of the curse that devastates her mother. She can shed the curse, just as her mother had hoped she would.

One thing that *Moonlight* shares with more traditional magical realism texts is its setting in a rural area. Bowers points out in *Magic(al) Realism* that magical realist novels "are often set in rural areas away from influence over, or influence from, the political power centres,"[16] and the story is often told "from the marginal perspectives of people lacking political power," which explains why "magical realism has become associated with fictions that tell the tale of those on the margins of political power and influential society."[17] *Moonlight* is set in a Jewish ghetto outside Tehran, clearly set a distance away from the political power of the Iranian authorities, but the novel lacks the kinds of "descriptions [that] detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world," what Wendy B. Faris calls in *Ordinary Enchantments* "the realism in magical realism."[18] This "sense of the magical growing within the real was," according to Faris, "articulated early on by Franz Roh

in his initial discussion of magical realism in painting: 'with the word "magical," as opposed to "mystical," I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it.'"[19] This sense of mystery that "palpitates behind" the narrative is lacking in *Moonlight*.

Magical realism, according to Wendy Faris, "is a combination of realism and the fantastic in which the former predominates."[20] Faris posits that some novels, like García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, are "at the heart" of the genre while others can be seen as "more marginal." To consider a novel an example of magical realism, Faris expects it to "conform to the basic requirements of a preponderance of realism that includes irreducible elements of significant magic within it."[21] *Moonlight* may be one of those "marginal" magical texts where the magic is associated with only one character. Even the "ghosts" who suddenly get blamed for disappearing things in Fräulein Claude's home turn out to be thieves hired by Fräulein Claude to steal her husband's belongings. She hires the thieves after she finds out that he has betrayed her by falling in love with Roxanna, their son's wife. Fräulein's brother, Jacob the Jello, who sits in the kitchen all day lost in a drug-induced stupor, sees the real thieves, "those two men who come to the house and carry everything away" (150). He tells his brother-in-law about the thieves, but "no one listen[s] to him" (150). Thus the ghosts turn out to be real people who are both seen and easily explained. However, on the day of Roxanna's wedding, Miriam, who never really sees a ghost in the house, tells her husband, Mr. Charles, "This house has ghosts" (116). Miriam does not see a ghost, but she apparently feels the presence of ghosts in the house where Roxanna will live with her husband and his parents. Miriam's extrasensory perception is linked with Roxanna, but Nahai never really attributes any moments of magic to Miriam other than her uncanny ability to smell the sea, feel the presence of ghosts that she never sees, and pick up the scent of her sister.

The few moments of magic evident in *Moonlight* have also been linked to the writer's focus on the lives of women. Tiffany Magnolia argues in her dissertation, *Within the Kingdom of This World: Magical Realism as Genre*, that "*Moonlight* offers feminocentric magical realism, a literary form that has realism as its base, as the answer to a very specific set of socio-political problems."[22] She adds that the novel "examines the gender-based conditions of oppression" as "it looks broadly at the political forces of Iranian, Muslim, and Jewish Orthodox laws that prescribe the actions of women,"[23] but this notion of feminocentric magical realism is problematic because, as Wendy B. Faris points out in *Ordinary Enchantments*, "magical realism is not a feminist genre." Faris argues that, even though "works by women authors such as Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, Laura Esquivel, Ana Castillo, and Marie Darrieussecq have used magical realism in novels that are centered on women's experience and women's problems, there is no single definable feminist ideology that joins them."[24] She adds that what works as "the female-subaltern voice in magical realist texts encourages the development of individual ethnic literatures that serve a decolonizing function within their own societies,"[25] but she does not consider magical realism a feminist genre; however, it is entirely

plausible that the feminocentric magic that Tiffany Magnolia finds in the novel emerges from this "decolonizing function" that privileges the feminine.

While many people read *Moonlight* as a feminist text or "feminocentric" magical realism, in "Writing Iranian Americans into the American Literature Canon," Persis M. Karim and Nasrin Rahimieh suggest that Nahai's novels "concern protagonists caught up in the events of the revolution and sometimes remember neglected chapters of that history." They note that in Nahai's *Cry of the Peacock* and *Moonlight*, "fictionalization of the past becomes a means of repositioning Jewish Iranian history and recentering women in that history. These novels open up a space in which to reenact the history of a marginalized segment of the Iranian population and provide a gendered view of that life"[26] Thus Nahai's novels, through their focus on the lives of women, also examine the oppression suffered by Jews in the Iranian ghetto to which they were confined for centuries. This aligns with Wendy B. Faris's point that, "given its attention to social issues, magical realism continues the social analysis in much of realism, but it uses different, postsurrealistic resources."[27] *Moonlight* documents Iranian history through the eyes of a marginalized people. The invasion of Iran by the Allies is noted, but the Jews in Iran are spared the horror of Nazi occupation. The political upheaval that leads to the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in January of 1979 is also mentioned when Fräulein Claude notices that "Teymur's old associates, and Sohrab's contemporaries were fleeing the country like rats" (259). The overthrow of the Shah's regime leads to the massive exodus that eventually relocates most of the family, certainly all of Roxanna's brothers and sisters, to California. Political or historical events, however, are not the focus of this text in which everything leads to that moment in which a woman flies away to safety, away from the ghetto where she is oppressed because the women in her family and their rule-breaking behavior have cursed her.

Gina B. Nahai consciously chooses to expose the oppression suffered by Iranian Jews through her novels because she sees herself as a sort of fictional historian of her people. She complains to Jasmin Darznik in an interview that when she started writing her first novel, she went to the library to research the lives of Jews in Iran but found no records. She states, "I couldn't believe that a people who had lived in a place for 2,500 years had not recorded their existence in any way."[28] Because she could not find evidence of a recorded history of her people, Nahai interviewed Iranian Jews who had immigrated to the United States and taped their stories. She states that she "had to rely on the memory of the older generation of Iranian Jews, who had lived in the ghettos and had also seen the transformation that took place within our communities under the Shah. So I began with my own relatives, then with friends, and then the circle kept growing. After a while, people got used to me going to them with my tape recorder and asking questions."[29] Darznik points out that Nahai "tells this history with a particular attention to the emotional and cultural traumas that have shaped the women of Iran's Jewish ghettos"[30] and she adds that the women in Nahai's novels exhibit a "longing for escape,"[31] that "they are in some way 'runaways'—not just from family, home, country, but also from the idea of 'destiny,' which is so

very pronounced in Iranian culture."[32] Darznik claims that this longing to escape "passes through several generations of her characters, appearing as a curse and, occasionally, as a salvation from fate."[33] During the interview, Nahai admits that "all of my characters, in one way or another, are trying to escape their destinies. Some, like Roxanna in *Moonlight*, do that by opting for exile."[34]

Early in *Moonlight*, Nahai makes it clear that, even though the characters in this novel move about freely, they still suffer the irrational force of racist laws and irrational beliefs that work to oppress women. Roxanna's mother, Shusha the Beautiful, was not only "raised on stories of wayward ancestors, many wandering naked and sorry through the deserts of central Iran," but she also spends her time "in the back of the family's fruit and vegetable shop, amid rotting produce too old and rancid for the Muslims—the law stating that Jews should not have access to fresh produce" (15). In a few sentences, Nahai conflates the two things that affect the lives of these women who are Jews living in an Iranian ghetto. Because they live in Iran, a Muslim country suspicious of Jews, they must submit to arbitrary laws that force them to eat rotting produce instead of fresh vegetables and they must also stay within the confines of their ghetto. This is a physical and political reality for Iranian Jews, one they lived with for centuries. The second thing affecting the lives of these women is the ways in which they behave toward each other as women and as Jews. Living in the back of her mother's vegetable shop, Shusha hears the stories about her ancestors, about the women who transgressed against their men and their community. The message inherent in those stories is that women who break the rules, women who transgress, are dangerous and are, therefore, a "curse" on their families. These stories passed down from generation to generation create a very effective mechanism for oppression, but as Faris and Zamora remind their readers, "magical realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic,"[35] and at least two of the women in this novel will break boundaries, one by transgressing so blatantly that she becomes the source of a curse that torments the women in her family and the other one by flying away to escape the conditions that oppress her and, thereby, fulfill the curse and put an end to its influence.

The family curse that plagues the characters in this novel begins with an act of defiance by a woman who rebels against her husband's rule. Nahai writes that "it had begun, as tragedies often do, with a woman—the Russian wife of a Lubovicher rabbi who had come to Tehran at the end of the eighteenth century with the express purpose of educating the Jews in the ways of virtue and righteousness. To this end the rabbi had brought his wife, his four daughters, and a mule's load of books and scrolls" (12). The problem however is that the rabbi convinces the Jews in the ghetto that "he was the world's foremost authority on the nature of Wrong and on the manner of preventing it," and "since women were most often the source of evil and the root cause of what he called 'acts of moral turpitude,' the rabbi had written his own bible on the proper codes of female conduct—forbidding them such luxuries as laughter, which made them light-headed, and requiring that they speak with one hand covering their mouths, so as not to

tempt any man with the display of the pink fleshy insides of their mouths" (12). That the rabbi writes his own bible on the conduct of women and then convinces his congregation that he is an authority on the subject of evil that emanates from women suggests that other equally bizarre rules and prohibitions practiced by different religious groups come not from God but from any number of disturbed men who managed to convince other people, including women, to follow their insane version of God's will.

Like Paul, whose decree to "let your women keep silent in the churches" (Corinthians 14:34) has influenced the behavior of Christian men toward women for centuries, the Lubovicher rabbi mandates silence on his wife and daughters. According to Nahai, "To set an example that others would follow, the rabbi kept his own wife and daughters under strictest watch. He wrapped them in suffocating layers of black cloth, never allowing them to talk, even in the presence of other females, never telling anyone their names." His control over the women in his family is so severe that the women "stayed home, quiet and aloof and eerie in their isolation, communicating with one another through gestures for fear that someone other than the rabbi might hear their voices. To the people who came to the door or stood on the roof watching them, they looked like a tribe of deaf-mutes moving in a slow and interminable fog" (12). The so-called religious rules controlling the conduct of women have nothing to do with religion or God. They are man-made rules created by men who elevate their own self-worth by oppressing the only people whom they can oppress in a society in which they themselves are oppressed. Tiffany Magnolia points out that, "even for a Lubavich, this rabbi is extreme."[36] She adds that his rules against women point "to the religious justification for patriarchal domination over women, and it allies radical Orthodox Jewish theology with other Orthodoxies in terms of women's oppression."[37] As a Jew, the Lubovicher rabbi had to live under Muslim rules imposed on the Jews by the Iranian government. He had no control over that kind of oppression on himself and other Jews. He does, however, have control over the women in his life, so he subjugates them so these women cannot speak against him, especially because he forbids it. The Lubovicher rabbi who oppresses his wife and daughters unleashes the curse that will pursue and oppress the women of his own family for generations as they try to live down his wife's actions when one day, "on Yom Kippur of the year 1800, she suddenly went mad" (13).

Going mad can mean that the rabbi's wife, whom the people had dubbed "the Crow" because of her black clothes, suddenly became angry or suddenly went insane. In this case, there is a little bit of both. On Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of fasting when people pray and confess their sins, the rabbi's wife breaks her husband's rules.

> Someone was singing. She had a soft, fluid voice, the kind of voice that drips off the lips and leaves a cool trail, that pours onto a man's body and makes his thighs burn. It was a harlot's voice, free and uninhibited, singing an old love song that only men of the lowest caste—entertainers—were allowed to sing. The women in the courtyard heard it first, then the men, and at last the rabbi. Then they all

> looked up, through the waves of yellow heat rising from the arid ground, and saw the Crow naked.
>
> She was white as the river's foamy waters, blond from her head down to her feet, slender and curved and scented like every young man's dream of copulation. She walked into the temple with her eyes closed and her hands on the sides of her mouth, so that her voice would carry farther as she sang. She was followed by her four daughters, who were still veiled and who seemed entranced by her singing. The very sight of her made the rabbi turn black with rage. (13)

The rabbi "watched as his wife went through the temple, circled the pulpit, then left" (14), but he could do nothing to stop her even though he was enraged. The reaction of the worshippers, however, was another matter. Nahai writes that "the women who saw her foamed at the mouth with envy, and the men memorized her every inch and passed the memory on to their offspring" (14). The rabbi's wife

> went into the street, her daughters in tow, the congregation behind them. She went through the main square that until a moment ago had been empty but for a pack of yellow stray dogs, through the silent alleys and the stifled archways of the ghetto, past the sorry homes and the pitiful shops where her husband had forbidden laughter, until she finally reached the gates that connected the ghetto to the city of Tehran. At last she stopped singing and turned to her daughters. Her eyes were hollow, like a madwoman's, and when she smiled, her breath smelled like water. Then she vanished into the unforgiving sun of the Day of Atonement. (14)

The fact that the woman who transgresses by singing naked in the temple also leaves the smell of water when she smiles reminds the observant reader that this woman has transgressed in other ways. Tiffany Magnolia points out that the smell of water in her breath works as "an allusion that calls into question her piety on Yom Kippur, as drinking water is forbidden."[38] Clearly, the rabbi's wife aimed to transgress, and she inspires envy in the women who see her because they do not dare to do what she has done, transgress against her husband, his religion, and all forms of male authority in their little ghetto.

This woman's transgression begins the insidious curse that will later affect the lives of all the rabbi's descendants "because it augured a series of escapes among the female members of every subsequent generation of the rabbi's offspring." According to the family lore,

> The Crow's youngest daughter, for example, left home one morning at the age of fourteen and was never seen or heard of again. Her granddaughter ran away at the age of nine to join a band of Turkish gypsies who had camped out in the mountains outside Tehran. Other girls ran off with bandits, were abducted by nomads, sold themselves to traders of whores. One woman, Shusha's grandmother, threw herself in the Karaj River hoping it would carry her to sea. She ended up purple and bloated and rotting on the river's southern banks. Another one, Shusha's aunt, was caught by her father in mid-flight and brought home, where he kept her tied by the ankles to a brick column for the rest of her life. (14)

This is a complicated matter because one man's irrational behavior leads to the transgression that alters the lives of all women in this family and, by extension, the ghetto where these women live. The legacy of the Lubovicher rabbi is one of women tied by the ankles at night so that they cannot escape the family homes where they should be cherished instead of held prisoners. It is a legacy of subjugation that keeps women in check but also teaches them to fear their own desire to transgress, to want escape from the thing that binds them. Indirectly, because they have heard the stories about the women who left, because they themselves have been abused, and because they are women who could eventually leave, these women learn to mistrust other women, including their own daughters. They learn to bind their own daughters by the ankles so that they cannot escape. They learn to oppress the women in their lives as effectively as they have been oppressed. Anna Free points out that, "from the apocalyptic unveiling of the Crow's body and delight, the women have been forced to live as *if* the shame has already been delivered. The crow itself is considered a bad omen, or as an intermediary between life and death," so in this novel "the Crow is perceived to be the beginning of the end for her lineage."[39]

It is no surprise then that some of the women in this family are rough. BeeBee, Shusha's mother, is "harsh with her customers and cruel with Shusha." She is presented as a tough woman, someone who "thought nothing of denying a worm-ridden apple to the beggarwoman with the crippled child hanging at her breast, and taught Shusha obedience by beating her with the branch of a pomegranate tree till blood beaded on her cracked skin" (15). Nahai provides few details about BeeBee's early life, but she does suggest that she had also been the victim of her own father's bizarre way of controlling his daughters in order to thwart the effect of the family curse. Nahai writes that BeeBee is so obsessed with the family curse of women who leave that, "to keep [Shusha] from fulfilling her destiny and running away from home, BeeBee follow[s] her own father's example and tie[s] Shusha's ankles together when she slept" (15), which points out that, in effect, BeeBee grew up in a home where her legs were bound while she slept to keep her from running away from her family. BeeBee's unfortunate upbringing only partially explains her rage, but it does not justify the way she treats her children. She is relentless in her attempt to end the family curse, and she tells Shusha, "If you marry, you will have a daughter, like I did, and she will run away, or her daughter will run away. I am going to keep you childless and, in this way, change our destiny" (15). She assures her, "I am going to stop the shame" (15).

Writing about the relationship between mothers and daughters, psychotherapist Kathie Carlson has argued that "this relationship is the birthplace of a woman's ego identity, her sense of security in the world, her feelings about herself, her body and other women. From her mother, a woman receives her first impression of how to be a woman."[40] If this is the case, the women in *Moonlight* learn from their mothers how to distrust themselves and other women. In her interview with Jasmin Darznik, Nahai complicates the topic of the relationship between mothers and daughters in her novels when she claims that, in *Caspian Rain*, "the narrator, a young Iranian Jewish girl, repeats a mantra she has heard all her life: 'A daughter

is her mother's worst enemy.' She has heard this from her mother, who has in turn heard it from her own mother, and so on. I put that line there because I used to hear it when I was a young girl in Iran."[41] It is no wonder then that mothers and daughters in Nahai's novels challenge recent statements made by Carol Gilligan about the intrinsic generosity of women. Gilligan's point through *In a Different Voice* is that "in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility,"[42] but this ethic of care is nowhere to be seen in *Moonlight*. If anything, the women become instruments of oppression who persecute, abuse, and even abandon their own daughters. Nahai connects the women's history of oppression as Jews in an Iranian ghetto to their own personal histories as women who devalue other women, which as Wendy B. Faris points out becomes very significant because "history is the weight that tethers the balloon of magic."[43] In this Iranian Jewish ghetto, history has not been kind to women, and it has been especially unkind to women who in any way challenge the rule of the father.

Miriam the Moon spends most of her childhood taking care of her siblings, so she is the one character who appears to exhibit this "ethic of care," but she becomes irrationally cruel when she refuses to speak to or comfort her 17-year-old daughter Sara after Sara's neglect inadvertently causes her 10-year-old brother Joseph to drown in the family's pool. Joseph, who is old enough to know better, goes swimming alone and drowns. Nahai writes that "for twenty-nine days following her son's drowning death that summer, Miriam the Moon did not speak to Sara" even though Miriam's sisters told her that "Sara was suffering horribly, that she blamed herself and would not stop doing so unless Miriam forgave her" (254). Miriam responds that her daughter "should know she's responsible" and refuses to forgive her or even speak to her. As a result of Miriam's inability to forgive her daughter, "on the thirtieth day of the shiva, Rochelle walked in to check on Sara and found her crouched on the floor, foaming at the mouth and vomiting Nile bleach. She died in the hospital, begging Miriam to save her" (256). Later, after both her children are dead and buried, "Miriam the Moon seemed to have forgotten her loss. She remained headstrong and impossible, so bent on denying God the pleasure of seeing her tears, she never showed her pain even to her husband," Mr. Charles, who had earlier "declared he was too sad to go to work" (256). Miriam the Moon simply takes "over the shop and [runs] it by herself" (256) as if nothing had happened. However, much later in the novel, when Miriam finds Roxanna hiding in Turkey, she admits her guilt when she tells her sister: "Joseph drowned. I killed Sara." In an effort to take her sister home, she adds, "But here you are, and all *you* have to do to find your child is turn around" (320). Although Miriam appears to have learned nothing from her daughter's death at first, she slowly develops an awareness not only of what she did to cause her daughter's death but also of what she did not do to stop it. She did not forgive her daughter; at the end of the novel, Miriam is the catalyst for forgiveness, the kind of sympathy and compassion that had so blatantly been missing in the lives of these women, and she is the one who does everything within her power to bring Roxanna and Lili together.

Miriam's behavior toward her daughter is surprising because Miriam is the one who, throughout the novel, cares for her brothers and sister and remains involved in their lives, even after they immigrate to the United States and settle in California. It is Miriam who, after Roxanna flies away and stays away for 12 years, travels to Turkey when she hears that Mateen, Jacob the Jello's son, on vacation in Istanbul in 1984 "looked into the crowd and saw a woman waiting for a bus. She was pale and small, her face full of lines, her skin dry and stretched tight over a bony face. When their eyes met she smiled at him, the kind of smile strangers offer one another on rainy afternoons in a crowded place when they know they will never meet again" (308), but Mateen left Istanbul with the feeling that he had seen Roxanna, a woman whom he had only seen once in his life when he was a child. On this unlikely bit of "evidence" that her sister could still be alive, Miriam ventures out to find her, and when she does find her living in a tiny room, she gives her money, fake papers, and a plane ticket so that she can join her family in California. It is also Miriam who finds Roxanna's daughter, Lili, living as a guest in Mercedez's house, and draws her back into the fold of her family. Miriam's concern for and connection to her family testify to her ethic of care, but her inability to forgive her daughter for the mistake that causes Joseph's death reminds the reader that Miriam, in spite of her loving connection to her family, is one of those women who, like her grandmother BeeBee, irrationally strike out against other women, especially their daughters. There is no logical explanation for this uncharacteristic lack of sympathy displayed by mothers in this novel, although the fear of women as transgressors and rule breakers harks back to the original Crow. The problem is that the fear created by the curse causes women to devalue their daughters, to treat them as if they are not capable of any behavior other than the kind of behavior that leads them to transgress, and this speaks to these women's complicity in maintaining the status quo that degrades them and their daughters. They become the guardians of the rules that subjugate them, and they learn to hate the women who break these rules and effectively free themselves, the women who leave.

The relationship between BeeBee and Shusha testifies to this illogical behavior displayed by mothers toward their daughters. After Shusha marries, in spite of her mother's fears that she will produce female children, her mother basically abandons her. BeeBee "never came to see her or her children" (22). What she does do is "send word every time a girl was born that Shusha must be careful, because sooner or later one of those daughters was going to shame her mother" (22). BeeBee cannot let go of her fears long enough to value her daughter or her grandchildren, and Nahai adds insult to injury when she states that, "as if to please the gods of BeeBee's Destiny, Roxanna was born" (22). By the time Shusha becomes pregnant with Roxanna, "she had become distant and distracted, uninterested in her children and in the daily routine of life." Her husband, Rahman, calls in the midwife, who tells him that his wife's behavior "happens when the infant's blood is hostile to its mother's" (23) blood. Thus it is clear that Roxanna and Shusha are at odds practically from the moment of Roxanna's conception, and it does

not help that, during her pregnancy, Shusha spends her time "thinking of the sea" (23). On the day when Roxanna is born,

> a breeze blew across the ghetto, bringing the smell of moist air and cool waters, forcing fog—thick and white and impossible to see through—to rise from the torrid earth and travel into the houses full of sorrow where women, overcome by waves of desire, turned to their men in their sleep. At dawn, when the mist cleared, the sun rose over Tehran, but did not illuminate the ghetto within it: the ghetto remained still and quiet under a blue-gray sky—like the beach after a biblical flood—emitting a smell of fish so strong, it traveled all over the city and attracted the Muslims, who turned around at noon, when the heat was blinding, and discovered the patch of dawn that still lingered over the Jews. (26)

BeeBee, who had never visited her daughter, comes to see Roxanna on "that night when the ghetto was surrounded by a sea of bewildered Muslims and the sun was rising fourteen hours late," and "everyone who had ever known the old woman swore she was going to declare Roxanna a bad-luck child" (27). In effect, as the people in the community suspect, BeeBee's words to her daughter are, "'This is the bad-luck one,' she said. 'Give her away if you can. Or else, kill her yourself'" (27). There is no sympathy here, no forgiveness, no assumption that people can shape their own destinies.

The "bad-luck" child born under such unusual circumstances is Roxanna, someone who very early in her life, when she was only four years old, shares an unusual fate with the Crow as she "falls" into a water storage tank in the neighbor's house and drinks until she almost drowns on Yom Kippur of all days. "As the day became warmer and her tongue began to burn in her mouth, [Roxanna] kept asking Miriam for water. In vain, Miriam explained to her the exigencies of being a Jew, and told her she had to wait till at least noon to drink" (30), but Roxanna would not wait. Guided by the pure logic of her childish thoughts, she does not see any reason why she should not drink water when she is thirsty; thus, transgressing against the law of man begins at an early age with Roxanna. Like the Crow, Roxanna breaks Jewish law and drinks the forbidden water, but she almost drowns as a result. That she survives her fall into the water storage tank is one of those miraculous things associated with her character, one of those things that mark her as a bad-luck child, someone who is different. Roxanna is also marked by the fact that she seems to have extrasensory perception, something else that would mark her as someone outside the norm in her community. When people in the ghetto get sick with smallpox, Roxanna "insist[s] she can see the fever in various parts of the house," and she even "point[s] to the spots where she said the smell [are] the strongest" (31–32). When her brothers and sisters fall prey to the disease, BeeBee finally relents and comes to help Shusha who believes that "Roxanna had summoned the disease by talking about it." Shusha distrusts her daughter to such an extent that she thinks that maybe her six-year-old daughter "had wished [the disease] on her family members. Maybe she had picked it up in her sleep, on those nights when she flew unrestricted into strange lands Shusha had never even heard of, and brought it back to give to others" (32). Shusha

"prayed and cried and even undertook the making of almond tears—a long and laborious process designed to procure miracles when all else had failed" (33). By the end of the week when her children survive the illness, Shusha "was already planning to kill her own child" (33). Shusha transfers her grief over her convalescing children on to the one child who challenges tradition and the status quo.

By the time smallpox affects the Jewish ghetto in 1943, a "new law allowing Jews to live outside the ghetto" (31) had been passed in Iran, and some Jews had moved out. Shusha visits Sun the Chicken Lady, one of the Jews who had purchased "a barn in the northern hills surrounding Tehran" (31), in order to execute her plan to kill her daughter far away from the ghetto. Sun the Chicken Lady welcomes Shusha and her children to her new home and invites them to climb to the roof with the assurance that "the view up here will make you crazy" (34), which may be what happened to Shusha when she "pushed Roxanna off the roof" (35). Miriam sees what her mother does and screams for her to stop, but it is too late.

> Roxanna fell backwards into the night, descending slowly, her arms outstretched and her legs loose—like a swimmer floating on water. She sank silently, losing her shoes, her eyes open but not frightened. Just as she was about to hit the ground, she began to move her arms, up and down, like a bird that was flying for the first time—finding its balance, tasting the air, loving its freedom. Then she moved with more certainty and rose higher, backwards and up over the wall of Sun's yard, away from Tehran and its fears, towards the snow-covered summits of the Elburz Mountains and beyond them, to the everlasting of the Caspian Sea. (36)

In an instance of magic, Roxanna sprouts wings, flies away to safety, and thwarts her mother's attempt to kill her. When military policemen find her and return her to the ghetto, the six-year-old child "instinctively" runs to her mother "to seek solace. Then suddenly she stopped and pulled back. For a moment she remained stunned. Her lips turned white. Then she dropped her head. 'I know what you did,' she whispered" (38). At the tender age of six, Roxanna realizes that "her own mother, who seemed to love her, had tried to kill her." This knowledge makes her "so restless after her flight, she could not sit in the same place for more than a moment at a time, so driven by the need to guard herself against real and imaginary dangers, she barely slept anymore" (38).

Roxanna's first flight to safety takes place at a time when the Iranian authorities are beginning to relax their draconian rules against Jews. Ironically, even as the government relaxes its grip on this small community, the Jews themselves continue to oppress each other. Shusha claims that she is afraid of her daughter and asks her husband to give her away, so only two years after she flies away to safety, Roxanna moves in with Alexandra the Cat, who had asked Rahman to find her a servant. Rahman "would decide to save his family and Roxanna's life at once" by giving her away. "He would find a taker for Roxanna, wrap her up like a bad gift, and give her away" (39). Alexandra the Cat was an aristocratic outsider who claimed to be Russian, but the people in the ghetto thought that "she spoke Farsi too fluently for someone who had just arrived in the country" (18), so they

had their doubts about her. Rahman had worked for Alexandra for seven years before he married Shusha, so it was not unusual for her to ask his help in finding another servant. It also seems logical that Alexandra, who was herself an outsider and a rule breaker, a woman kept by an Assyrian merchant who visited her house at night, should be the one to take Roxanna into her home. This arrangement not only provides a home for Roxanna but it also creates the connection between Roxanna and Mercedez, Alexandra's "love child" with the Assyrian merchant. Mercedez is another female child abandoned by her mother, who cannot care for her because she must make herself "available" to her lover. The Assyrian merchant who fathers Mercedez, however, somehow convinces his legal wife to take Mercedez into their home, but the arrangement ends suddenly shortly after Roxanna becomes Alexandra's servant. At the time Mercedez is brought back to Alexandra's home by the Assyrian merchant whose wife no longer wants to keep her, Alexandra is already too old and too blind to recognize her own daughter. Mercedez is described as "a green-eyed monster with yellow hair and no heart" (43), but her friendship with Roxanna is solid enough that when Lili, Roxanna's daughter, finds herself alone in a Catholic boarding school in Los Angeles, Mercedez the Movie Star is the one who stares down the nuns and takes Lili home.

Mercedez and Roxanna suffer together but differently. They share the same fate as daughters whose mothers abandon them, but they have a different sense of who they are in relationship to their mothers. Mercedez grew up in her father's home and was nurtured by a woman who thought she was an orphan, not her husband's illegitimate daughter. She was cared for by this woman who was not her birth mother. Roxanna, however, was totally abandoned by her mother, who also feared her. Mercedez resents her mother and feels "no guilt for wishing death on this woman who had brought her into the world only to give her away" (55). She never understands "the kind of desperation Roxanna felt at the possibility of losing" (55) Alexandra, who had taken her into her home and allowed her to live a relatively safe life away from Shusha, who still wanted her dead. "More than anything else, more than the taste of hunger that tainted every bite of food she ever ate or the fear of Shusha coming in the night to kill her, Roxanna the Angel dreaded the time when Alexandra would die" (55). Roxanna suffers silently through most of her childhood because she cannot explain to Mercedez that Alexandra had saved her life. Jessica Yadegaran, in a review of *Caspian Rain*, writes that Gina B. Nahai "demonstrates that suffering is a cultural imprint; that people, particularly in the East, don't make lemonade from lemons. Rather, they carry a ton of lemons on their hearts and shoulders for generations."[44] This suffering as a cultural imprint is very evident in Roxanna and Mercedez, two girls abandoned by their mothers for different reasons, but two girls who grow up with different purposes in life. Mercedez wants "to leave as soon as possible, on the back of a rich man stupid enough to give her not just money but also freedom, so that she could go out into the world alone and unencumbered" (56). Roxanna wants "a man to love" her so that "together we'll have a daughter that the whole world will love because she will be prettier than anything anyone has seen—prettier than Miriam the Moon or even you. And what's more, she will be

smart. You'll be able to see in her eyes how smart she is, and even Mrs. Wisdom won't dare stop her from going to university because she'll know, everyone will know, that my daughter will someday make my whole family proud and undo every shame that I have brought" (58–59).

That Roxanna wants to give birth to a daughter speaks to her ability to transgress. In a family in which female children are feared and oppressed, Roxanna wants to have a daughter who will erase what she sees as her shame. She wants in fact to change her family history. When Alexandra the Cat dies and Roxanna travels to Tehran to find Mercedez, she meets the man who will father her child. Sohrab the Sinner sees Roxanna as light in one of those instances of magic associated with her character, an instance in which the horrible history of oppression suffered by Iranians transforms itself into something more meaningful for one of the characters. Sohrab was on his way home, traveling in his car through the square where Reza Shah had executed his victims. In order to ignore that bit of Iranian history to which he had been a witness, Sohrab "closed his eyes as the car moved through the square, and meant to open them only when they had cleared the area. But in the dark space between his eyelids he had seen her again, remembered her face during the split second before she had turned away from the car in Vanak" (82). He tells his driver "to go back and look for her" because "in the place where his most bitter moment had come to pass, the place where his childhood had ended and his faith had been destroyed, Sohrab saw a field of light so radiant, he felt as if he had opened his eyes for the first time" (82). Sohrab's vision, of course, was Roxanna, who was destitute and desperate, walking through the streets of Tehran looking for Mercedez, her only friend. Alone and left to her own devices in Tehran, Mercedez had found her man. She had left the ghetto determined to trade her body for a wealthy husband, which recreates what her own mother had done during her lifetime, but unlike Alexandra the Cat, Mercedez actually marries her chosen wealthy man and later becomes even wealthier in her own right as a movie actress in the United States. On the night when Roxanna is walking through the streets of Tehran looking for her, Mercedez is enjoying her honeymoon in Paris. As luck would have it, Sohrab knows Mercedez and her new husband, so he asks Roxanna to come home with him to wait until she returns.

Roxanna's sojourn in Sohrab's home brings her face-to-face with another woman who will hate her and attempt to kill her by slipping crushed pearls into her food. Sohrab's mother, Fräulein Claude, hates Roxanna from the moment she sees her, not because Roxanna is cursed but because she has come to take from her what she sees as her own. In Fräulein Claude's house, however, Roxanna will find love, something she never had before, and even though she "fully believed in her own corrupting influence—the ill fortune that surrounded her like a halo and spread to anyone she touched" (150), she agrees to marry Sohrab. Unfortunately, the two do not go on to live happily ever after because Sohrab is not the only who falls in love with Roxanna. In fact, his father, Teymur, also falls in love with this woman whom he sees as light. On her wedding day, Sohrab and Teymur watch as "the light moved slowly past one wall and then another, illuminating

every room . . . so that by the time it was at the front door, the entire house was lit—like a golden ship rising out of dark waters—and opened its arms to reveal Roxanna" (119). This new perception of Roxanna as light, as something other than the bad-luck child, may have empowered her to finally take the chance and offer herself to Teymur years later, but for the moment Roxanna is loved for the first time in her life. Her marriage to Sohrab fulfills her dream of finding a man to father the child who will redeem her. However, because this is Roxanna, the bad-luck child, she falls in love not with her husband, who loves her, but with his father, Teymur the Heretic, who "would not look at her" (108). She learns soon enough that Teymur "did not look at her because she was already in his eyes, from before he had ever met her, before she had even left the ghetto; that he did not have to stand close to her because he knew she smelled like the seas he had already sailed; that he did not have to touch her because he knew that she had no weight—like sleep, or desire. And then she understood that he had seen her wings—those transparent feathers that grew color only at night, against the blue sapphire sky of her longings" (109). In this house where two men love her, Roxanna's worst enemy becomes her mother-in-law, Fräulein Claude, who "tried to stop the marriage, of course." Nahai writes that "she fought a bloody battle to the finish, schemed, plotted and cursed, threatened suicide, staged a heart attack the day Sohrab came to her asking permission to get married. She threw herself in front of Teymur's black Ford, saying she would rather die suddenly than after a life of slow suffering, even took her maternal responsibilities to their logical end and tried to poison Roxanna" (113). Nothing works because Teymur "prevailed upon her. He wanted this marriage" (113).

The irony in Fräulein Claude's instant hate for Roxanna is that she also does not come from the best of families. In fact, she descends from a penniless although popular father, Ruhallah from Shiraz, a man with "no money and even less social standing" who had "an extensive list of friends all over Tehran" (100). When his daughter Golnaz notices Teymur driving around town in his car, she realizes that "a 'correct' marriage was her only chance at improving her life and saving her brothers from their poverty" (101). She picks Teymur because he is wealthy and can help her family, so she transforms herself into someone whom she thinks Teymur will notice and becomes "Fräulein Claude, formerly the Jew from Shiraz and Tehran" and visits Teymur in his home "without an invitation" (103–4) in order to let him know that she exists. She chases the man who will improve her family's social standing and does not stop until she gets him to propose to her and marry her. She creates a myth about her life in Germany to appear sophisticated, but all of it is a fiction designed to achieve her end. When her son Sohrab falls in love with Roxanna, Fräulein Claude assumes that Roxanna is after his money. She attributes to Roxanna her own original motives for chasing the man in this family, but Roxanna has no idea who Sohrab is. She is not only a girl from the ghetto with little exposure to the outside world, but she is also a very taciturn girl who is so aware of her own shame as the bad-luck child in her family that she barely speaks. Roxanna has no aspirations to money or grandeur, and she is more honest with Sohrab than Fräulein Claude was with Teymur. When Sohrab

asks Roxanna to marry him, she tells him that "she was just a runaway from the ghetto with no place to go and no choices to make" (110), and she even tells him "what she thought he deserved to know—that she was a bad-luck child, that she came from a line of women who had dishonored their families, that she was destined to run away, from her parents or her husband, or perhaps from both, that for this reason, her mother had tried to kill her and her father had given her up to a woman who lived with ghosts" (110–11). Roxanna is in fact more honest with her husband-to-be than Fräulein Claude was with hers, but like so many women in this text, Fräulein Claude assumes the worst of other women. She treats Roxanna with no sympathy from the first encounter and asks her to leave her home because "'enough is enough,' she said to Mashti, without even addressing Roxanna. It was seven in the morning, and Roxanna was standing on the steps outside the main entrance to the house. 'Give her fifty rials and put her on the bus downtown. We're not running a boarding house here'" (91).

Fräulein Claude's private battle against Roxanna leads to the second moment of magic in *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith* when Roxanna flies out the window into exile because she cannot tolerate her mother-in-law's behavior and because she cannot be with the man she loves. As soon as Fräulein Claude finds out from her brother Jacob that "[her] husband was screwing that girl from the ghetto last night" (134), she removes all doors from their hinges so that Roxanna and Teymur cannot be alone. She tells Roxanna that "this way [Sohrab] can watch your every moment of every day and night," but she adds "my husband has slept with many women since he married me . . . but it doesn't bother me because he knows they're all whores, there for his taking. So I don't blame *him* for what happened. I blame *you*. And my son, too, blames you" (138). She hires a man who lets hungry dogs loose in the house to guard it from thieves but she had also hired the thieves to steal from the family so that she could then turn around and blame Roxanna for whatever was missing. The thieves leave the house "empty and full of dust, robbed of everything but the enormous chandelier" (169) on the high ceiling; however, "instead of saving the house from the robber ghosts, the dogs became its jailkeepers" (148). Roxanna one day catches "sight of her own image in the mirror: thirty-three years old. Trapped at the end of her own life" (167). Her husband refuses to let her go, and Teymur "closed himself off, and abandoned Roxanna to Fräulein Claude's revenge" (143). Alone, but still "desperate with longing" (165) for Teymur, Roxanna decides to leave, even if it means abandoning her daughter. She tells Lili that she cannot take her because "you have a future here, with your father. I will not take it away from you" (149), but she knows that she cannot stay.

In November, when Lili starts kindergarten, "Roxanna was still confined to the house, guarded by Fräulein Claude, allowed no freedom" (160), but she climbs down a ladder with Lili at night so that she can take her to a fair. There, she tells Lili to look up at the sky and admits to her that "'I flew there once,' Roxanna said. 'I was six years old, still living with my mother. One night I grew wings and flew'" (163). This is her way of explaining what may happen. She does not tell her that she flew away because her mother had tried to kill her, and she

does not explain that she is once again suffering from the fear and hatred of yet another mother. Instead, she tells her daughter that "from that time on, I could never stand the feel of my feet on the ground anymore" (163). She assumes the blame for what she is about to do instead of admitting that her life has become unbearable under her mother-in-law's rule and the benign neglect of the two men who love her. Left to her own devices, Roxanna once again sprouts wings and flies away as "she open[s] her arms and lean[s] into the night" (169). When she disappears, Jacob the Jello once again sees what happens. He tells Fräulein Claude, "'I saw that girl,' he said. 'Your son's wife. She had white wings, and she was flying outside the kitchen window'" (170), and even though they searched everywhere for days, Roxanna was never found. She landed "in the Karaj River, waist deep in water and surrounded by darkness. She was ice cold, miles away from Teymur's house," but "instead of fear, Roxanna was filled with a sense of relief so deep and liberating, it made her feel omnipotent" (175).

Her omnipotence translates to sexual freedom. She makes love to the young man who picks her up "in broad daylight, in a car exposed on the open road, in a land where a woman accused of indecency could easily be stoned to death or thrown into a deep well to rot," but Roxanna no longer cares. In fact, "she made love to him over and over, at every stop, in every village, without asking his name or offering her own, without loving him, without being ashamed" (179). Once she leaves Teymur's home, Roxanna is "not afraid of exile anymore. It did not matter to her that she was alone and nearly naked, about to freeze, and lost on her way to nowhere. It did not matter that she would never see Teymur again, that Sohrab would try to hunt her down, that she had left her child crying out to her in the dark. She had saved herself and was not about to look back" (175). Uninhibited sex is her first freedom, and because this is Roxanna, the bad-luck child, it will also become a punishment when, only two hours after arriving in Van, a city that "had the feel of a city under siege, of women and children hiding from the enemy" (181), she gets picked up by the Turkish police and delivered to a whorehouse because, in this country and particularly this town, "a lone woman out on the street was only begging for trouble" (181). The woman who runs the house tells Roxanna, "You will work here as long as I want to keep you," and she adds, "If you try to escape, or disobey a customer, I will have my boys knife you in the face" (191). Effectively, Roxanna's flight to freedom delivers her to a horrible place, a whorehouse where yet another woman guards the gate. The "House of the Eastern Star" was owned by an Azerbaijani Turk, a man who profited from the trade, but it was a woman who kept the other women in line.

Back in Tehran, Fräulein Claude continues her war against Roxanna and even her daughter. She tells Sohrab and Teymur to stop looking for Roxanna because "by now she has probably rotted . . . Or else she's sleeping in someone else's bed, eating out of his hands the way she ate out of both of [yours]" (184), and even the principal at Lili's school perpetuates the war against this woman when she tells the five-year-old child, "Your mother is dead," and she adds the ridiculous lie, "She threw herself out a window and your father buried her in the yard. That's why they poured concrete all over the yard: to keep her body from being

discovered" (187). There is no sympathy for women who transgress in this house, in this country, which is why redemption and forgiveness are not possible until these people immigrate to the United States and settle in California. In "May 1972, five months after Roxanna's disappearance" (198), Fräulein Claude convinces her son to send Lili to America. She tells her son that "he owed it to [Lili] to give [her] a fresh start, that by sending [her] away, he would free [her] of Roxanna's legacy" (198–99), so he enrolls Lili "in a Catholic boarding school near Pasadena, California" (199) where Lili finds herself alone and without the language to communicate with her teachers or classmates. Effectively, Lili suffers an exile very similar to the one suffered by her mother in Turkey. Mother and child find themselves in different foreign countries without the language skills to communicate with others. Lili finds an ally when she sends a simple three-word note to Mercedez at the only address she had brought from home. She writes:

> Roxanna
> Lili
> Please. (222)

Amazingly, Mercedez understands the message and comes to the school to rescue Lili and begins taking her home on weekends. Through this connection, Lili recovers her language and access to someone who loved her mother. Like her daughter, Roxanna finds a way out of exile when she runs away from the whorehouse into a deeper exile in Istanbul where she finds a job in a restaurant. She rents a tiny room where she "entertains" men, sometimes for money and sometimes for pleasure. It is here that she is "struck by the realization that she was loose, and unknown, and that she was going to die in this town—free, it was true, but also alone" (220). The war against Roxanna and, by extension, her daughter Lili continues in the hearts of Fräulein Claude and other people like her, but the abuse against Roxanna effectively ends the day she flies away from Tehran and later the day her daughter is sent to school in California.

Twelve years later, when Miriam finds her sister and tells her, "You don't have to explain anything. No one holds a grudge. We've just come to take you back" (319), she is not entirely correct. Lili has already told her aunt in no uncertain terms, "in as calm a voice as [she] could manage, with words [she] forced out till [her] stomach began to bleed . . . that [she] *could not* go with her because [she] did not—*could not*—afford to find out if Roxanna was alive. Because [she] had lost Roxanna a thousand times a day for twelve years and could not bear either to lose or to find her again." She ends her statement with the words, "If she had wanted me, she would have stayed" (315), which means that Lili is still holding a grudge against her mother for leaving her. Still, Miriam somehow convinces her sister to join her family in California and leaves her a passport that she procured using her daughter Sara's birth certificate and picture. When Roxanna uses the ticket and fake papers that Miriam provides for her and flies, on a plane, to California, the journey toward forgiveness is made possible. However, with Roxanna, nothing is easy. Within weeks, she "was wheezing all the time, getting

larger, slower," and by the time she arrives in California she was "two hundred and eighty-three pounds and barely able to walk" (330). Uncertain about what to do, Roxanna does not call her sister. Instead, she takes a bus and ends up in the heart of the Iranian community in Los Angeles, where a rabbi asks if he can help her, even though he is not exactly willing to do so. Eventually, "the rabbi realized that he had bought himself a headache" and "thought about referring Roxanna to any of the various Iranian social agencies established in Los Angeles" (333), but for some reason he finds her a place to stay. When "a young Iranian boy, barely seventeen years old, drove up in a full-sized van," the rabbi tells her, "We're going to load you into this thing . . . and take you up to a room I've found. There might also be a job" (334). Instead of contacting her family, Roxanna hides.

Nahai does not explain the reason why Roxanna flies to California only to hide from her family again. Instead of calling Miriam to come and get her, Roxanna takes the job offered by the rabbi and once again settles into a life of drudgery in exile. She "worked at the market for a week, getting paid three dollars an hour," but "her greatest fear next to dying in her sleep was that one of the women who shopped at the market would recognize [her] from the past." Then, "on her eighth morning in the pharmacy building, she woke up and found she could not move" (336). The people who come to check on her notice that she is "clearly heavier than when they had last seen her" and her weight even threatens the building. The pharmacist calls the rabbi to tell him that "the city came over this morning" because "the tower is leaning to one side, and that happens to be just where your lady friend has been lying the past few days" (337). They find out that "in the last few days since she had been lying there, she had grown so large, she could not fit through the door," and the men start "talking about cutting a large hole around the window and using a crane to lift her out" (338). Miriam finds her sister through a subtle moment of magic. When she hears about the fat woman who will be lifted out by a crane, the woman who "sweats salt water right onto the floor all night" (341), Miriam instinctively knows that the woman is Roxanna. When she goes to the building, "she smell[s] the scent of moist air and sultry dreams, of cool nights and old, old memories. It was the scent she had known in her childhood, in those years when she had slept on the floor next to Roxanna, and woken up many a night from the sound of her wings flapping in the wing" (342), so "Miriam [has] no doubt she [has] found Roxanna" (343). Eventually, "the crane lower[s] [Roxanna] to the street and back into everyone's life, like a giant malediction," but they have to keep her "strapped to the gurney" so that they can load "her onto a flatbed" (348) so that they can deliver her to Miriam's home where the family can care for her.

At home, Miriam tells Lili that her mother is "dying of Guilt, you see. Over what she did to you, and to your father before you. She's dying of Sorrow, over the life that she wasted, that she could have fixed but didn't." She points out that Roxanna "never got the chance—gave herself the chance—to go back and ask forgiveness" because if she had done that, according to Miriam, "she might release some of those tears and start to recuperate" (356). Miriam's diagnosis for what ails her sister is to make "almond tears," what she describes as "an old ritual

we used to do back home, whenever we were faced with a tragedy we couldn't resolve" (356), but earlier in the novel the same process is defined as "a long and laborious process designed to procure miracles when all else had failed" (33). Shusha made almond tears when her children had smallpox. Miriam wants to make almond tears to save Roxanna but also to bring Lili into the process of saving her mother, something particularly important because the women in Roxanna's life have always been her enemy. Miriam understands that Roxanna needs Lili's forgiveness if she is to choose life. She tells Lili that making almond tears is "a long process—takes at least two days—and at the end of it, you need someone with a pure soul—good karma, they call it here—to feed the tears to the afflicted person. I thought I'd get *you* to do this" (356). Lili is the one with a pure soul who must give up her resentment, forgive her mother, and bring her into the fold of her family, a small miracle. The problem, however, is that even on her deathbed Roxanna understands that Lili has a reason to hate her. She knows that "[she] did love her, it is true. But [she] did not love her enough," and she admits that she "was always leaving her" because she "had one foot on the ground and the other dying to fly" (361). Thus, it may not be true that Roxanna is dying of guilt because even as she is close to death she is unrepentant.

Although Miriam attributes Roxanna's weigh gain to her guilt, it may be more truthful to say that Roxanna is dying from all the tears that she has never shed. Unlike her mother, who kept a bottle into which she cried her tears, Roxanna never cries, just as she hardly ever speaks or asks for anything. When Lili performs the ritual and the tree drops almond tears, "even Mercedez cries with joy" (368). Lili does as she is told and feeds her mother the almond tears. Before long, Roxanna claims to "feel a wall cave in, and [she] begin[s] to cry—real tears instead of this cursed water that has been pouring from me like poison" (371). Soon, she feels "lighter, as if with each tear [she is] shedding another pound, as if it is the tears, gathered up inside [her] through the years of living by the Sea of Marmara, before that in the house of Teymur's Desire, and even before that in the ghetto far away in the desert—as if it is the tears that have weighed [her] down" (371). When Roxanna finally feels light enough to stand up, she puts her "arm around Lili and, in one move, lift[s] her off the ground. [They] glide through the glass door, into the yard, across it, into the night sky. When [her] feet leave the ground, [Lili] holds on to [her] and looks down" (372). In a final flight, Roxanna takes her daughter with her and shows her the past, "the path that brought [her] to this house" (372) and tells Lili, "*In the beginning, . . . there were many choices and I, believing I was doomed, let them go to waste*." She also sees for the first time that Lili "has understood [her]" (373). She realizes then that "on this day, in this land of choices, [she] can see the possibility of forgiveness—the chance to sin and be absolved, to start again, as [she] should have done after [she] slept with Teymur. As Sohrab wanted [us] to do. As Lili can do" (373). Forgiveness is possible in America, the land where the women in her family come to Miriam's house to sit Shiva, even before Roxanna dies, because they care about her, the land where her daughter can choose a different life than the one she would have led in Iran.

At the end of *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*, exile is a positive thing. Roxanna claims that "sometimes, exile is the best thing that can happen to a people" (359) just as Lili had earlier understood that "Sohrab might have done [her] a favor by sending [her] away." Lili states, "He had taken away my hope and my family, it is true. But he had also taken away the fear I had of being haunted by greedy ghosts, the anxiety of having rabid dogs at the window, the anguish of wondering if Roxanna was buried under the concrete in our yard. He took from me the sadness that had tainted my mother's life, and the limitations of a destiny I could not have avoided in Iran" (262–63). Exile, although painful, brings these women to a country where they can escape the weight of their family history, a country that offers them a second chance, a country where they can live down the family curse left by the Crow, a country where transgressing could very well be the norm. They can choose to forgive transgressing women in America, something they could not do in Iran, and this choice is as magical as the moments when Roxanna sprouts wings and flies to her freedom. The magic moments when a woman flies away from the women who torment her emerge from this woman's fear that she is completely alone in a very hostile world. In America, hostility gives way to concern, to sympathy, and eventually to a hard-earned forgiveness.

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PART II

Sensory Irruptions, Magical Sensibilities

CHAPTER 4

Flashes of Transgression

The Fukú, Negative Aesthetics, and the Future in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz

Richard Perez

The Transgression of the Curse

In Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*,[1] the fukú names a horrific substance begotten in an alchemy of violence marking the emergence of the New World. For Díaz, this curse signifies the symbolic starting point of New World identity—"we are all its children" (2)—as it sutures a perverse history that begins in the Black Atlantic and grounds itself, among other places, in the Latin American plantation, in the subsequent twentieth-century dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, and in contemporary diasporic afterlives. The fukú, "carried" throughout the hemisphere "in the screams of the enslaved" (1), is transmogrified into an obscene inheritance, running through the very historic and social bloodlines of the hemisphere, to shape and deform the psychic lives of its subjects. Indeed the fukú, or curse, according to Díaz, designates the foundational characteristic of the Americas and, in its violent origins, gives birth to an anti-Edenic universe and sensibility. Consequently, the curse produces an agonistic struggle between love and evil, justice and violence, that requires an imaginative intervention to translate its ineffable properties and perhaps reverse its seemingly ineluctable grasp on the New World subject. Thus the curse, instantiated by centuries of exploitation, certifies a "doom" that sits at the heart of (Latin) American existence, beyond the ken of traditional reason, in an experiental abyss where only fiction dares to tread. This essay therefore will trace the curse as Díaz imagines it, from the Dominican Republic to New York/New Jersey and back, a spiraling motion of exchange that alters, haunts, and reconstitutes Latino/a identity as seen from the exemplary lives of its two protagonists, Beli and Oscar. How

does this fukú, then, act to punish and inform, poison and rejuvenate Dominican communities on the island and in the United States? Moreover, does this fukú contain a secret element, a code of its own destruction that allows, unwittingly, for "miraculous identity shifts"[2] between Latino/a diasporas, thus suggesting the possibility of a future, through fiction, beyond it?

Pulled to the United States by economic necessity, diasporic subjects infect the social fabric with a curse purportedly brought from their homelands. Akin to a malady, the curse functions like a disease inscribed in the genetic makeup of the hemisphere, inexorably passed down from one generation to the next. In its effect, this curse signals an imbalance, like the curve of a convex mirror, of historic distortions that throb with an unexplained life force threatening to burst from its assigned place to consume whatever lives cross its path—"Everybody knew someone who'd been eaten by a fukú" (2). The concept of diaspora sits at heart of the fukú, since the trauma and ambition inherent in such dislocations set the stage for a violent refiguring of identity in the face of difference. Therefore Díaz identifies, as a foundational moment, the arrival of Europeans to the New World and the struggle to establish whiteness as hegemonic: "No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since" (1). Thus the curse is the brutal imposition of a system and identity (capital, whiteness, patriarchy) over Others encountered or brought to the New World and symbolically reduced to differential characteristics—gender/sexuality/skin color—or to their capacity as alienated laborers, or simply criminalized and entombed in an architecture of social death. The sheer levels of violence required to implement such a system forged more than just an economy; rather it became the very roots of a tradition providing toxic sustenance to each historical epoch, community, and individual life. Hence the curse ingrained a malevolent strain of violence into the composition of American identity and asserts its dominant characteristics with every succeeding generation. It is this inhuman attribute, established for posterity by the originary sins of genocide and slavery, like a New World mark of Cain, that identifies the fukú.

In this vein, the novel invokes the curse as the constitutive feature of modern American life, which must be faced and acknowledged as a force, a death drive. The novel opens with a detailed description of what we can call the long Latino Century:

> They say it came from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite "discovering" the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with

> both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to incite calamity on the heads of you and yours. (1)

This passage effectively describes the moment of creation in the New World as forged in a frenzied onslaught that bequeathed violence to all succeeding generations. Through the widespread violence of the originary phase of New World history, the fukú instilled itself as a cultural principle, the common denominator linking the entire hemisphere across time and space. The curse is born here, in this exceedingly violent episode, leaving all future subjects branded by its comprehensive severity. Yet despite its power and omnipresence, the curse manifests itself as an indecipherable rumor—"they say"—whereby language fails to describe or track its devastating power. Born of the enslavement and death of the peoples drawn here (or "discovered"), by a rapacious drive for new lands, labor, and wealth and underwritten in the discourses (religion, philosophy, science, history) of the West, the curse instantiates itself through fury and gluttony. Like the curse in Greek tragedy, whereby violent pasts serve to predetermine future outcomes, the fukú, similarly, implicates descendants by seeping into the very essence of New World identity to deform the prospective lives of its unsuspecting subjects. If it all begins with the utopian voyages of Columbus, the "Admiral," who was both "its midwife and one of its great European victims" dying "miserable and syphilitic," driven by a concoction of ideals and brutality, it reaches its apex with Trujillo, a "demon drawn into Creation" centuries later, the "Curse's servant or its master, its agent or its principal" (2–3) who would reproduce the originary scene by turning Santo Domingo, as Díaz tells us, into his very own plantation. But Trujillo, as he is called by Latin Americans with an almost perverse familiarity, is only exemplary to the extent that he embraced the fukú, and dared to take it to its logical conclusion. In fact, to suppose that Trujillo stood alone in some kind of monstrous singularity is to evade, Diaz's novel makes clear, our own complicity and participation. Rather Trujillo is the product of a set of social values—machismo, prejudice, and exploitation—that nurtured him into existence. He is literally the everyman of the Americas, the paternal reflection Beli, Yunior, and Oscar (not to mention the reader) will have to measure themselves against. The novel starts and ends here, in the seething presence of the fukú (as/is Trujillo), enraged and waiting for "his name" to be said "aloud" in order to "incite calamity on the heads of you and yours." Why then does Díaz call it forward, identify it, and claim it as an organizing logic of the New World? Is it possible that not only death but life itself is located in the mystery and persistence of the curse? Does the fukú have a life-giving dimension, a secret stored in its being from which a future can be expressed and constructed?

The fukú seen in its reverse marks the possibility for transgression, in the Foucauldian sense, where difference in the New World "permits a profanation without object, a profanation that is empty and turned inward upon itself and whose instruments are brought to bear on nothing but each other."[3] The "instrument brought to bear" on the fukú, as Díaz explains, is the zafa, a counterspell (and countermemory) that would "prevent disaster from coiling around you" (7).

Significantly, zafa "was a word" calling attention to the recuperative power of language to effectively counter the destructive potential of the fukú. Zafa crosses territorial and temporal boundaries, "popular" in "Macondo" and in the Bronx, and is used persistently so as to not allow "bad luck to cohere." But in its most profound sense zafa is Díaz's novel itself, a fictional confrontation that takes place in the outer limits of the imagination. He admits at the conclusion of his prologue, "Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell" (7). It is in the limit or fissure between death and life, cruelty and rapture, nation and diaspora, where the fukú resides, waiting like a predator for its next victim but also creating the site for its transgression. As Michel Foucault reminds us, "Transgression is an action which involves a limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses."[4] Transgression, in this sense, is the act of writing, which imagines or "displays" the diasporic "flashes of its passage," the trajectory of Latino populations from the inception of the New World to its creolized present. This is why Díaz must address the fukú despite the risks, because in grounding his text in the fukú he is able to transgress "the entire space" of the Americas, "in the line" he fictionally "crosses." *Oscar Wao* is at once the story of a family, a nation, and a hemisphere, for "even its origin" is displayed in the violent outcomes of its present. Ultimately, the curse is a "sovereign gesture" whose violent impact hollows out the present leaving behind an absent form, a ground zero, the utter reminder of death from which Díaz must speak. Fiction authorizes him, as Homer has said, to speak of the disasters the gods send to men "so that their fulfillment will be averted in the distance of words, at the place where they will be stilled in the negation of their nature."[5] Thus Díaz is able to confirm and dispel the misfortunes of New World history. For in fiction he accesses the infinity of the past where "death opens before language."[6] Díaz must write, in short, so as not to die.[7]

Beli and the Curse of Love

For Díaz, the fukú not only infiltrates peoples' lives, infecting them slowly like a disease or killing them with the suddenness of a car accident, but its most insidious aspect is its effect on love. I refer to love here in all its range, from a basic everyday necessity, to its binding role in a community, to its larger political sense pushing the limits of history. In this sense love has a transformative and revolutionary potential (exemplified in the twentieth century by figures such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. who stand in contradistinction to Trujillo's ruthlessness). Other postcolonial writers have honed in on the socially layered dimensions of love. Arundhati Roy's celebrated novel *The God of Small Things*, for instance, describes love and its relation to a cursed state. While the narrator admits Sophie Mol's premature death marked the day, at least in a "purely practical sense," when a series of tragedies befell the entire family, when "it all began."[8] She also suggests their cursed state began "long before the Marxists came" or "the

British took Malabar" or "Christianity arrived in a boat."[9] For Roy the inception of this cursed state extends back to a primal moment: "That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much."[10] The curse is inaugurated in these early organizational periods by a logic of power that led to exaggerated deprivation and neglect. Love became the first signifier of value and, as Roy points out, the initial iteration of the law. Thus the "love laws" violently partitioned human subjects by implementing a haptic metaphor to determine who could be socially and politically touched, the very essence of love, while rendering untouchable those outside its arbitrary purview. As the love laws subsequently asserted themselves, they gave birth to a curse that fed off the lives outside its terms. This discrepancy epitomizes love's pathological dimension, for in its expression, love disproportionately buttresses those it favors while mercilessly sabotaging an outside it actively forms. Love and its absence foster a hatred that threatens and extends its existence. The curse, then, emerges at the moment life empties itself of love, instead finding its subsistence in the affective debris of the negative. The curse, if one can define it, is when love and justice have become impossible. How then does literature confront this curse? Find inspiration in the barren sectors of untouched lives?

Oscar Wao is similarly a love story—individual, communal, and hemispheric—where love fails to take root in any of its characters, their emotional lives rendered futile by the traumatic histories into which they are born. In no character is this failure more aggressively played out than in the life of Hypatía Belicia Cabral, the orphaned and exiled daughter of a doctor and nurse, and subsequently the mother of the novel's other cursed figure, Oscar Wao. For Beli, as she is called in the novel, the fukú, like the cancer she will eventually die from, begins to work on her life indirectly, even before she is born, in the demonic form of Trujillo. Indeed, the curse, for Diaz, is epitomized by and indistinguishable from a rapacious masculinity expressed in predatory forms. Her insistent search for love and the rage its failure ultimately produces recombine into an antagonistic mode of resistance, a brazen contestation against the adulterated masculinity that comes to impose itself on her life. While Beli's anger at this predatory masculinity acts ultimately as a poison to herself and to those in her life, it also functions as a response, cursing the fukú that curses her. A rage, if you will, with a countermessage inscribed in its psychic traces. If the fukú denies her love, it cannot deny her the possibility of exile and a diasporic relocation that, if nothing else, alters the Dominican viewpoint of the past and thus, in increments, rewrites the possibility of a future through distance and return.

Her relationship to love is predetermined by Trujillo's ruthless imprisonment, torture, and murder of her father for refusing to make one of his daughters sexually available to him. Beli, still in her mother's womb as these events unfold, is consequently born homeless and orphaned. As Díaz describes it, "Hypatía Belicia Cabral, who was only two months old when her mother died, who never met her father, who was held by her sisters only a few times before they too disappeared, who spent no time inside Casa Hatüey, who was the literal Child of the Apocalypse?" (251). The effects of political perversion here infiltrate not just the public,

social sphere, but move into the home threatening to obliterate the last line of defense, the space of privacy and individuality found in the domestic. This is precisely the monstrous logic of the fukú: it begins at a (historic, phenomenological, and ontological) distance and inexorably closes the gap. The characters in Díaz's novel are always aware of its presence and are never sure when and from which direction it will arrive. In this sense the fukú functions through an uncanny paradox: it combines surprise and inevitability. What is interesting, however, is Beli, child of the apocalypse, represents a supplemental element, which contains the curse's form of survival; that is, Beli's life, through her sheer will to survive, will not only carry out the curse anew, but also the possibility of its subversion. This subversive trace is found in her middle name, Hypatía, hidden as a secret source of her power and deemphasized by the surrounding patriarchal community. Beli, of course, meaning beautiful conforms to the brutal masculinity that pervaded the island: "No amount of wishful thinking was changing the cold hard fact that she was a teenage girl living in the Dominican Republic of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, the Ditatingest Dictator who ever Dictated" (80). Conversely, Hypatía was a Greek mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer, murdered by a group of Christians (perhaps foreshadowing the modern fukú that moved through Europe and into the New World?) for her openly feminist and pagan views. Conscious of this Hypatían trace La Inca urges Beli to be aware of her privileged past—"Remember your father was a doctor, a *doctor*, and your mother was a nurse, a *nurse*" (81)—one that not incidentally calls attention to the medicinal properties of literacy as a symbolic antidote to the curse.

Yet abandonment inaugurates her early life and gives way to a pattern of violence, leaving indelible marks from which she cannot, like her country, quite recover. As Díaz explains, she was not an easy orphan to place because "she was born bakiní—underweight, sickly. She had problems crying, problems nursing, and no one outside the family wanted the dark child to live" (252). For the community, Beli comes to embody the fukú, and therefore fails to elicit empathy or the primal desire to save the young girl. Instead the sight of the suffering child provokes, almost counterintuitively, a death wish. The community sees in the abandoned girl a reflection of its own monstrous state. Ultimately, she is sold to a family of "complete strangers" (253) in Azua. Her role in her new family as a *criada* reduces her to a child laborer who spends her day, despite her young age, doing arduous household chores. Beli, an "immensely stubborn" girl, is unable to accept her new lot, this social death, and begins to skip work in order to "attend classes" (255), recognizing education as her mode of escape. Yet her attempts to pursue any schooling are met with punishments utterly disproportionate to her acts. As a result of her forays, and because of the ambition they express, she is brutally disciplined by her adopted father who splashes hot oil on her back "nearly killing her": her exposed back here symbolic of a vulnerability that conditions her existence. Indeed, the scene echoes the violence that has linked labor and race since slavery, the scars on her back an almost intertextual reference to Toni Morrison's Sethe, and her near death evidence of the lack of value her (bare) life

has in the community, in the country, and in the hemisphere. Indeed, Beli's subjectivity is structured in relation to a vulnerability that haunts her throughout her life.

Judith Butler describes this condition in her text *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. She argues, "There is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization. This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure."[11] The irony here, of course, is the minority body, while vulnerable and politically "at risk," is also the essential tool of resistance. Therefore, Beli's Hypatían trace pushes the limits of this socially inscribed violence, not only forcing the violence to actualize itself, but in this negating encounter, producing the possibility of an oppositional being. The extremity of the burning is so intense that it spreads, via gossip, throughout the community until it finally reaches La Inca, Beli's estranged grandmother. As the violence plays itself out it publicly exposes the madness of its logic. This is the paradox of power. It fails as soon as it follows through on its promised violence, as soon as it asserts itself too much. What is leftover in its seismic aftermath is a public recognition of its arbitrary and illegitimate position in society. Isn't this why the violence is necessary to begin with, to cover its threatened moral and ethical standing? Ultimately, her outraged grandmother takes her in, reestablishing Beli as a Cabral and providing what Díaz calls a "sanctuary." Yet her burns forge a rage that will persist, poison, and propel Beli for the rest of her life.

Her hope and ambition nonetheless get expressed in her search for love. Two relationships in particular stand out for their intensity and impact on her life—first, with Jack Pujols and later a lover known simply as the Gangster. For Beli, Jack Pujols, light-skinned and the son of Trujillo's colonel, represents social power at its purest and most perverse. He is treated preferentially by all sectors of society: not only by his teachers in school, but even the law shies away from him. As Díaz rhetorically asks, "Legally, he was too young to drive, but do you think anybody in Santo Domingo stopped a colonel's son for anything? Especially the son of a colonel who was said to be one of Ramifis Trujillo's confidants?" (98–99). Jack Pujols, in this sense occupies an extralegal position where the law loses its potency and functionality. Beli, on the other hand, is exceedingly aware of the law's overt masculinity. In an essay she writes for school, Beli's desire for social power is expressed with an almost confrontational directness when she predicts, "I will be married to a handsome wealthy man. I will also be a doctor with my own hospital that I will name after Trujillo" (97). Beli responds with a statement that mocks the gross ideological demand of the assignment by offering exactly what it called for. In openly expressing her ambitions, she reveals the uncanny gap between her desires and the predetermined limits that violently circumscribe her social mobility. The difference between Jack and Beli lies in their proximity or distance from the law. In this sense the law has its own laws—unwritten or

underwritten—that function on socially symbolic levels. The law avoids Jack (male, white, and wealthy) and polices Beli (female, black, and orphaned). Isn't this perennial unevenness the perverse fodder on which the curse grows, strengthens, and forms? A logic and practice that disfigures all of its subjects?

The relationship between Beli and Jack is short lived, more a projection of social fantasy and physical lust. They begin meeting secretly, having sex in the school's "broom closet" (100), and are eventually caught by school officials. Díaz contextualizes the encounters detailing the discrepancies socially inherent in their pairing: "Remember the time and the place: Baní in the late fifties. Factor in that Jack Pujols was the number-one son of the blessed B—í clan, one of Baní's most venerable (and filthy rich) families. Factor in that he'd been caught not with one of his own class (though that might have also been a problem) but with the scholarship girl, una prieta to boot" (100). What is interesting here is even though Pujols blames the expendable Beli "for everything," telling the rector "how she had seduced him," and even though this incident becomes a scandal that reverberates throughout the community (Jack would be shipped off to military school), Beli, Díaz tells us, was not "embarrassed" and refused, despite being "shaken down by the rector and the nun and the janitor" to "profess her guilt" (101). Beli simply shook her head "as stubborn as the Laws of the Universe themselves—No No No No No No No No" (101–2). Díaz repeats this "No" 66 times filling a third of a page so as to highlight Beli's unyielding investment in this negative affirmation. Implicit in this negative gesture is a refusal to acknowledge the institutional logic that expresses its rules against what it perceives to be the socially weak, and the unjust contradiction of Pujols's manipulative use of love in order to gain her sexually. For Beli it is Pujols who has more egregiously broken the laws of the institution and of love. Her rage acts as a protective rigidity against the institutional onslaught, against justice itself. On the one hand, "No" signals a dogged belief in the rightness of love; on the other, a paradoxical awareness of love as a manipulative slogan allowing men to indeterminately use it, while women are socially bound by love as a sign of family and faith. This is precisely why she refuses to admit guilt: because according to her she was "in love" and sex here was a *just* expression of that affect. Love, as Beli's understands it, has an ethical dimension. Therefore, she refuses to apologize for the intimacy expressed through her body.

Interestingly, the transgressive element of this scene can be found in the closet itself. For isn't the broom closet here symbolic of more than just a hiding place? It points to a location outside the purview of authority. Indeed, their pronounced class distinction allows Pujols to cross the boundary between their socially sanctioned positions in order to exploit her body with impunity, not only for his pleasures, but also as a training ground of sorts for his developing manhood. The closet, therefore, highlights this class difference. However, as often happens when borders are crossed, Pujols fails to recognize the other forms of authority concentrated in liminal spaces. In this inquisitional scene, then, Beli is figured as La Bruja, or the witch, suggested, of course, by the broom, which serves as a female phallus and brings with it an alternative power and logic to the one-sided

masculine law. As a result, she says "no" with providential security, possessed by a female-centered logic, which may be closeted but is still, magically, viable. In this formative experience she learns to depend on the power of her own judgments, while disavowing machista-driven institutional mandates: she thus promises herself "never again" to "follow any lead other than her own" (103). Díaz explains her process: "A first lesson in the fragility of love and the preternatural cowardice of men. And out of this disillusionment and turmoil sprang Beli's first adult oath, one that would follow her into adulthood, to the States and beyond. I will not serve. Never again would she follow any lead other than her own. Not the rector's, not the nun's, not her poor dead parents'. Only me, she whispered. Me" (103).

This scene then represents a failed interpellation: for Beli's cosmic NO exceeds, in its reverberative impact, the social boundaries of the church that hails her, that attempts to discipline her into its masculine logic, while her "oath" of self-reliance ("Only me . . . Me") sets the terms of her survival. It is important to note how her open resistance functions in and through language. Her refusal roots itself in the generative power of language, negatively activating a counterknowledge or counterspell. Significantly, Beli's "oath" conjures into existence a personal law ("I will not serve") in direct response to a machista-laden curse embedded in social and institutional injunctions. In verbalizing her position she establishes a sovereignty of the (female) self. It is interesting to compare Beli's oath to Antigone's self-assertive insistence to bury her brother, what Judith Butler calls Antigone's claim, against Creon. In the force of her opposition to Creon, Antigone destabilizes gender and, by extension, the interdependent structures of kinship, patriarchal authority, and the State. According to Butler, Antigone's defiance unmans Creon while, in exchange, she becomes "manly." Butler goes on to argue,

> Antigone comes, then, to act in ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law. She not only does the deed, refusing to obey the edict, but she also does it again by refusing to deny that she has done it, thus appropriating the rhetoric of agency from Creon himself. Her agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honor his command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty she refuses. He expects that his word will govern her deeds, and she speaks back to him, countering his sovereign speech act by asserting her own sovereignty. The claiming becomes an act that reiterates the act it affirms, extending the act of insubordination by performing its avowal in language.[12]

Interestingly, the support of the law and the sovereignty of the State, depends, to a large extent, on the magical utterance of language. Beli, like Antigone, claims her insubordinate acts, not in a mode of confession ("She absolutely refused to profess her guilt" [101]), but by "appropriating the rhetoric of agency" thought to be the sole province of power. The confidence in the masculine "word" to "govern her deeds" wilts when, in an almost demonic gesture ("If she had rotated her head around 360 degrees and vomited green-pea soup it would have caused only slightly less of an uproar" [101]) she "assumes the voice of the law in committing

the act against the law." In claiming the masculine "word," Beli causes it to boomerang via a magical "reiteration" away from its intended target to those who accuse her. This is precisely the power of the witch: she understands that in the vertiginous nature of language, in its capacity to fictionally re-present itself, the curse of the law can be redirected and transgressed and, in small yet significant ways, agency can be reclaimed.

This sense of the magical real power of language is also evident in Beli's relationship to the Gangster, a hit man for Trujillo. Again their relationship develops along the same patriarchal lines: he represents prestige and power and the necessary link for her social ascension. And again this relationship is carried out on the margins, most of their meetings taking place surreptitiously in hotels. The Gangster's constant promises, like Jack Pujols, of love and marriage act, in Beli's mind, as the confirmation that gives their meetings meaning. Marriage here is the legalized expression of their love. Beli's social authorization—becoming a doctor and opening a hospital—is dependent on such a union. But the gangster is already married to none other than Trujillo's sister. This is how the curse sets itself up: by creating a perverse proximity between the socially advantaged and the vulnerable victims it feeds on. Thus power expands parasitically quenching its narcissistic needs with violence as its trump card and the sex/labor/lives of Othered bodies at its disposal. When Trujillo's sister finds out Beli is having an affair with her husband, she has Beli arrested and brutally beaten, as Díaz put it, "like she was a slave. Like she was a dog" (147). She is brought to a sugarcane field seemingly "plunged 180 years into rolling fields of cane" (146). The setting, once again, serves as an allusion to slavery where bare lives were brought to die at the arbitrary bequest of the law. In this scene the cane fields are violently updated combining the old promise of sugar, life's sweetener, with beaten bodies sacrificed to the insatiable New World gods of masculinity, whiteness, and capital. The curse gathers and expresses itself with utmost intensity here, in the organized wildness of the cane field, where extremes meet: the site of production and punishment, ingenuity and invisibility, civilization and barbarism. Díaz coldly details the punishment: "Let me pass over the actual violence: her clavicle, chicken-boned; her right humerus, a triple fracture (she would never again have much movement in that arm); five ribs broken; left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung collapsed; front teeth blown out" (147). The symbolic weight of the cane field is intensified by the "actual violence" performed. It is as if the law searches out all the breaking points in order to highlight the insignificance of the body it punishes. Beli's body is fragmented into a mass without ontological substance. Thus the law revisits these locations to generate a power it illegitimately clings to, sapping its subjects of their humanity. Beli is left, legally cannibalized, to die in the middle of a cane field. Díaz describes the violence with tragic significance as "the end of language" (147). Perhaps language and violence are adumbrated in the etymology of the word cane (meaning reed or spear). Is cane to cannibalism what reed is to pen/fiction? Or what field is to knowledge? Or what law is to love?

How then does she survive after enduring "about 167 points of damage" and swelling to "elephant-man proportions" (147)? As Beli slides into a "loneliness so

total it was beyond death, a loneliness that obliterated all memory, the loneliness of a childhood where she'd not even had her own name" and as she neared death, "set to disappear across the event horizon," she picks up a stick (a dried reed or cane?) and begins to jab at the dust, "pretending that the scribble was letters, words, names" (148). What is fascinating here is how Beli turns to language to revive herself, gathering the will to live by tapping into the magical dimensions of "letters, words, names." She almost literally inscribes herself back to life. In this sense, the dust, mud, and stick represent a primal moment, the possibility of rebirth in language, echoing the biblical intersection between creation and the word ("In the beginning was the word"[13]). As Judith Butler explains, a deed in language allows for a trespass on the norms of gender that expose "the precarious character of those norms"[14] and thus set the stage for the refashioning of expectations and experience. This is the function of literature for Díaz: literature takes us to the heart of the curse in order to activate a life in language, in story, and to open the potential for a more ethical future. If, as this scene suggests, a zafa or counterspell lies in language, it is because language contains, in its logic and desire, a need to exceed the limits of experience. In turn, language animates a rage against injustice, breaking the rigid form of the law and offering a malleable narrative of the future. To quote Díaz once again, "Like Superman in Dark Knight Returns, who drained from an entire jungle the photonic energy he needed to survive Coldbringer, so did our Beli resolve out of her anger her own survival. In other words, her coraje saved her. Like a white light in her. Like a sun. She came to in the ferocious moonlight. A broken girl, atop broken stalks of cane. Pain everywhere but alive. Alive" (148).

The logic of Latino literary creation begins in such otherworldly locations. Somehow, in the face of stereotypes, borders, and legal violence; feeding on the negative, productive possibility of pain; and strengthened by the ethical dimension of rage, an aesthetics emerges. While the agony of being human, foreign, and new is "everywhere," that pain is mediated in a conflictual process that produces something creolized and alive. Not a victim but an intensified humanity whose presence puts into question and enlarges the contours of identity, community, and nation. Remarkably, Beli uses this horrific episode to find alternative outlets of strength, resolving "out of her anger her own survival." While this traumatic episode leaves her "a broken girl, atop broken stalks of cane" it serves, also, to spark an almost cosmic aliveness and vision, an acute sense of her place in the world. This acute sense of the world, what Édouard Glissant calls a "poetics of depth," where pain creates a "vertiginous extension, not out into the world but toward the abysses man carries within himself,"[15] bespeaks a sensitivity and sensibility rooted in issues of justice. Beli, in what Díaz calls "the strangest part of our tale" is led from the cane field by a sonorous voice, the sublime, beautiful, uncanny singing of a mongoose.

The mongoose, like the broom in the closet, is an even more dramatic manifestation of the Latina phallus. As I claimed, the curse Díaz fictionalizes has a violent machismo at its core, a masculinity carefully sown by years of economic exploitation, racial inequalities, and gender abuse. Yet this abuse rather

than simply destroying, unwittingly creates an "extraordinary tolerance" and endurance "for extreme phenomena," which, as Glissant recognizes, "in the end becomes" a "knowledge" of an "unknown that does not terrify."[16] Thus Beli, on the brink of death, "flitting in and out of life," is revived by a spectral creature "quite large for its species," who exhorts her to "rise" for future generations "who await" (151). The mongoose embodies a prehistoric animus, a figure of feminine magic that never dies, emerging to impel women beyond the matrix of violence prevalent in patriarchal orders. In a footnote Díaz points out the mongoose's transnational history: "The Mongoose, one of the great unstable particles of the Universe and also one of its greatest travelers. Accompanied humanity out of Africa and after a long furlough in India jumped ship to the other India, a.k.a. the Caribbean." Díaz concludes his description of the Mongoose by highlighting its capacity for subversion: "The Mongoose has proven itself to be an enemy of kingly chariots, chains, and hierarchies" (151). The voice of the mongoose leads Beli through the maze of the cane field and into a "promised future" that includes children and diasporic relocation. The mongoose, killer of snakes and "enemy of kingly chariots, chains, and hierarchies," symbolizes an indomitable female strength fuelled by "hope," "hate," and an "invincible heart" (150). The mongoose functions as an extrahuman response to a symbolic order, suffused and supported by the curse, within which there is little possibility for expressions of female power. It emerges from the abyss of history to lead Hypatía to her new destiny, the United States, propelled by her rage, a rage that will help her negotiate "what she doesn't yet know: the cold, the backbreaking drudgery of the factorías, the loneliness of Diaspora, that she will never live in Santo Domingo, her own heart . . . and she will never love again" (164). The promise of children is the promise of survival: one more generation born into the curse, thus extending its life, but also another generation charged with the responsibility to create a zafa that might change the course of the curse's power and thus history itself. In the diasporic future, a new set of curses and ghosts await. We must, Diaz seems to exhort, address them through fiction.

Oscar and the Curse of Difference

If for Beli the violence of a patriarchal order prevents her from establishing a rooted and "legitimized" presence on the island; for Oscar, the "Ghettonerd," his very constitution, tastes, and being, mark an alienable difference he cannot reconcile with his diasporic community. Díaz links his nerdiness to a lack of paternal model or care: "It wasn't just that he didn't have no kind of father to show him the masculine ropes, he simply lacked all aggressive and marital tendencies" (15). In this sense, the nerdy Oscar lacks the street skills that would garner him respect from his peers, male and female. The consequence of Oscar's grotesque identity is complete social rejection, depicted comically in the novel as his failure to find a girlfriend, but indicative of larger historical exclusions. Oscar, unlike his mother (Beli) who was a powerful object of desire in the Dominican Republic, has no traits deemed desirable in the working-poor areas of New Jersey. His difference,

both from a larger majority culture (son of an Afro-Latina and first generation immigrant) and from his own community, creates a doubled alienation. For Oscar the intensity of his difference forces him to overdevelop his imagination in the face of a cursed existence. His "wondrous life" refers to his understanding that beyond the laws and normative structures of a culture lie alternative spaces for fantasy. If he is cursed by his difference he is also blessed by an unrelenting imaginary that side steps masculine conventions even as he is trapped within them.

We first encounter Oscar as a relatively "normal" seven-year-old boy in New Jersey. Notably, Oscar has two girlfriends—Maritza and Olga—who function as symbolic support for his developing masculine identity. Their presence suggests a miniature man: "Look at that little macho, his mother's friends said. Que hombre" (14). Yet, as the novel points out, his power is dependent on Olga's and Maritza's fleeting presence. For one week they flank his fragile masculinity. So when Olga leaves and Maritza dumps him, eliminating the feminine cover and support his masculinity is dependent on, it marks the beginning of his transmogrification from potential Latino stud to abject nerd. Díaz describes the collapse of his Latino masculinity:

> It seemed to Oscar that from the moment Maritza dumped him—Shazam!—his life started going down the tubes. Over the next couple of years he grew fatter and fatter. Early adolescence hit him especially hard, scrambling his face into nothing you could call cute, splotching his skin with zits, making him self-conscious; and his interest—in Genres!—which nobody had said boo about before, suddenly became synonymous with being a loser with a capital L. Couldn't make friends for the life of him, too dorky, too shy, and (if the kids from his neighborhood are to be believed) too *weir*d (had a habit of using big words he had memorized only the day before). He no longer went anywhere near the girls because at best they ignored him, at worst they shrieked and called him gordo asqueroso! He forgot the perrito, forgot the pride he felt when the women in the family had called him hombre. Did not kiss another girl for a long *long* time. As though almost everything he had in the girl department had burned up that one fucking week." (16–17)

What is important here is not the awkward stage of early adolescence, which scrambles his face, makes him grow "fatter and fatter" and become increasingly "self-conscious," but his "weird" turn to literature and the imagination. His loss of physical control over the contours of his body corresponds to an increasing interest in "Genres!" How do we read this divestment in his body and his overemphasis on his mind? The novel suggests a comical answer, a one-to-one connection between Oscar's early adolescent deterioration and his breakup with Maritza, a trauma whose effects his masculinity purportedly could not withstand: "As though almost everything he had in the girl department had burned up that one fucking week." What I want to argue instead is that his break up with Maritza makes clear to Oscar that he, in fact, could not sustain his romanticized Latino masculinity without a modicum of violence. When he begins to cry after the breakup, his mother throws him to the floor and exclaims: "Dale un galletazo, she panted, then see if the little puta respects you" (14). For his mother and the

community, his masculinity entitles him to give his girlfriend "un galletazo," a disciplinary slap, that would rein her into the symbolic circle of his masculine respect. It is this violent gesture against women, so prevalent to Beli's sense of love and relationships, to the island's figuration of masculinity, that for Oscar becomes impossible. In this primal scene, Oscar's total disavowal of violence positions him as an antithetical figure to a Latino masculinity whose identity, stereotypically, is grounded in pride, rage, and aggression. If the "galletazo" his mother calls for signals a rite of passage, from innocence to dominance, what Oscar opts for instead are habits of language: "He had a habit of using big words he had memorized only the day before." The nerd as masculine identity functions as an oxymoron, a male subject emptied of a violence that traditionally defines it.

Oscar, the nerdy subject, then stands in contradistinction to a machista sensibility. He is an antihero whose body absorbs the violence of his culture and history. In this sense Oscar functions as a mirror or scapegoat, presenting his community with a critique of itself in his grotesque reflection.[17] Interestingly, Oscar turns to a negative aesthetics, "moving hungrily from book to book, author to author, age to age . . . You couldn't have torn him away from any movie or TV show or cartoon where there were monsters or spaceships or mutants or doomsday devices or destinies or magic or evil villains" (21). Later the narrator would go on detailing Oscar's "growing obsession with the End of the World" (23). This fantastic turn signals Oscar's spectral image of himself, like the "Man Without a Face" (321), taking form in an apocalyptic sensibility where negativity becomes fertile ground for alternative imaginings. Is he not the negative likeness of a positive masculine persona, a spectral embodiment, at once monstrous, excessive, awkward, and socially invisible? His apocalyptic desires are a search for transformative possibilities. For Oscar aesthetics, at least in a virtual way, speaks to the potential of a rupture that promises to transform hardened forms of Latino identity. The virtual power of the image is juxtaposed to the actual violence of machismo.

In Jacques Derrida's classic essay "Différance," he argues for the negative valence underlying his concept: "First consequence: *différance* is not. It is not a present thing, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom."[18] This is the logic used by Yunior and his friends when they decide to change Oscar's name to Oscar Wao echoing "that fat homo Oscar Wilde" (180). They accuse him of being too strange to be Dominican. Wao, here, like Derrida's insertion of the "a" is a marker of difference, signifying a "not" or negative identification that "instigates subversion." Yunior, one of the cool kids in school who decides to "fix Oscar's life," embodies this positive machismo (175). Significantly, Yunior's decision comes after he has been caught cheating on his girlfriend, Awilada, who "went absolutely *nuts*" (175). Yunior, clearly, shifts his focus to Oscar so as not to analyze his own behavior, his own hypermasculinity,

a psychosis that covers other social and historical lacks. He admits, "Instead of focusing on something hard and useful like, my own shit, I focused on something easy and redemptive" (175). This is precisely the function of the scapegoat as a negative identity. It acts as an absolute Otherness that serves as an ontological distraction, hiding more immediate psychic, economic, and historic questions. This is why Yunior gives Oscar the name Wao (or Wilde), because Oscar becomes the substitute for Awilda's wildness, her open rage at his infidelity socially humiliating Yunior. Difference, as Derrida puts it, "threatens everything in us that desires a Kingdom," or in Yunior's sense the conflation of machismo with Dominican identity.

The failure to rehabilitate Oscar drives him, in a Conradian and Cesarian gesture, south to the Dominican Republic, to the heart of the cursed native land, for what seems an innocent summer trip but turns out to be a doomed love affair. Oscar falls in love with Ybón, his grandmother's next-door neighbor and community prostitute. If the nerd is a figure who has emptied himself of an identificatory violence, thus becoming its communal receptacle, similarly the prostitute is the woman who blocks love, using her body instead for financial subsistence. The prostitute, like the nerd, is socially positioned to absorb societal violence. What they have in common, then, is their position of absolute difference in the community, scapegoats upon which traditional identities can parasitically live. Beli and La Inca object to his purported new love: "Do you know that woman's a Puta?" (282). Yet for Oscar, Ybón stands for more than just a relationship: she is someone who shares and echoes his flaws and can thus make him feel "like a man." In his mind she is his last hope, a projection so powerful that only death could ensue from its impossibility. As the narrator points out, "Ybón, he was sure, was the Higher Power's last-ditch attempt to put him back on the proper path to Dominican male-itude" (283).

As I pointed out earlier, for Oscar alienation was doubled: he was black and poor; awkward and smart; loveless and foreign. His trip to the Dominican Republic confirms his doubled alienation for there too his lack of power, his lack of machismo, makes even a rudimentary love something beyond his reach. For Oscar his positive love turns into a negative death-drive, a search for identity in heroic death. Oscar's pursuit of Ybón both ignores and is drawn to the fact she is dating a captain of the police force, the very epitome of machismo—his violent potential legitimized by the law itself. Oscar is taken to the cane field, not only echoing his mother's experience but also returning there twice. The first time as a brutal warning: "All I know is, it was the beating to end all beatings" (298). The second time to die for love. The first time he is a terrorized victim: "Oscar thought about escaping, thought about jumping out of the car and running down the street, screaming, but he couldn't do it. Fear is the mind killer, he chanted in his head, but he couldn't force himself to act." The second time actively resistant,

> he told them that what they were doing was wrong, that they were taking a great love out of the world . . . He told them that it was only because of her love that he'd

> been able to do the thing that he had done, the thing they could no longer stop, told them if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak or about to be struck by a car and then they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn't be no fatboy or dork or kid no girl ever loved; over there he'd be a hero, an avenger. (321)

This doubling effect is the perverse elaboration of difference: for, as Derrida argues, difference differs and defers.[19] Oscar's promise to be "waiting for them on the other side" is a promise to haunt, a deferral of justice, a leftover being that infects and menaces the curse of colonization. The wildness of the cane fields have embedded in them the traces of a story, a zafa that has "no face" (325), no sound, and no form, only the wondrous contours of negative beings. As Derrida puts it, "The a of *différance*, thus, is not heard; it remains silent, secret discreet as a tomb: *oikesis*. And thereby let us anticipate the delineation of a site, the familial residence and tomb of the proper in which is produced, by *différance*, the *economy of death*. This stone—provided that one knows how to decipher its inscription—is not far from announcing the death of the tyrant."[20]

In death Oscar announces the possibility of communal renewal through self-reflection. For the ultimate tragedy of the novel is not that Oscar dies. Instead the tragedy lies in the fact that he is not viable in the community. And if a community fails to accommodate nerds, thinkers, scholars, and writers, then what future does it have? Can it compose? Will it imagine? Thus the tragedy of this novel pertains to the community itself, for in killing Oscar it guarantees its own death. Yet his death remains, delineating a site of opacity, a silence or question mark, which forces us to turn back on ourselves to "decipher its inscription." The death of the New World curse begins in this negotiation opening up to the negativity of difference and thus to alternate forms of existence.

Cursing Difference: An Aesthetics of the Negative

What then, is a US Latino/a aesthetics? As Slajov Zizek puts it in a reflection on Georg W. F. Hegel, "What better description could one offer of the power of imagination in its negative, disruptive, decomposing aspect, as the power that disperses continuous reality into a confused multitude of 'partial objects', spectral apparitions of what in reality is effective only as part of a larger organism? Ultimately, imagination stands for the capacity of our mind to dismember what immediate perception puts together, to 'abstract' not a common notion but a certain feature from other features. To 'imagine' means to imagine a partial object without its body, a colour without shape."[21] In this imaginative act of dismembering, Junot Díaz finds a narrative language for justice. The potential of something new is located in these pieces scattered by the fragmenting power of the imagination and reconstituted into something new and enduring. Broken by rage and sustained by a commitment to co-motion and imbalance, the negativity of the curse compels an aesthetic response through its sheer narrative pertubation

and results in the formation of fantastic critical understandings, the awakening of consciousness from "the capacity" of a nerd's "mind" "to 'abstract' not a common" hegemonic "notion but a certain" transgressive and transformorative "feature from other features." The fukú metamorphoses in Díaz's fiction into a Calibanian "fuck you" (304), difference cursing back in rageful response, defacing bodies of power. Caliban, in an Antillean imaginary, is the very embodiment of a transgressive negativity, the beginning, if you will, of a Caribbean zafa. As Silvio Torres-Saillant has pointed out, Caliban "remains unrivaled as a signifier of the tensions existing at the core of the human experience in the Caribbean."[22] Caliban's lure in the Americas stems from his open desire for an alternate aesthetics, since cursing for him comes from learning languages, and the exchange of power from stealing and reformulating the oppressors books. Díaz's fiction is an extension of this cursing, of this stealing, of this negative embodiment, that in relation to itself attempts to find, through work and artisitic form, traces of freedom. Through a negative aesthetics Díaz opens up the everyday to the historical, surface realities to the abyss, and thus allows for an infinite exposure to difference. This is an ethics of love or the vision of the nerd.

Notes

1. Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007). All quotations from the novel will be followed by page number.
2. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 22.
3. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 30.
4. Ibid., 33–34.
5. Ibid., 54.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 53–54.
8. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New York: Random House, 1998), 32.
9. Ibid., 33.
10. Ibid.
11. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 20.
12. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 11.
13. *The Holy Bible*, John 1:1, trans. King James Version (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 621.
14. Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 24.
15. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 24.
16. Ibid., 8–9.
17. For a provocative reading on the scapegoat and Díaz's fiction, see Lyn Di Iorio Sandín, "The Latino Scapegoat: Knowledge through Death in Short Stories by Joyce Carol Oates and Junot Díaz," in *Contemporary US Latino/a Literary Criticism*, ed. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15–34.

18. Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 21–22.
19. Ibid., 18.
20. Ibid., 4.
21. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 1999), 30.
22. Silvio Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 200.

CHAPTER 5

Searching for Rhythm and Freedom

African American Magical Realism and the Creation of a Home Country

Angela J. Francis

> [Carnival] discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life. It leads man out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable.
>
> —Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

> If you want to mirror reality, get a camera. If you want to make someone understand reality . . . You have to distort things . . . Tell it as it is *for you and you alone*.
>
> —Touré, "Solomon's Big Day"

In his introduction to *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*, José David Saldívar highlights a configuration of America first suggested by José Martí. A Cuban poet and long-standing supporter of Cuba's independence from Spain, Martí organized the revolution while living in New York and posited the existence of two distinct Americas that he labeled "*Nuestra América*" and "European America." While this organization of the continent addresses the linguistic trend to reduce America to the United States, it is more important a response to the political history shared by the United States and Latin America as well as a move to frame this history as oppressive and problematic.

The distinction between *Nuestra América* and European America therefore does not solely lie in differences of heritage, culture, or worldview but also falls across geographical borderlines. Following Martí, much of Saldívar's discussion of *Nuestra América* refers specifically to Cuba, and he highlights the political standpoints of Cuban activists who connect their "oppositional criticism of North American culture [to] the Cuban-Marxist ideology of resisting U.S. empire as

a way of life."[1] Thus the configuration of *Nuestra América* is one of resistance against the United States' political, cultural, and military incursions and serves as a corrective for what Martí viewed as the world's ignorance of Latin American history, cultural worth, and achievements. At its heart, this formulation of the Americas is also a call to celebrate Latin America's culture as it is represented through the folk. The same marriage of political criticism and folk appreciation can be found in magical realism, where images, despite an "initial aura of surprising craziness, tend to reveal psychological, social, emotional, and political motivations after some scrutiny."[2]

Although Martí constructed *Nuestra América* in opposition to a representation of a unified European America, the spread of magical realism has enabled African Americans to perform a similar maneuver, highlighting the presence of multiple cultural Americas *within* the United States one hundred years later. Texts such as Touré's *The Portable Promised Land*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, and Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* highlight the existence of a raced "Our America" that shares its spatial boundaries with Martí's European America. Like *Nuestra América*, the African American "Our America"—referred to in this essay as "African America"—is formed by a distinct historical standpoint accentuated by its own folk culture, historical figures, and brand of magic. Using politically charged descriptions of the magical and marvelous, these texts attest to the troubles inherent in the resulting geographical palimpsest and testify to current and historic inequalities while singing and dancing the praises of their America's history and folk.

Characterized by a deep disdain for limits and borders and depicted in moments of magical realism through grotesque images of bodily transgression and carnivalesque scenes of cultural appreciation, African America is located on US urban streets and throughout its marginal periphery. Through this combination, African American magical realism often declaims, revises, or altogether discards boundaries in favor of more fluid social orders and grotesque configurations of the human body. Seemingly magical in its very construction, the grotesque body becomes difficult to define as it seeps across "its own confines [and] ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects."[3] Such a body also disregards its internal boundaries, bypassing the borders between its interior and exterior and ignoring the delimited aspects of its form in favor of those that extend either into the outside world or deep within itself.

Although I focus here on the role of the grotesque and the carnivalesque in the formation of an African America in magical realist texts, both often also play a role in magical realism more generally. In her essay "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," Jeanne Delbaere-Garant uses the term "grotesque realism" as a way of outlining the grotesque's key role in some works of magical realism and defines it as "a combination of North American tall tale, Latin American baroque, and Bakhtinian 'carnivalesque.'"[4] The grotesque aspects of this subset can be used to represent the oral storytelling tradition in which narratives are

often elaborated on, perhaps to the point of distortion, for greater effect or, conversely, to make the story more believable. Furthermore, Delbaere-Garant also specifies that grotesque realism describes "any sort of hyperbolic distortion that creates a sense of strangeness through the confusion or interpenetration of different realms like animate/inanimate or human/animal," as happens fairly often in descriptive magical realist writing where a man may be depicted as seeming like a tree or a house may begin to behave like a man.[5]

While Delbaere-Garant's focus is on the importance of the grotesque in a particular subset of magical realist texts, other scholars have instead suggested that the grotesque has a much more widespread role in the literature. David K. Danow argues in *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* that Latin American magical realism combines aspects of the grotesque and carnivalesque in its depiction of a world filled with ambivalence and duality.[6] This ambivalence is not at all negative; in fact in magical realism, the grotesque is appreciated as a site of potential renewal rather than viewed as a frightening figure, and carnival is viewed not just a moment in time but instead an overarching aspect of the world. In the hands of African American magical realist authors, these traits shift their focus and scope. Rather than depict a world in which magic and creative duality exist, they instead locate the grotesque and carnivalesque as existing primarily within the African American community and suggest that, if it can exist outside of their community, it is often misunderstood or feared by society at large.

Despite this difference, both Latin American and African American magical realism depict the grotesque body as being capable of a great many magical things due in large part to its dismissal of physical limitations. In Touré's collection of short stories, *The Portable Promised Land*, it is represented in "Solomon's Big Day" through the portrayal of Solomon, a young boy who begins to paint masterpieces in the wake of a magical dream. His appearance is described in a manner that emphasizes his difference from adults while also lending a sense of the grotesque to his body: "His eyebrows were the same height as [the adults'] belts. His blue collared shirt had three different stains. His shoelaces were untied. His left knee had a cut that was open and oozing."[7] While Solomon could perhaps represent any child coming in after recess, frazzled, rumpled, and messy, this description also highlights his uncontained nature; the oozing cut on his knee creates an opening through which he can breach the boundaries of his skin. Due to the emphasis placed on this first crossing of margins and the disruption of the body's boundaries, Solomon is portrayed as a grotesque site of disorder.

Following the rather ordinary nature of Solomon's weepy knee, the text soon provides a more spectacular example of his body's grotesque nature. In the short story's first instance of the magical real, Solomon falls asleep while searching for inspiration for a school art project:

> It was a hot night and when he fell onto his big art history book his sweaty little face melted into Bearden's painting. When Mariana came to put him to bed she could not pull his face from the book, so she opened the window, put a blanket

> over him, and left him there on the floor until the cool night winds came and loosened his paper chains. But before she pulled him free the Bearden painting seeped into Solomon and in his dream he morphed into a two-dimensional Bearden cutout, each eye pulled from a different photograph.[8]

Here, as with his knee, Solomon's body ignores the distinction between its inside and outside. The melting of his face into the book alludes to a mingling underscored by the "seeping" of a Romare Bearden painting, later specified to be *The Block*, into Solomon's dream. It suggests that Solomon's face and the art book become fluid and malleable at their point of contact, and their merging, which involves both Solomon's consciousness and his body, results in a fusion too intimate for Mariana to pry apart.

That Solomon seeps into this particular painting is significant in and of itself. Bearden's *The Block* (1971) is a deeply layered representation of black bodies living in crowded clumps beneath the bright store awnings of Harlem buildings, the feet of angels, and a pair of lovers engaged in an intimate moment. The collaged bodies move in front of a church and a liquor store, individual body parts clearly taken from a variety of sources, and create a sense of simultaneous unity and disjunction. This painting, with its colorful depictions of carnal, spiritual, and everyday black life, serves as the magical center of Touré's short story. Accosted by his father's jaded vision of the city as a corrupt and predatory place where a man "can't get a decent blow job without going all the way down to Chinatown,"[9] *The Block* represents an affirmation that the New York remains deserving of Solomon's wonder and love while presenting a way for him to preserve his positive and somewhat magical view of the city. A character in the collage advises him to "tell it as it is *for you and you alone*" in his art,[10] and this suggestion leads to Solomon's discovery that he can create beautiful paintings with a skill and speed that are nothing short of magical.

While Solomon's body continues to eschew the rules that contain our physical forms, this freedom does not extend into the greater organization of his life despite the mystical advice he receives in his dream. Mainstream society, exemplified by his teacher and his classmates' parents, instead works to subsume his outlets for creative disorder. His artwork creates a bidding war, disrupting his ability to paint and inserting the pieces into the existing social order while failing to recognize their potentially subversive content. Solomon's dancing, his only other uncontrolled outlet for expression, is likewise incorporated into the existing mainstream by his teacher through her institution of a dance class. Rather than engendering spontaneity and play, it is thus transformed into a mandate that interrupts his painting and is enforced by threat of punishment. His response is bitter—"*If only she knew what I could do with this page*, he thought. He took a moment to pity her in silence, then trudged off to dance"[11]—and his anger at his teacher's ability to organize his life mimics his father's fury at the power exerted over his life by the city's upper class, who he views as controlling everything from where he can work to how he can express his sexuality.

Solomon and his father both lament the inability of one body, no matter how grotesque, to subvert and circumvent the powerful norms of society. Yet while "Solomon's Big Day" displays the stifling effects of controlled creativity and mandated dance, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* portrays the subversive power of dance when it is performed by the masses in the spirit of carnival. Defined by Mikhail Bakhtin as a type of ritual spectacle and at times described as "the living image of the participatory spectacle itself,"[12] carnivals frequently showcase the grotesque bodies of mystical figures such as giants and monsters.[13] However, the main purpose of carnival is not to provide a gallery for abnormal bodies but to serve as the location of ritualized laughter and to provide catharsis for the participants through the use of clowns, fools, and the mimicry of society's more serious rituals. This laughter is simultaneously derisive and joyful in nature, and its ambivalence is directed toward society at large, including the carnival's participants themselves. The atmosphere created by the combination of laughter and the grotesque encourages the widespread transgression of societal boundaries. Thus carnival is a celebration of freedom from the order of the everyday as well as its cause: "It marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed."[14]

Considering their preference for experiences of freedom and boundlessness, caused in part by their historical location in the period between slavery and the civil rights era, it is unsurprising that the characters of African American magical realist texts would favor such an atmosphere. Within the novels, carnivalesque imagery tends to be placed in opposition to depictions of "European America," from where the majority of society's rules and order originate. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Jes Grew is the carnivalesque spirit gone viral, configured as a powerful force that inspires wild dancing in those it infects. Jes Grew's onset is characterized by spontaneity and a lack of control, and doctors, politicians, and professors, all of whom are representative figures of societal order, fall under Jew Grew's spell with little warning.

Jes Grew's impression of joyous disorder is fostered by the fact that it consists of lowbrow forms of dance where bodies appear uncontrolled in their shaking and gyrating. Likewise, the dancers do not all perform the same dance, nor do they confine themselves to the same steps once they have begun to move: "[The dancers] were in a state of 'uncontrollable frenzy,' were wriggling like fish, doing something called the 'Eagle Rock' and the 'Sassy Bump'; were cutting a mean 'Mooche,' and 'lusting after relevance.' We decoded this coon mumbo jumbo. We knew that something was Jes Grewing . . . it started to play hide and seek with us, a case occurring in 1 neighborhood and picking up in another. It began to leapfrog all about us."[15] Sharon A. Jessee highlights this focus on lowbrow, traditionally African American dance, stating that the celebration of such dance forms also "elevates African American art forms above European 'highbrow' cultural forms" by targeting as the subject of laughter white men who cannot dance.[16] Importantly, with Jes Grew there is no explainable mechanism controlling the dancers or forcing them to observe societal norms of order and decorum. Rather,

Jes Grew is motivated by something within them that onlookers configure as a virus or a plague, underscoring the impression that the dancing is unintentional and impossible to control. At the same time, however, it is distinguished from biological plagues through the discussion of its beneficial effects; its "victims" feel more alive than ever before, and the epidemic is quickly viewed as something as "electric as life and . . . characterized by ebullience and ecstasy."[17] Despite (or perhaps because) of these effects, mainstream society's need to control Jes Grew serves as the primary force driving the plot forward through the Wallflower Order's attempts to "adulterate Jes Grew, to bleach its blackness and neutralize its force."[18] Thus central to *Mumbo Jumbo* is the contrast created by comparisons of European- and African American–based belief systems, an effect that has been labeled subversive due to its arguably concealing aspects of the text's political work.[19]

While "Solomon's Big Day" does not contain the same explicit conflict between African American culture and the values of the American mainstream, similar attempts at neutralization occur when Solomon's classmate's mother attempts a reading of one of his paintings. Viewing the dancing that covers the city's watercolor streets, she wonders if "the artist [is] saying that everyone is happily marching to the same tune, dancing together in a gigantic chorus, or that a central mechanism controls us all and we don't even notice it?"[20] While the two scenarios she offers differ in the amount of agency granted to the dancers, both suggest order. This order may be self-imposed, as when everyone is "happily marching," or it may be imposed from without, as if by a "central mechanism," the mechanical and artificial nature of which suggests perfect unity. Neither option contains the laughter and transgression present in Jes Grew or carnival, "where the dismembered body politic [is] transformed from an amorphous silent mass into the vociferous equity of the crowd."[21]

While the dancing in Solomon's painting is never described in any depth, I would suggest that the movements of the dancers in *Mumbo Jumbo* more closely relate to that of the figures in Solomon's painting. The presence of fireworks and neon lights in Solomon's version of New York City both suggest a festive atmosphere rather than one of careful mechanical order and unison described by the adults.[22] Furthermore, Solomon's preoccupation with existing outside of the lines also throws the adults' reading into doubt. Indeed, Solomon is so preoccupied with freedom that he magically incorporates himself into one of his watercolors, proclaiming that "he couldn't go back to a place where people made him live in between the lines when he knew there were places where you didn't have to."[23] Instead, by creating the carnivalesque atmosphere also present in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Solomon fashions a world without boundaries, where grotesque bodies are appreciated and where the freeing spirit of Jes Grew reigns supreme.

In this manner, Solomon's ultimate solution is to escape others' control by separating himself from society. By magically inserting himself into his art, he revises the world portrayed by his Bearden-inspired dream where his collaged body created new outlines through the transgression of old ones. Through his use of watercolor paint, a medium for which seepage is a key characteristic, the objects in Solomon's paintings instead lack distinct edges and as a consequence

are capable of bleeding into one another just as his knee bled his body into the world. Thus Solomon's transformation at the conclusion of the text is ultimately freeing, if isolating: "He opened his eyes to a watercolor city . . . His shirt was cornerless like watercolors are. His arms were red and his legs were green. He was all alone and he was free to paint and he was happy."[24] Rid of lines and borders, his shirt, and potentially Solomon by extension, is capable of bleeding into the world around him. This lack also corresponds to a lack of laws placed on him; in his deserted city, there is no one available to recreate the rules he felt boxed him in and Solomon can experience a freedom tempered only by his solitude.

The grotesque transgression of bodily boundaries occurs in other African American magical realist texts as well, several of which depict the relation between Americas as one in which African America is delimited to the fringe, pushed into the geographical and political margins where it is affected by European America but largely does not mingle with it. Such a configuration, as seen in texts like Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Ralph Ellison's "A Coupla Scalped Indians," is heavily influenced by the politics of Jim Crow that dictated the impossibility of integration. Yet at the same time, this separation is embraced by black characters such as Pilate and Aunt Mackie, who demonstrate their disdain by choosing to live as close to the outskirts as possible. Pilate extends this beyond her geographical location by breaking the law as a bootlegger, acting as the matriarch for a family made entirely of women, and living in a house without electricity or a schedule that rules her day. In addition, both Pilate and Aunt Mackie are also marginalized due to their belief in the truth of African American folk tradition, evidenced in their use of herbal remedies and apparent disdain for Christian mores.

Ellison's "A Coupla Scalped Indians" follows two boys searching "for adventure and fulfillment in a world circumscribed by God, the white folks, and their elders, who interpret God and the white folks for them."[25] The pair, recently circumcised, stumbles upon Aunt Mackie's shack while completing Boy Scout tests to become Indians. Aunt Mackie, a conjurer who lives on the outskirts of town, terrifies Riley, but the sight of her body both shocks and arouses him. Finding himself alone with her, Riley discovers "a brown naked woman, whose black hair hung beneath her shoulders. I could see the long graceful curve of her back . . . a young, girlish body with slender, well-rounded hips . . . above the smooth shoulders of the girlish form I saw the wrinkled face of Old Aunt Mackie."[26] The sight is reminiscent of Solomon's watercolor paintings as Aunt Mackie's incongruent body parts seep seamlessly into one another, and it threatens to inspire both laughter and tears in Riley.

As in "Solomon's Big Day," here the blurring of boundaries is considered if not appealing then captivating. It is in part the incongruity of Aunt Mackie's appearance that prevents Riley from looking away: "I was fascinated . . . feeling a warm pain grow beneath my bandage—along with the newly risen terror that this deceptive old woman could cause me to feel this way, that she could be so young beneath her baggy clothes."[27] He attributes this in part to his inexperience—his prior exposure to female nudity consisted entirely of still images rather than women who are alive and familiar. However, Riley also ascribes his attraction

to the fact that he had never seen anyone "this inconsistent, with wrinkled face mismatched with glowing form [so that] mixed with my fear of punishment for peeping there was added the terror of her mystery."[28]

Although I focus on Aunt Mackie as a grotesque figure, she also represents the African American folk and connects to the magical real through her role as a conjurer. Riley describes her through a faux Native American chant as the "wearer of greasy headrags, wrinkled gingham aprons, and old men's shoes . . . herb-healer, root-doctor, and town-confounding oracle,"[29] and Ellison taps into the folk knowingly, citing it in "Discipline" as the location of self-definition where African Americans can "back away from the chaos of experience and the horror of our living" and thus "tell what Negro experience really is."[30] Aunt Mackie clearly does not allow herself to be delimited by the Christian God, white men, or other African Americans, and this is alluring to Riley, possibly more so than even the firm breast he discovers himself fondling as they kiss.

Yet as we witness in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, the eschewing of physical and cultural limits is not always viewed as an admirable trait.[31] Within Morrison's text, Pilate represents a different sort of boundlessness. She defies containment in fashions that are not unlike Aunt Mackie's. Reminiscent of the folk figure of a witch, she trespasses the line between life and death when she interacts with the dead and demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of herbal remedies by helping Ruth to conceive and protecting the unborn Milkman from the abortive efforts of his parents.

Furthermore, while her body appears abnormally contained due to the absence of her navel, a lack people find disconcerting because it erases the visible sign of her connection to the rest of humanity, she demonstrates her freedom from established boundaries in other ways. Pilate eschews those of her body when Milkman is arrested, changing her appearance into that of a "raggedy" and diminutive old woman in order to achieve her goals by conforming to the image of blackness approved by those in power in the racist South. Although adjusting one's posture may enact radical changes to one's appearance, both Milkman and Macon clearly view the transformation of Pilate's form as more than the careful positioning of her body. The narration confirms their opinion: "Pilate *had* been shorter. As she stood there in the receiving room of the jail, she didn't even come up to the sergeant's shoulder—and the sergeant's head barely reached Milkman's own chin. But Pilate was as tall as he was."[32]

While these changes are clearly beneficial to Milkman, to Macon they only reaffirm her untrustworthiness, leading him to repeat his opinion that she is a snake who can "drop her skin in a split second" and change forms when it suits her.[33] His wariness, a position he shares—if with more vehemence—with much of their society, underscores the potential for loneliness experienced by those who live within the African America posited by this essay. Living on the outskirts of society both, physically and metaphorically, while occupying the dual role of low bootlegger and town legend positions Pilate as an outsider of society while simultaneously keeping her as an integral part of it. In her unapologetic difference and

through her lawlessness and the magic of her grotesque body, she continuously redefines the American center from the periphery.

As seen in *Song of Solomon* and unlike *Nuestra América*, depictions of an African America necessarily deal with the problematics inherent in sharing the geographical space of the United States with European America. In urban areas, the result is often a palimpsest where the two Americas are represented as lying directly over and blending into each other. It is only through magical means that such a version of "Our America" is made distinguishable from "European America." Sugar Lips Shinehot, the title character of Touré's "The Sad, Sweet Story of Sugar Lips Shinehot, the Man with the Portable Promised Land," hopes to see the separation of the two after Navy sailors beat his mouth with a brick as punishment for dating a white woman. The attack leaves him unable to play jazz on his saxophone, and this injury puts him in a position comparable to Solomon's when the child is ordered to dance. Sugar Lips Shinehot's skill as a jazz artist suggests his ability to improvise, which frames his music in terms similar to the unplanned expressive nature of Jes Grew's carnivalesque dance (the Eagle Rock is in fact a jazz dance and, like the Sassy Bump and jazz, is closely tied to African American culture). He, much like Solomon, has that expression taken away from him by those who have the power to order his world.

In desperation, Sugar Lips Shinehot participates in a Hoodoo ceremony in which he must eat another boy's eyes. Although he wakes up the next morning with no memory of what followed this cannibalistic act, he is immediately overcome with a vague feeling of joy. When he leaves his apartment, he finds himself in what he calls "Negro Heaven" and what other African Americans label the portable promised land: a world held apart from "European America." "He looked round and saw less than half the normal number of peoples on that street and they was all Negroes. No white cops directin traffic. No white waitresses takin orders. No white men in suits movin down the street. Jus Negroes percolatin everywhere, shoppin, drivin, sellin ice cream. He felt the weight of tuggin on door after door drop away . . . Wit no place to go and no place being exactly where he wanted to be he felt like a jus-freed slave."[34] The reactions of other African Americans to Sugar Lips Shinehot's claims of race-based blindness range from simple belief to hope and acceptance; while his claims were impossible to prove, his entire community wants them to be true. As a consequence of their hope and his changed vision, Sugar Lips Shinehot becomes a celebrity, represented as a present-day Moses who "parts the white waters with nothing but his eyes."[35]

Like the other narratives previously discussed, Sugar Lips Shinehot's story ends when he has successfully alienated himself from a segment of society; however, unlike those narratives, Sugar Lips Shinehot's story concludes with him in a position embraced by the people around him. The presence of this larger desiring collective is what prevents the short story from concluding in a position of inherent loneliness, but despite their elevation of his condition, they cannot rectify the problematic nature of his position. European America continues to exist regardless of the fact that it has become invisible to him, and so the palimpsest created by the coexistence of the dual Americas is made even more potent: The African

America constructed and emphasized in part by Sugar Lips Shinehot's wish never to see another white individual continues to act and be acted upon by a European America that his magical ceremony is unable to completely erase.

As in Touré's short story, the representation of an "Our America" in Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* is also closely tied to the folk and magic that affects the way the characters see the world. For Indigo, a young girl who "has the South in her," African America resides in the reality of the unreal where magic exists and rituals can rectify almost anything. The rituals dispersed throughout Indigo's narrative are often split between traditional and modern methods. They carry with them the weight of Afro-Caribbean tradition and the African American history of slavery. Thus Indigo is positioned in a similar frame as Aunt Mackie and Pilate, despite the fact that her magic is generally explained away as make-believe by the adults around her.

Because many of the adults in her life are unable to see the magic that forms African America as Indigo understands it, they dismiss her assertions that dolls and fiddles can talk, that stars fall between her legs during menstruation, and that other worlds exist. In short, they refuse the view that magic exists and visions of the world based heavily in the folk are accurate. Her mother in particular is concerned about the danger to which Indigo may be exposed because of her worldview and warns her about the danger of white men, but Indigo does not understand why the African America she has formulated cannot remain separate from European America: "Every time I tell you something, you tell me about white folks. 'White folks say you can't go here—white folks say you can't do this—you can't do that.' I didn't make up white folks, what they got to do with me? I ain't white. My dolls ain't white. I don't go round bothering white folks!"[36] Here, as in the texts explored earlier, whiteness is immediately associated with limitations on black freedom and desire.

While her mother's consequent assertion that the decision not to bother someone does not always correspond to being left alone is accurate, aspects of Indigo's worldview are validated by other adults and the narration of her personal experience. For instance, Indigo receives such support when her mother tells her she must leave her dolls in her room, a decree that motivates Indigo to take a long walk with her favorite doll, Miranda. When she visits Uncle John afterward, he gives her a violin while telling her about "the reality of the unreal" that can be traced to the time when slaves used musical instruments to speak for them: "[White folks] was thinkin' that if we didn't have nothin' of our own, they could come controllin', meddlin', whippin' our sense on outta us. But the Colored smart, ya see. The Colored got some wits to em, you & me, we ain't the onliest ones be talkin' wit the unreal. What ya think music is, whatchu think the blues be, & them get happy church musics is about, but talkin' wit the unreal what's mo' real than most folks ever gonna know."[37] Through his discussion of the realistic unreal, Uncle John confirms Indigo's belief in a world of magic and folk ritual regardless of the correlation between her actions and their apparent effects. Furthermore, his framing of the real unreal in terms of race positions it as a feature

distinguishing European America from its colored counterpart; the real unreal is off limits for Europeans and as such they will never know it.

Uncle John's validation is immediately coupled with that of the narrative after Indigo travels to Mr. Lucas's pharmacy to purchase her first Kotex. When she accidentally disobeys her mother's warning not to mention her menstruation, she hears "somebody talking to her. She saw Mr. Lucas coming toward her & somebody talking to her. Telling her to get the Kotex & get home quick."[38] Indigo's flight is framed by the narrative focus's unveiling of Mr. Lucas's thoughts, which in turn reveal that Indigo's mother and the mystical voice were correct to be wary: "He wanted to keep looking at this girl, this woman. He wanted to know what she felt like."[39] The narrative style, which reports the events without any sense of hesitation and disbelief, underscores not only that Mr. Lucas meant to rape Indigo but also that she was warned by a mystical source. As such it also attests to a formulation of an America available only to a select group that contains spirits, folk magic, and the apparent unreal.

Soul City, the African American city in Touré 's *The Portable Promised Land*, has two streets of note—Freedom and Rhythm—which intersect in the city grid.[40] Touré lists Soul City next to New York and London in the publishing information for his text. Doing so once again posits the existence of an African America extending beyond the magical configurations of his fiction into reality even if we cannot locate it on a map. Ideas of rhythm and freedom also form the bones of the "Our America" posited in this essay and described throughout African American magical realism. The attainment of freedom, a release from the confines of lines, laws, and bodily and societal boundaries, is the driving motivation for many of its characters, who range from a young disheveled boy with a set of watercolors and a healthy dose of magic to an older woman who lacks a navel but keeps her name in a box hung from her ear. Characters who conform to mainstream ideologies of capitalism and acquisition are often no less concerned about their freedom; Macon Dead does not attempt to transcend the rules placed upon him by society in *Song of Solomon*, motivated by his belief that "money is freedom . . . the only real freedom there is."[41] Thus in one way or another, the active search for freedom in a society that strives to limit African American possibilities remains an explicit central concern. The configurations of popular dancing and jazz improvisation present in the previous narratives also emphasize freedom through the relationship between African American music, dance, and the carnivalesque. At the same time, such figurations also highlight the importance of unfettered artistic and bodily expression, and the unsanctioned and uncontrollable experience of the reveler who is free to enjoy her heritage, her America, and by extension, herself.

While each of the texts mentioned here configure African America differently, they all share the presence of folk magic that either forms or reveals the distinction between African America and European America. As in the formulations of *Nuestra América*, there is an appreciation of a distinct American history and an acknowledgment of valuable cultural history and forms of expression that should be acknowledged, remembered, and used to help cope with the present. While this

magically raced home country complicates Martí's conceived dynamic through its troubling of his monolithic presentation of the United States, it would also suggest there is now the potential for an alliance that could reconfigure the current problematic understandings of America, a revision that would alter the way it is historicized and transform it into an inclusive geopolitical entity that, like the grotesque bodies in these texts, acknowledges each of its ever-changing parts.

Notes

1. José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 11.
2. Wendy Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 34.
3. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 310.
4. Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 256.
5. Ibid.
6. David K. Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 41.
7. Touré, *The Portable Promised Land* (New York: Bay Back, 2002), 111.
8. Ibid., 107.
9. Ibid., 106.
10. Ibid., 108.
11. Ibid., 109.
12. Herbert Blau, "The Surpassing Body," *TDR* 35, no. 2 (1991): 76.
13. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 5.
14. Ibid., 10.
15. Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1972), 4.
16. Sharon A. Jessee, "Laughter and Identity in Ishmael Reed's 'Mumbo Jumbo,'" *MELUS*, Winter 1996, 129.
17. Ibid., 6.
18. Neil Schmitz, "Neo-HooDoo: The Experimental Fiction of Ishmael Reed," *Twentieth Century Literature* 20, no. 2 (1974): 135.
19. Evelyn Fishburn, "Humor and Magical Realism in *El reino de este mundo*," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Tamesis, 2005), 156.
20. Touré, *The Portable Promised Land*, 110.
21. Blau, "The Surpassing Body," 76.
22. Touré, *The Portable Promised Land*, 109.
23. Ibid., 114.
24. Ibid., 115.
25. Susan L. Blake, "Ritual and Rationalization: Black Folklore in the Works of Ralph Ellison," *PMLA* 94, no. 1 (1979): 121–36.
26. Ralph Ellison, "A Coupla Scalped Indians," in *The Jazz Fiction Anthology*, ed. Sasha Feinstein and David Rife (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 184.
27. Ibid., 185.
28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 180.
30. Blake, "Ritual and Rationalization," 122.
31. While I acknowledge the contemporary debate regarding Toni Morrison's position with regard to magical realism, I maintain that the figure of Pilate, on whom I will focus here, is indeed magical realist in nature. Morrison's novels are sometimes categorized as romances. Such texts follow a heroic protagonist who often possesses superhuman powers and who typically embarks on a quest. However, Pilate's body presents a site of disjunction within the narrative that cannot be explained by natural laws and that likewise does not fit within any established framework of the magical or miraculous. This final point especially is often taken as the distinguishing feature between magical realist texts and romances, therefore putting her squarely within the realm of the magical real.
32. Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Plume, 1987), 208.
33. Ibid., 206.
34. Touré, *The Portable Promised Land*, 41.
35. Ibid., 43.
36. Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (New York: Picador, 1982), 22.
37. Ibid., 27.
38. Ibid., 29.
39. Ibid.
40. Touré, *The Portable Promised Land*, 8.
41. Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 163.

CHAPTER 6

Of Magical Gourds and Secret Senses

The Uses of Magical Realism in Asian American Literature

Begoña Simal-González

In the (post-)postmodern context in which we continue to breathe and write, the fiction of truth and the truth of fiction conspire to lead writers and readers alike to approach literature with new eyes. While there is nothing new in magic(al) realism, the Latin American boom of the second half of the twentieth century is still echoing around the globe, and in the last decades such echoes have reached the US with diaphanous precision[1]. Magical realism surfaces most notably (but not only) in "ethnic" American literatures, and the Asian American literary tradition is no exception to this.

Although it is generally agreed that Asian American literature was born at the turn of the century, with the first publications of the Eaton sisters early in the twentieth century and the first books published by "Ambassadors of Good Will"—echoing Elaine Kim's oft-quoted coinage—from Korea, China, and Japan, it was not until the 1970s that the Asian American movement became visible and audible in literature: the shout-like *Aiiieeeee* anthology (1974), which soon constituted a symbol and stronghold of cultural nationalism; and the pioneer books by Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1975, 1976), and by Shawn Wong, *Homebase* (1979), all appeared in the 1970s. About the same time that these texts were written and published, the Latin American phenomenon known as *el boom* was starting to traverse frontiers. The flagship of the movement, Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which appeared in 1967 and marked the zenith of the *boom*, was soon translated into French (1968) and English (1970) and immediately heralded the "worldwide recognition of magical realism."[2] Paradoxically enough, just as this inexorable process of internationalization of magical realism reached its acme during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the literary movement itself started to wane in Latin America.[3]

It was precisely when the magical realist chapter in Latin America seemed to be coming to a close that magical realist fiction emerged or blossomed in the English-speaking world and beyond, as seen in the works of Salman Rushdie, Leslie Marmon Silko, or Angela Carter, to name just a few.

Such internationalization of the literary phenomenon of magical realism had an echo in critical debates and publications. Wendy Faris was among the first to note, in her seminal "Scheherezade's Children" (1995), that even though Latin Americans had historically led the list of magical realist writers, it was high time critics "extend[ed] the mode beyond that region, beyond *el boom*."[4] Therefore, not only did magical realist fiction continue to flourish, albeit in different forms and mutations, all throughout the planet (from India to the US; from Nigeria to Canada), but the magical realist perspective was soon extrapolated to critical appraisals of different literary traditions. Such a widening of the scope, which led critics to approach certain non–Latin American texts as magical realism, starts to be visible in scholarly publications during the 1980s. Just as the work of several Latin American critics, most notably Irlemar Chiampi's ground-breaking structuralist approach in *O realismo maravilhoso* (1980; translated into Spanish in 1981), gradually moves away from a specific analysis of the Latin American phenomenon and begins to focus instead on the literary mode itself, other critics turn their attention to North American, European, and postcolonial texts that are newly approached as genuine examples of magical realism.

If such a historical contextualization was in order when trying to ascertain the trace of magical realism in Asian American literature, it is likewise incumbent to outline, albeit briefly, the main subtypes of magical realism that have been put forward in specialized criticism, since they will prove instrumental in our analysis of Asian American magical realist texts. Trying to summarize the history of the term is no easy task, as Seymor Menton demonstrates, but Franz Roh (1925), Arturo Uslar Pietri (1948), and Alejo Carpentier (1949) are generally credited with the coinage of, respectively, magic(al) realism in art (*magischer Realismus*), literary magical realism (*realismo mágico*), and marvellous realism (*lo real maravilloso americano*).[5] Although there are some differences between the three terms, at least at the level of their genesis, nowadays most critics use "magical realism" as an umbrella term for all three phenomena. And yet, for the purposes of this study we will chiefly be discussing and addressing Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*, interrogating the particular connotations that originally accrued to such a concept and that have now "tainted" many uses of magical realism.

Magical realist fiction can be simply described as encompassing those literary texts where the realistic and the fantastic coexist with no apparent contradiction. Amaryll Chanady's comments on Miguel Ángel Asturias's work serve to exemplify such "equalitarian" coexistence: "Unlike the traditional fantastic narrative . . . in which the supernatural is portrayed as unacceptable and threatening to the world of reason, magical realism in Asturias juxtaposes two worldviews without establishing a hierarchy between them, thus relativizing the dominant Western rational paradigm."[6] Carpentier's pioneer formulation of *lo real maravilloso*, in his 1949 prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, not only echoes the oxymoron

of magical realism but adds the adjective "americano," thus grounding the mode in the American continent and, more specifically, in the Latin American context, where "faith" in such coexistence is still possible: "Sensing the marvelous presupposes faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot be cured through saints' miracles."[7] Such faith he does not find in the artificial juxtapositions of surrealism.[8] In contrast, it is abundant in America. In other words, Carpentier criticizes the "fake," contrived juxtapositions of surrealism and favors instead "a representation of a reality in which such juxtapositions already, inherently exist."[9] In his book on Carpentier, Roberto González Echevarría explained how the Cuban writer's notion of *lo real maravilloso* "rest[ed] on an onto-theological assumption: the existence of a peculiar Latin American consciousness devoid of self-reflexiveness and inclined to faith," whereby Latin Americans perceived history as fate and "fantasy cease[d] to be incongruous with reality."[10] According to Carpentier, *lo real maravilloso* inheres in the American land, imagined both as virginal landscape and as a palimpsest of cultures and ethnic communities. For Carpentier, therefore, certain realities apparently prove more "amenable," as it were, to the magical realist mode than others. Thus it is the very "essence" of Latin American reality that proves magical realist, not necessarily the writer's attitude or technique. It is a question of ontology, not of aesthetics or epistemology. In his critical work, González Echevarría developed this preliminary taxonomy by talking of an epistemological mode of magical realism and an ontological type, the one that Carpentier had theorized.

From a radically different perspective, that of materialist criticism, Fredric Jameson's "On Magic Realism in Film" (1986) proffered another seminal interpretation.[11] Apart from elucidating the emergence of the literary mode from a political standpoint, Jameson suggests a powerful label for the most common understanding of magical realism. He refers to Carpentier's pioneering work and describes the subsequent development of the movement up to García Márquez, at which stage, Jameson points out, "the focus of the conception of magic realism would appear to have shifted to what must be called an anthropological perspective"; according to Jameson, by the 1980s, magical realism had come to be interpreted as "a kind of narrative raw material derived essentially from peasant society, drawing in sophisticated ways on the world of village or even tribal myth."[12]

Faced with the difficulty of reconciling Roh's original definition of the term with later understandings of magical realism in literature, in his essay "Magic Realism: A Typology" (1993), William Spindler puts forward what aims to be a comprehensive taxonomy of the literary mode. Spindler's typology aims at braiding the different strains of magical realism, which for him fossilize into three possible shapes: metaphysical, anthropological, and ontological.[13] These types originate in the different interpretation given to the "magic" element in the oxymoron. In "Metaphysical Magic Realism," magic is understood as the astonishing result of "the arrangement of natural objects by means of tricks, devices or optical illusion,"[14] as in Giorgio de Chirico's *Pittura Metafisica*. Magical realist fiction of this type would create a sense of the uncanny through *ostranenie (defamiliarization)*.

These "metaphysical" magical realist texts, according to Spindler, would "induce a sense of unreality in the reader by the technique of *Verfremdug* by which a familiar scene is described as if it were something new and unknown, but without dealing explicitly with the supernatural," but suggesting instead "a disturbing impersonal presence, which remains implicit."[15] Spindler's second type, "Anthropological Magic Realism" is characterized by the existence of two distinct narrative "voices." Sometimes the narrator "depicts events from a rational point of view (the 'realist' component) and sometimes from that of a believer in magic (the 'magical' element). This antinomy is resolved by the author adopting or referring to the myths and cultural background (the 'collective unconscious') of a social or ethnic group."[16] Anthropological Magic Realism, therefore, seems tightly linked with Carpentier's "lo real maravilloso." Spindler still favors Jameson's label, "anthropological," which both situates the marvelous realism within the broader framework of magical realism and avoids "confining it to Latin America, as 'lo real maravilloso (americano)' does."[17] Spindler links this type of magical realism with "the survival in popular culture of a magical and mythical *Weltanschauung [worldview]*, which coexists with the rational mentality generated by modernity," but the critic is careful to add that Anthropological Magic Realism is not exclusive of Latin America, as numerous writers hailing from the Asian and African continents demonstrate.[18] "In fact, the strength of Magic Realism in the 'periphery' . . . could be explained by the fact that collective myths acquire greater importance in the creation of new national identities, as well as by the more obvious fact that pre-industrial beliefs still play an important part in the socio-political and cultural lives of developing countries. Magic Realism gives popular culture and magical beliefs the same degree of importance as Western science and rationality. In doing this, it furthers the claims of those groups which hold these beliefs to equality with the modernizing elites which govern them" (ellipsis in original).[19]

In contrast, the last type in Spindler's taxonomy, "Ontological Magic Realism" does not have to rely on a specific ethnic or cultural past in order to "resolve" the apparent realist-magical contradiction. Spindler describes this last type of magical realism as an "'individual' form of Magic Realism" where, without any mythical, precapitalist, or "primitive" background, "the supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if it did not contradict reason, and no explanations are offered for the unreal events in the text."[20] Unlike what we tend to encounter in the fantastic mode, here the narrative voice does not seem to be "puzzled, disturbed or skeptical of the supernatural," but portrays the fantastic "as if it was a normal part of ordinary everyday life," narrating such events "in a very realistic way," exactly the inversion of the defamiliarizing strategies found in metaphysical magic realism.[21] Although some of these texts could be understood as psychological parables, or could alternatively be interpreted "as the product of the mind of a 'disturbed' individual," Spindler argues for their inclusion within the category of magical realism, for the very fact that "these 'subjective' views are endorsed by the 'objective' personal narrator, by other characters or by the realistic description of events that take place in a normal and plausible framework. Instead of having

only a subjective reality, therefore, the unreal has an objective, ontological presence in the text."[22] It must be noted that Spindler's categories have to be handled with care, in that there is constant overlapping between the three types, as the critic himself recognizes.[23] And yet, despite their controversial nature, especially in the case of anthropological magic(al) realism, Spindler's labels remain highly useful for critical purposes.

Having built the frame for our picture, let us now dwell on the painting itself, the presence of magical realism in Asian American literature. Although the first mention of an Asian American writer, namely Maxine Hong Kingston, in connection with the magical realist mode dates back to the 1980s,[24] in-depth studies of Asian American texts as examples of magical realism did not appear until the 1990s. The scarcity of studies focusing on Kingston's and Amy Tan's magical realist texts—to name just the two most conspicuous examples—until quite recently continues to surprise the informed critic. Elsewhere I have accounted for such a conspicuous absence by pointing out that it was not until late in the twentieth century that the magical realist label acquired its current de-territorialized use; until then, there was an unwitting identification of "Third World literatures" with magical realism among American critics,[25] a "Third-Worldist" stigma that Timothy Brennan, among others, has denounced.[26] For most of the century, the term magical realism was immediately associated with Latin American literature, and only in the late 1980s and 1990s did scholarly publications, such as those by Stephen Slemon (1988), Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (1995), or Jean-Pierre Durix (1998), start contributing to the internationalization of the critical term.[27]

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976) continues to be considered the landmark in the emergence of Asian American literature, although, as mentioned before, Asian Americans had published fiction and autobiography prior to the publication of these seminal memoirs. Both *The Woman Warrior* and its sequel, *China Men* (1980), do not adhere to traditional realism, but become magical gourds where the mundane and the extraordinary coexist. Both books include legends and fantastic stories side-by-side with historical accounts and autobiographical writing, a juxtaposition that has variously been dubbed "postmodern,"[28] "magical realist"[29] or both.[30] Amy Tan's best-selling *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) once more has recourse to magical realist techniques and motifs, such as the presence of ghosts, avatars, or characters with ESP.[31] When approaching these texts, many readers and some critics have considered them as prime examples of "anthropological" magical realism, or rather, as containing "magical realist moments," to use Lyn Di Iorio Sandín's fortunate phrase,[32] of the "anthropological" type. Much like postcolonial examples of magical realism, some of Kingston's and Tan's books have generally been perceived as a result of the juxtaposition of two cultures or worldviews, a rational Western *Weltanschauung* and a mythical non-Western one. The same can be said of a more recent and equally successful novel, Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997),[33] which has been construed as a variation of magical realism, specifically as an example of a new subgenre, "Mystical Realism,"[34] and,

like Kingston's and Tan's texts, it also bears the mark of "orientalized mysticism." Before discussing the consequences of using the controversial label of "anthropological magical realism" and/or its concomitant connotations, let us unravel the magical realist threads in two of these books, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

Most of the magical realist moments in *The Woman Warrior* appear in the central sections of the book: "White Tigers" and "Shaman." Although the beginning of "White Tigers" is a retelling of the story of legendary Fa Mu Lan by the narrator's mother (Brave Orchid), the young protagonist, who is listening attentively to the tale, gradually merges with the heroine:

> The call *would come* from a bird that flew over our roof . . . I *would be* a little girl of seven the day I followed the bird away into the mountains . . . We *would go* around and around the tallest mountain, climbing ever upward . . .
>
> . . . The bird, now gold so close to the sun, *would come* to rest on the thatch of a hut, which, until the bird's two feet touched it, was camouflaged as part of the mountainside.
>
> The door *opened*, and an old man and an old woman *came out* carrying bowls of rice and soup and a leafy branch of peaches.[35]

The verb shift from the conditional mood to the simple past tense indicates the smooth amalgamation of the possible and the actual, the "magic" and the "real." However, the deliberate gap between the *would* paragraphs and the past-tense recounting that follows makes the transition all too visible. A similar textual strategy is used at the end of Maxine/Fa Mu Lan's story. When the mother comes to the end of the story, graphic gaps once more signify the breach between the world of maternal storytelling and the "tangible" reality that young Maxine has to contend with, and such gaps figuratively evoke the separation of the magical and the realistic:

> I went home to my parents-in-law and husband and son . . .
>
> My mother and father and the entire clan would be living happily in the money I had sent them. My parents had bought their coffins. They would sacrifice a pig to the gods that I had returned. From the words on my back, and how they were fulfilled, the villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality.
>
> My American life has been such a disappointment.[36]

Even if for a while Maxine had become the swordswoman herself, Fa Mu Lan's story ends and, after the paragraph break, the autodiegetic narrator comes back to her "real" situation, to her "real" self as a confused Chinese American girl. However, there is a lingering suspicion that there is some other life in Maxine besides her "American life," and, as she soon recognizes, having grown up under the constant drumming of her mother's "talking-story" has apparently deprived Maxine of the ability to tell fact from fiction, the real from the magical. "Before

we can leave our parents," the narrator complains, "they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jam-pack with homemade underwear," so that it becomes hardly possible for her to ignore "the deformed" and the uncanny, which continue to intrude into her life.[37] As the author herself says of her first book, "The myths and the lives in *The Woman Warrior* are integrated in the women's and girls' stories so that we cannot find the seams where a myth leaves off and a life and imagination begin."[38] After all, as Maxine puts it, Fa Mu Lan and Maxine herself "are not so dissimilar,"[39] an identification that emphasizes not only the blurring of frontiers so typical of magical realism, but also the weight that (real, lived) fantasy has in the narrator's life.

"Shaman," the chapter dealing with Brave Orchid's life in China, also abounds in "magical realist moments." The battles with supernatural forces are probably the most conspicuous example. Before migrating to the US, Maxine's mother receives medical training and, while staying at the student dormitory, she has to struggle with the ghost that haunts one of the rooms. These fights are described in detailed, physical terms, in the tradition of Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and other magical realist novels,[40] and also like Rulfo's characters, Brave Orchid "die[s] for a while," and she does so at precisely "3 A.M.,"[41] using the typically magical realist strategy of describing magical events with misleading journalistic detail. Kingston's text also shows how, in a fittingly paradoxical way, time becomes flexible: "Altogether I was gone for twelve years, but in this room only an hour had passed. The moon barely moved."[42] Finally, with the help of the other young women in the dormitory, Brave Orchid burns and gets rid of the sitting ghost that had "pounced" on her and had almost managed to suffocate her to death.

As we can see from the succinct description given, Kingston's text exhibits another characteristic of magical realism: the "literalization" of metaphor. When discussing Jorge Luis Borges's concept of "prefiguration," by which the irruption of the fantastic or unbelievable as a matter of fact is anticipated or, as it were, prepared by some previous insinuation, Carter Wheelock explains that such "sudden literalization of what was conceived figuratively raises the whole textual environment above ordinary truth and imbues it with anagogic significance," a technique that becomes crucial in magical realism, he argues, "for only by such means can the unreal be given the aura of the appropriate."[43] In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the literalization of metaphor is anticipated in the subtitle and sustained throughout the book, where "ghosts" both refer to remorseful or nostalgic memories of the past, and take on a corporeal nature, either as supernatural forces (the drowned aunt in "No Name Woman," Brave Orchid's battles with the sitting ghost, etc.), or as unintelligible "barbarians," such as when Maxine's family call white people "ghosts": "The Garbage Ghost," "Hobo Ghosts and Wino Ghosts," "the Grocery Ghosts," "the Milk Ghost," "Taxi Ghosts, Bus Ghosts, Police Ghost, Fire Ghosts, Meter Reader Ghosts, Tree Trimming Ghosts, Five-and-Dime Ghosts" are as real, or as unreal as the "Wall Ghost, Frog Spirit," "Eating Partner," or the "Sitting Ghost" had been in China.[44] Even in adulthood, the narrator never actually finds "ghost-free" places, although she may momentarily believe she has.[45] In the end, as Gayle Fujita Sato claims, the "very 'ghosts' that drive

the narrator away from home bring her back, for she realizes that banishing them all means banishing all poetry and magic too, including the legend of Fa Mu Lan."[46]

In *The Hundred Secret Senses*, magical realist moments appear from the very outset, but the homodiegetic narrator, Olivia, tends to conjure the magic away by constantly looking for "rational" explanations to otherwise mysterious events, such as the disappearance of her doll as a child,[47] or the strange noises she hears while living with Simon but which, significantly enough, he never witnesses. The character who is apparently in touch with the world of spirits, with "the hundred secret senses," is Olivia's half sister from China, Kwan, who matter-of-factly points out how difficult it will be to find a certain type of ghost or spirit: "Polish-Jewish, very hard to find, so many dead Polish-Jewish. Many dead Chinese people too, but I have many connection for Chinese—this yin person know that yin person, easier for me to find if Chinese. But Polish-Jewish—ah—maybe she don't even go to Yin World, maybe go someplace else."[48] When Olivia travels to Changmian, Kwan's home village, her childhood confusion between fact and fiction reemerges, this time prompted not by maternal "talk-story," as in Kingston's text, but by "sisterly storytelling." The Chinese rural setting, the landscape, fauna, and flora, are instrumental in the change operated in Olivia, even the Chinese owls compel her to "wise up" because her "American ideas don't work" in the new context.[49] As had happened in *The Woman Warrior*, in Tan's novel most of these magical moments become "epiphanic moments of heightened consciousness."[50] As the novel moves forward and deeper into China, Olivia becomes more and more convinced that Kwan's apparently incredible stories about previous lives and avatars linking both sisters could after all be not only possible but true.

As befits magical realist fiction, therefore, both in *The Woman Warrior* and in *The Hundred Secret Senses* antinomies are ultimately resolved.[51] Dichotomies like spiritual versus material, living versus dead, finite versus infinite, animate versus inanimate, fact versus fiction are no longer perceived as contradictory but coexist on an equal basis in the magical realist mode. One more conceptual boundary that is typically transgressed in magical realism is that between "I" and "the Other," where the self mutates, merges with, or is transfigured in/through the (non)human Other, in some cases enacting Emmanuel Levinas's substitution.[52] In *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine and Fa Mu Lan merge into one being, and the rabbit identifies with and sacrifices himself for the young heroine, whereas in *The Hundred Secret Senses* Kwan believes she is actually inhabiting someone else's body, as the "ghost-talker" had explained to her worried mother when she was a child: "There's a ghost inside this girl . . . The girl who lived in this body before doesn't want to come back. And the girl who lives in it now can't leave until she finds her." That's when I saw her. Buncake, staring at me from a window across the room. I pointed to her and shouted, 'Look! There she is!' And when I saw her pointing back at me, her puckered mouth saying my words, I realized I was looking at my own reflection."[53]

Another characteristic of magical realism that is present in both novels is the specific nature that time acquires. Time becomes elusive, or warped; "time is bent."[54] On some occasions, it becomes circular instead of abiding by

conventional understandings of time, which tend to be linear or chronological. It turns into an elastic metaphor that can last for years or minutes simultaneously, as we have seen in "Shaman," or else it becomes intensive, compressed, as when the narrator-heroine is training in "White Tigers." Ultimately, as befits a magical realist text, in *The Woman Warrior* "the lines between past and present, self and other are slippery and overlapping."[55] The bond between past and present becomes even more obvious in *The Hundred Secret Senses*, where the reincarnation avatars literally link past and present. And the list of magical realist features to be traced in these two Asian American texts is by no means exhausted.[56]

From this brief analysis of the frequent magical realist moments in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*, we can safely conclude that both books are clearly indebted to magical realism. In *The Woman Warrior*—most consistently in the second and third chapters—Kingston uses marvelous events as if they were everyday, normal occurrences to the point that the narrator, grudgingly or willingly, comes to include herself in this circle of believers, thus following Carpentier, for whom faith in the coexistence of the antinomy was a precondition of magical realism: "When my mother went doctoring in the villages, the ghosts, the were-people, the apes dropped out of trees . . . She had apparently won against one ghost, but ghost forms are various and many. Some can occupy the same space at the same moment. They permeate the grain in wood, metal, and stone. Animalcules somersault about *our* faces when we breathe. *We* have to build horns on our roofs so that the nagging once-people can slide up them and perhaps ascend to the stars, the source of pardon and love."[57]

In *The Hundred Secret Senses* magical realist moments increase as the plot moves from the Western locale to the Chinese rural setting. It is precisely in Changmian, where "Olivia's 'cozy' rationalistic worldview will come undone"; it is also at this stage that the stories Kwan had told Olivia in her childhood are no longer perceived as "wild, magical tales of adventure," but as "actual memories of a previous avatar."[58] The fact that magic is conspicuously linked to the Chinese, "primitive" background consolidates the contentions we find in both Carpentier's "lo real maravilloso" and Spindler's "anthropological magical realism," and which remind us of a third coinage, Fernando Alegría's "primitive tropicalism."[59] From these perspectives, the very coexistence of two worldviews in the writer's original "mestizo" culture would seem to account for such a "natural" use of the magical realist mode. Were we to follow this anthropological explanation, it would then be the presumed coexistence of a rational Western worldview and a mythical "Oriental" one in the Asian American community that would generate these magical realist works. The obvious confinement of the coexistence of the magical and the real to the Chinese locale, or to the character representing "genuine" Chineseness, points at a deeply ingrained Orientalism, which shall be explored later, but first we should turn to the problematic label of "anthropological" magical realism itself.

Already in 1980 Horst Rogmann warned of the double danger of racist essentialism and structural dependence (perpetuation of the colonial regime and the colonialist position) in understanding the magical realist mode as emanating

from a specific landscape or "primitive" culture. More specifically, Rogmann described how magical realism ran the risk of "anthropologization"—that is, the identification of the literary mode with a certain geography or ethnic enclave. In an echo of Carpentier's famous hypothesis of *lo real maravilloso*, Rogmann cautions, "the appealing and dangerous nature of magical-marvelous realism lies in its desire to present Latin American reality . . . as intrinsically magical and marvelous; in other words, magical-marvelous realism tries to go beyond literary realities and maintains that these reflect or reproduce a *characteristically* [Latin] American reality."[60] This "anthropologization" of magical realism is conceptually close to Chanady's notion of the "territorialization of the imaginary," whereby a given "manifestation of international avant-garde fiction is ascribed to a particular continent."[61] Theo D'haen similarly talks of "indigenous magic" when referring to postcolonial practitioners of magical realism.[62] And yet, to this day, magical realism and Latin America, or, in its wider variant, magical realism and "Third-Worldism" continue to be problematically associated.

In "Discarding Magic Realism: Modernism, Anthropology and Critical Practice" (1998), Liam Connell explores the ways in which "Third-Worldism," stigmatized as primitivism, has been attached to the term magical realism, which also accounts for the growing hostility toward the label that can be found among many non-Western writers. As Connell lucidly argues, in many textbooks magical realism is simply defined as a literary mode where realism and fantasy coexist, but there is a visible "reluctance to restrict any definition to merely formal properties" in those introductory books, preferring to mention extraliterary issues instead.[63] By 1986, Rawdon Wilson had emphasized such "contextual" constraints: "Although it is unmistakably a textual mode," the critic explained, "magical realism has been given powerful contextual accounts," specifically when it was described "as the representation of primitive, or naïve, reality."[64] When introductory manuals and companions claim that magical realism was originally "a response to the nature of South American reality," and that the literary mode had subsequently flourished in those "countries previously ruled despotically as colonies" and lacking in rights and freedom in the postcolonial period,[65] such definition effectively fosters the "geographical fallacy" that Wilson both coined and critiqued.[66] Although the political instability of Latin American (postcolonial) countries described in the textbook may be historically accurate, in other words, even though the impact of colonization-related and other conflicts in Latin America should not be underestimated, modern Europe has not been free of wars and oppression either;[67] and yet, in contrast with what happens in postcolonial contexts, Europe's violent upheavals have not led critics to link magical realism "anthropologically" to traumatic European history.

At this point, we can recapitulate the different positions vis-à-vis the hypothetical anthropological nature of magical realism. On the one hand, it has been argued that certain writers from postcolonial contexts and/or belonging to ethnic minorities (in some cases, internal colonies themselves) can tap into their syncretic or hybrid cultural past. There is also a certain consensus among critics that, in the North American context, the *mestizaje*[68] that Carpentier or Mario

Vargas Llosa claimed for Latin America,[69] or, in more specific jargon, multiple "cultural focalism" becomes an obvious feature of so-called hyphenated communities (Asian American, Native American, African American or US Latin@ writers).[70] On the other hand, we are asked to interrogate the deep implications of such assumptions. In other words, we need to seriously question whether this "peaceful" coexistence of Western positivism and non-Western magic and mythical thinking is a given—that is, if it is true of these communities and/or true of the writers themselves—or whether the double coding of magical realism is a conscious decision on the part of the writer—either an artistic option, like the surrealists' "artificial" juxtapositions, according to Carpentier, or an exotic posing driven by commercial reasons, or a combination of both.

Were we to apply the multiple positions previously described to the Asian American writers we are dealing with, we could conclude that Kingston and Tan may have opted for magical realism either for purely aesthetic reasons (perhaps artistic choice), or because this literary mode fits the very hybrid nature of Asian Americanness/Chinese Americanness and their liminal status between cultures (perhaps anthropological or cultural necessity), while other literary modes did not prove so amenable to this *mestizaje*. The importance of cultural and/or literal *mestizaje* has been noted by experts in magical realism, from Carpentier and his followers, to contemporary critics such as José David Saldívar. When analyzing Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, Saldívar emphasizes the double-voiced nature of Shange's work, since, in his own words, "her literary antecedents are both black and mestizo (African American and Latin American) novelists."[71] It could be argued that this widespread characterization of Latin American practitioners of magical realism as *mestizos* not only constitutes a simplification but is inaccurate in many cases: Relevant writers of the movement such as Carpentier or Julio Cortázar are culturally—and sometimes literally—*criollos*.[72] However, this (real or metaphorical) *mestizaje* has become a prevalent factor by which the emergence of "ethnic" magical realism in the United States is explained. Following this argument, then, cultural *mestizaje* would be the main reason behind the emergence and success of Asian American magical realism. One cannot forget that the two writers we are initially concerned with, Tan and Kingston, originally felt at ease with the label "magical realism." In addition, many Chinese even regarded Kingston as a new García Márquez, as the Chinese American writer explains in one of her early interviews: "I was their [the Chinese writers'] continuity. And they wanted help in figuring out where to go. They thought Gabriel García Márquez's would be the way because of his richness, because his work can be multi-layer [*sic*]. He can use the Indian past and the Catholic-Spanish heritage. Keep it all. You don't have to cut that out, cut this out."[73] In a later interview, Kingston once more maintained that, just as Silko or Toni Morrison had done in their novels, she also aimed to capture her own experience of cultural syncretism, very similar to that *mestizaje* found in Latin America.[74] After all, both American contexts proffered surprising, antinomic juxtapositions, apparently born of the palimpsestic accumulation of African, Native, Chinese, and Euro-American layers.

Despite the comments and interpretations above, it is my contention that the "geographical fallacy" and the concomitant anthropologization of magical realism outlined above are not only simplistic, but dangerously redolent of geographical or environmental determinism. In Book III of *De l'esprit des lois*, published in 1758, Montesquieu would plant the seed of geographical determinism, which, together with pseudo-scientific racialism and a bastardized version of social Darwinism, would contribute to the imperialistic and racist enterprises of the 19th and 20th centuries. Still today some critics, assuming an essentialist, anthropological attitude, resolutely point at landscape and climate as the most prominent reasons for the emergence of Latin American magical realism:

> Among the more apparent sources are an imposing geography, composed of daunting natural barriers . . . and a frequently unbearable humid Caribbean atmosphere that inevitably dampens the spirits. The geographical proximity of the jungle to the city elicits a related omnipresent sense of the closeness of the prehistoric past to modern life, of myth, or primordial thinking, to scientific thought. Yet that closeness, filtered through a creative human imagination nurtured on a mix of their traditions and beliefs of the native Indians, as well as those of the transplanted Africans and Europeans absorbed into that world of prolific cultural hybridization, allows for a seemingly inevitable portrayal of the fantastic as factual and realistic.[75]

David Danow's description is not rara avis, just an elaborate instance of the tendency toward what Chanady called the "territorialization of the imaginary" that persists among literary critics. In the face of the survival of such a trend, I would argue that much can be gained if we deanthropologize magical realism, if we "deterritorialize the imaginary," as Chanady herself suggested.[76] In other words, I would side with the "internationalist" rather than with the "Americanist" critics of magical realism, even if one has to admit that the Latin American boom both made the narrative mode visible and left us some of the best examples of magical realist fiction. Yet, I want to argue that this literary mode does not have to follow *necessarily* from a given cultural/ethnic background or a certain landscape. To start with, as several critics remind us, the magical realist mode cannot and should not be disengaged from the literary history of which it is part of, and, more specifically, from the tradition of the fantastic and the uncanny.[77] Likewise, the success of magical realism in the West can only be partially explained because of the allure that the exoticized Other—the construct of the "Orient" in the case of Asian American magical realism—has for Western readers.[78] Maybe the answer lies in emphasizing the aesthetic, artistic dimension of magical realism as with any other literary mode. In this critical endeavor, it is important to consider magical realism alongside (or within) postmodernism, as several critics have done.[79] In this context, magical realism can be said to work as "the supplement of realism": trying to overcome "the ineluctable *lack* in communication" that, according to Scott Simpkins, plagues the postmodern subject, magical realist writers such as García Márquez, have used different "supplemental strategies in an attempt to increase the significative force texts seem able to generate," enlarging realism, which García Márquez himself had faulted with being "too static and exclusive a

vision of reality."[80] Moving away from the geographical or cultural determinism that plagued anthropological approaches to magical realism, Simpkins maintains that, for these writers "the use of magic is a self-conscious (perhaps painfully so) attempt to overcome significative loss, to bridge that space between the ideal and the achievable," even if they remain aware of this narrative strategy's (and language's) shortcomings.[81]

In this nonessentialist approach to the narrative mode, there is also room for extraliterary elements. However, this time extratextual factors do not confirm but belie the geographical fallacy of anthropological magical realism. It is more than legitimate to associate (but not in a univocal or exclusive way) the use of magical realist techniques with personal and collective trauma, in the wide sense of the term. This theoretical framework would easily account for the emergence of magical realist fiction in every single continent. When putting forward this theory, David Lodge explained that the practitioners of magical realism seemed to have one thing in common: they had all lived traumatic experiences, experiences that had deeply marked their personal and collective lives and that they considered could not "be adequately represented in a discourse of undisturbed realism."[82] This inextricable bond between the ineffable in trauma and magical realism begs for further exploration, and recent critical articles are finally paying attention to it. Eugene Arva's "Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism" (2008) is probably the most outstanding example. In his essay, Arva identifies the magical realist mode as the best vehicle for the expression of traumatic, silenced experiences. As the critic insightfully claims, even if traumatic events are not "an illusion," they are often "perceived and relived as one," which explains "the vital role played by illusion (magic, fabulation) in our representations of, and grasp on" such traumatic experience.[83] Building on the theories of Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Slavoj Žižek, and Ihab Hassan, among others, Arva argues that the coexistence of ontologies in magical realism, like Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal, best captures the postmodern uncertainties regarding the nature of "reality." However, "magical realist simulacra" differ from Baudrillard's hyperreality in that they are not shallow[84] or "depthless."[85] "Magical realist hyperreality," on the other hand, constitutes "a missed, or a silenced, but at the same time a re-livable kind of reality. It might be the only reality in which one can remember in order to forget trauma."[86] Magical realism, therefore, ultimately achieves "the encoding of the ineffable," to use Wendy Faris's phrase:[87] it succeeds in (re)presenting the unrepresentable.

If the connection with trauma can contribute to deanchoring magical realism from a specific locale or ethnic enclave, it is in the (chosen) coexistence of worldviews that the real subversive nature of magical realism lies. As John Erickson puts it, in magical realist texts "the supernatural serves to rupture the 'coherence' of the systematized empirical world by revealing it to be, not a universally true or absolute representation of external reality, but only one of several possible representations."[88] For Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora, it is the boundary-transgressing nature of magical realism that proves especially attractive for writers all over the world, not only for Latin American authors, since it "encourages resistance to

monologic political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women."[89]

To the preceding arguments we should add a more explicitly political dimension: Jameson's materialist interpretation of anthropological magical realism. According to Jameson, the historical emergence of magical realism in Latin America has to be explained, once more, as resulting from the coexistence of preindustrial and capitalist modes:

> The possibility of magic realism as a formal mode is constitutively dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present; or, to generalize the hypothesis more starkly, magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features . . . This is, I believe, the most adequate way of theorizing the "moment of truth" in the anthropological view of literary magic realism outlined above, and of accounting for the strategic reformulation of the term by Carpentier in his conception of a "marvelous real," a real maravilloso: not a realism to be transfigured by the "supplement" of a magical perspective but a reality which is already in and of itself magical or fantastic.[90]

Although Jameson inadvertently consolidates Carpentier's anthropologization of magical realism, which is once more seen as the product of "naïve superstition, left behind in sophisticated industrial societies,"[91] at the same time his materialist analysis emphasizes the historical contingency rather than pointing at some marvelous essence inherent in a certain continent or land, the central tenet of Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* and of the anthropological approach to magical realism. In much the same way, the historical link between the magical realist mode and postcolonial literature—already established by Michael Dash in his pioneering 1974 essay[92]—is ambiguous enough to be read either as contributing, more or less explicitly, to anthropologizing magical realism, or else as an exercise of cultural materialist criticism and a strategy of political intervention. Some critics explicitly read magical realism as a shared "subaltern textual mode" that successfully disrupts "any linguistic lean toward binary oppositionality."[93] Following in Jameson's footsteps, some critics explain the earlier appearance of magical realist texts in Latin America specifically because of its (neo)colonial status in the twentieth century: "Precisely the discrepancy between its nominal independence and its continuing cultural dependence exacerbated the feeling of ex-centricity of many Latin American authors, and thus alerted them to . . . the possibilities of magic realism, at an earlier stage than authors from other continents or countries, or from other groups races, or genders."[94] And yet, other critics still make the same mistake of applying the magical realist label, in a recalcitrant and exclusive way, "to a geographically limited segment of literature," and, in so doing, not only do they "fail to see that the really significant resistance within the international postmodern movement is being put up by magic realism," but, more important, they contribute to perpetuating the same "'privileged centre' ideology" that they purportedly criticized.[95]

How, then, to transfer the results of this ongoing debate on to the Asian American arena? As anticipated in previous paragraphs, in the case of Asian American literature the discussion concerning the need to "de-territorialize the imaginary" or to "de-anthropologize" magical realism is braided with another ingredient: the Orientalist ghost that has haunted the Asian American literary house from the very outset. In Edward Said's own words, "Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery and practice," but at the same time, it encompasses "the collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies East of the dividing line."[96] If, as Vargas Llosa eloquently puts it, "Latin America has often done its best to reproduce those fictions that Europeans [and Westerners in general] invented for it,"[97] Asian America has likewise been inspired by Orientalist fantasies that, as Said has convincingly argued, ultimately originate in Europe. In other words, Orientalism not only takes the form of the Western (curious) gaze into the "mystery" of the Other, but has also tainted those writers associated with "the Orient," either because they live in Asia or because their ancestors did. Asian American writers correspond to the latter, and it is not uncommon for them to flaunt the very "Oriental foreignness" that seems to mesmerize—mostly Western—readers still today. According to Gita Rajan, Divakaruni consciously engages in orientalism when looking for a suitable narrative strategy for *The Mistress of the Spices*: for Divakaruni, that orientalist "grid" makes the protagonist's actions easier to understand,[98] and, I would add, more palatable. Similarly, in some of her novels Tan has obviously indulged in the "Orientalist mystique" so as to render her stories not only more accessible but also more enjoyable. The writer has occasionally been accused of deliberately pandering to exotic tastes,[99] or else she has been faulted with consciously constructing a highly marketable "sugar sisterhood," to use Sau-ling Wong's insightful phrase.[100] "Tan's success," for Sheng-Mei Ma, precisely and paradoxically "hinges on her ability to revive Orientalist tropes as if she rejects [*sic*] them."[101] Even Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been accused of reinscribing Orientalist desire, although probably in an unconscious way.[102] However, Asian American cultural nationalists, much though they decried Kingston's and Tan's "fake" books, failed to offer a viable alternative to that purported exoticism. As Lisa Lowe cogently argued, although the confrontation between Asian American nationalists and Asian American feminists was "framed as a conflict between the apparent opposites of nativism and assimilation," what lay at the core of this dialectics was "a struggle between the desire to essentialize ethnic identity and the condition of heterogeneous differences against which such a desire is spoken."[103] In *Immigrant Acts*, especially in her seminal third chapter, Lowe has argued for the need to emphasize heterogeneity at the expense of a homogenizing nationalist agenda.

In the spirit of Lowe's call for heterogeneity, we must proffer a warning against sterile essentialisms. Looking for a collective identity, be it Asian American or Latin American, is not only "futile" but "dangerous," to quote Vargas Llosa, "since identity is something individuals possess"—and postmodern theorists would deny even such possibility—"but collectivities lack"; therefore, each

time we try to come up with a single identity for a given community, we engage in "an act of discriminatory surgery that excludes and abolishes" multitudes.[104] Despite all these warnings, such a penchant toward building and fixing an identity remains. Among both readers and writers of Asian American literature, as previously mentioned, that essentialist drive takes the shape of exotic Orientalism. And yet, it remains paradoxical that such Orientalizing or exoticizing gestures survive in magical realism, for the very nature of the magical realist mode runs against such monologic fixation of essences: magical realism constitutes a privileged instrument "for opposing essentializing ontologies and fundamentalizing epistemologies."[105] However, the very political nature that, despite some misconstructions, inheres in magical realism has gradually been undermined because of the domestication suffered by the magical realist mode at the hand of the publishing market and its overriding commercial interests. In this surreptitious way, the "potential for radical critique" inherent in the magical realist mode has waned, slowly but surely, especially due to its "overuse" and its "commodification . . . as a marketable signifier of 'ethnic' fiction"[106] or of "genuine" Latin American culture.[107]

As can be gleaned from previous comments, what has happened in the context of Asian American literature bears a striking resemblance to the controversy surrounding magical realism in Latin America, especially the pernicious emphasis on the "primitive" and "exotic" side of *lo real maravilloso*. Raúl Dorra's words concerning the impact of the magical realist boom in Latin America prove especially pertinent here. According to Dorra, the image of Latin America that European and, I would add, international readers gather from magical realist best sellers like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* confirms previous configurations of Latin American exotic, primitive exuberance.[108] Dorra's fears are confirmed in the very genealogy of marvelous realism. When Carpentier and his followers attempt to define *lo real maravilloso americano* in contrast with European surrealism, what they emphasize as its distinctive trait is precisely the primitivism so dear to surrealist artists. After all, Carpentier, like Vargas Llosa years later, actually "discovered Latin America in Paris."[109] What is more disconcerting is the fact that similar recourse to primitive myth—such as can be found in high modernists like T. S. Eliot—was perceived as sophistication, whereas, when magical realist writers hailing from Latin America and the Caribbean used mythical material, such choice was immediately ascribed to some genuine bond with an arcane mythical past that survived in the writer's culture. As Connell insightfully explains, the only "difference between the practice of borrowing mythical material from anthropological texts," common among modernists, and "that of reinvigorating the writer's indigenous cultural material" falls back onto an essentialist understanding of "the writer's relationship to culture,"[110] a pernicious reference to "genetic affiliation" that has also thrived until quite recently in criticism of "other" literatures.[111] In this context, it is no wonder that Connell cautions us to be critical of those definitions of European modernism and magical realism that focus on the polarization of Western and non-Western epistemologies, not only because such a dichotomy is a simplistic fallacy in itself, but because locating magical realism "in a distinct epistemology

which is organically linked to the persistence of mythic material—as well as an unproblematic use of 'traditional' cultural forms—fundamentally essentializes these writers and writing practices."[112]

Other voices have joined in this critique of the ways in which magical realism, especially Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*, effectively panders to Western desires for the exotic other, which, in the case of Asian American literature, becomes a clearly Orientalist desire. One such critic of essentialist anthropologization is Francisco Goldman, whose "State of the Art: Latino Writers" (1999), in keeping with Dorra's argument many years before, decries the widespread belief that "magical realism is an authentically and uniquely Latino form of literary expression," and its dangerous corollary: the preconception that Latino writers, as an "extension" of Latin Americans, "are magical, more sensual, childlike, folkloric, unthreatening, so pleasing to read about, if not to have to actually live next door to."[113] It is no coincidence that both Dorra's and Goldman's indictments very much resemble the concept of "racist love," theorized by Asian American cultural nationalists in the 1970s.[114] It is equally significant that the critique of such self-inflicted stereotyping ultimately takes us back to Frantz Fanon's critical attitude toward the very similar penchant for essentialism discernible in the Négritude movement.[115]

The parallelism between the anthropologization of magical realism in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, on the one hand, and the tendency toward Orientalist fetishization in the case of Asian American literature, on the other, remains noticeable in much criticism of Asian American magical realist fiction. At the same time, the Orientalist, anthropologizing approach to Asian American magical realism has been necessarily eroded by new Asian American texts, specifically in Alvin Lu's and Karen Tei Yamashita's novels.

Two of Yamashita's novels to date can be properly described as magical-realist: *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Tropic of Orange* (1997). Yamashita's first book, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, commonly read as an ecological parable,[116] can safely be categorized as "eco-magical realism" and studied from an ecocritical point of view,[117] thus opening up the spectrum of the political uses of the magical realist mode. *Tropic of Orange* has likewise been lauded as a sociopolitical parable where the excesses of capitalism such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) commercial imperialism, (child) organ trafficking, environmental injustice, and the degradation of urban subalterns leading up to the freeway car sit-in are sarcastically depicted, severely criticized, and categorically condemned. In addition, *Tropic of Orange* resorts to classic strategies of detective fiction, even if it slowly moves from the atmosphere of the classic private-eye narrative to a virtual, postmodern version of the genre: In the end, "Chandler's Marlowe [is] transformed into a Dean Koontz cyberdetective."[118]

Lu's debut novel, *The Hell Screens* (2000), has similarly been described as following the conventions of detective noir, but it can also be approached as one more example of magical realism in Asian American literature.[119] Steve Tomasula, in his appraisal of *The Hell Screens*, shies away from the label magical realism, but actually explains the novel's features in terms that literally correspond to

the definition of the magical realist mode: "Public/Private; Natural/Supernatural; Past/Present; Fact/Fiction: imagine a novel where all the dichotomies people assume to get through . . . are allowed to bleed into one another and you'll get a sense of Alvin Lu's *The Hell Screens*."[120] The noncontradictory coexistence of antinomies (such as fact/fiction) and ontologies (magical/real) is not only characteristic of the magical realist oxymoron, but constitutes its very raison d'être. And yet, Tomasula openly rejects the label of magical realism because, in his opinion, the novel's "blurring of current events and myth is more subtle, more realistically grounded" than magical realism, "even if its cumulative effect is to convey an uncanny sense that the spirit and natural worlds do impact upon one another."[121] Once more, the reviewer's actual words belie his original intentions. Although at times the novel seems to verge on the fantastic genre, I would argue that Lu's narrative can be more adequately categorized as an example of "ontological magical realism"[122] or "psychic realism."[123] As happens to the characters of some of Cortázar's stories that have been labeled "ontological magical realist," Lu's narrator negotiates his own identity and plays with a slippery self, a self that sometimes seems to merge with the object being regarded: "Dust settled on my contact lenses, my surroundings growing thick with the obscure smells of the temple. Particles of dispersed light seeped into my pores so that I became indistinguishable from them. The more I looked, the more I found myself enclosed in the mural's world."[124]

The fact that an elusive identity is a recurrent theme in postmodern literature does not contradict my contention that Lu's novel can be aptly described as magical realism, because, as D'haen has convincingly argued, magical realism is part and parcel of postmodernism. Like Yamashita's hyperreal thriller *Tropic of Orange*, which also follows the magical realist mode and certain conventions of the detective novel, *The Hell Screens* deals with "the dissipation of identity in an age of media saturation," and it does so "through a narrative that has the suspense of a murder mystery, which it is, the mystery of a ghost story, which it is, and a performance of ethnic identity, which it is also."[125] As befits an example of "psychic realism," *The Hell Screens* focuses "on an individual whose fissured self renders him or her particularly sensitive to the manifestations of an otherwise invisible reality . . . The 'magic' is almost always a reification of the hero's inner conflicts, hence . . . the thematic recurrence of elements linked with the initiation journey."[126] Such literary *topos*, the initiation journey—also obvious in Shawn Wong's Rainsford and Kingston's Fa Mu Lan—appears in Lu's novel under the guise of a detective search for the truth. The fact that, as we have just mentioned, both Lu's *The Hell Screens* and Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (partially) avail themselves of the conventions of the detective novel has proved instrumental in dissuading critical interpretations of both works from an anthropological, Orientalist perspective. In contrast with Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* or Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Lu's and Yamashita's books have rarely been approached in anthropological terms. Like other Asian American novels appearing around the same time and featuring magical realist moments—Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, and some of Tan's novels, including *The Hundred*

Secret Senses—The Hell Screens includes human-flesh characters side-by-side with spirits who are associated and even circumscribed to the exotic Other and/or the exotic setting, in this case Taiwan. And yet, in their analyses of *The Hell Screens*, critics have stopped short of indulging in an anthropological reading, emphasizing instead the fantastic and/or postmodern aspects of the novel. This, I argue, not only follows from the technological, hypermodern atmosphere surrounding the characters in the novel, but also to the nonmythical nature of the uncanny that pervades *The Hell Screens*.

Like Lu's novel, Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* has been hailed as simultaneously postmodern and magical realist, since it both "traces the movement of one of its characters from the presumably 'real' world into the postmodern world of cyberspace" and chronicles the "dissolution of reality" that magical realism brings about.[127] Yamashita's novel self-consciously amalgamates different genres,[128] among others postmodern pastiche, (Los Angeles–associated) detective fiction, (Los Angeles–associated) disaster novel, and, of course, magical realism. While not always ignored, the magical realist elements in *Tropic of Orange* have been analyzed only insofar as they serve the book's critique of transnational capitalism and its consequences.[129] Those critical studies that pay more attention to magical realism in the novel are possibly Johannes Hauser's "Structuring the Apokalipse" and Jesús Benito, Ana Manzanas, and Begoña Simal's *Uncertain Mirrors*.[130] As well as describing the "most magical realist characters" in the novel, namely Arcángel and Rafaela—who, as Yamashita herself notes, "has a satirical, magical-real vision of Los Angeles"[131]—Hauser points out the metamorphoses present in the book, so dear to practitioners of magical realism: "The situation gets a twist into the magical real when Rafaela transforms into a snake and Hernando into a black jaguar."[132] Even though Rafaela's metamorphosis is highly reminiscent of Mesoamerican myths and the parallelisms and links between Latino/a and Asian American "borderlanders," as Claudia Sadowski-Smith has amply demonstrated,[133] are more than evident in *Tropic of Orange*, Orientalism does not seem to be a factor in this narrative, and, as can be expected, no critics have dealt with it. However, what does problematically transpire in some of the critical appraisals of the novel is the association of virtual reality and magic with the territory north and south, respectively, of the (shifting) Tropic of Cancer: "The magic realism of the South" is literally construed as moving North only to emerge in "realist" Los Angeles.[134] True enough, the association of magical realism and Latin America derives from the exoticization of the non-Western, and, in the novel, such linkage between the South and the exotic is, more often than not, a reflection of one of the characters' preconceptions: Balboa, the Chicano detective figure, who has built a definitely exoticized construction of "Mexicanness."[135] Yet, the central metaphor that structures Yamashita's novel, the unstable line of the Tropic of Cancer, effectively neutralizes such anthropologizing, exotic readings. The trope of the moving line/orange, the tropical line that is literally dragged toward the North, should be read not only as a comment on the effects of migration and globalization, but, more important for our argument, as a way of subverting the

"tropical primitivism" that inheres in essentialist, anthropological understandings of magical realism.

Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* probably constitutes the most complex case of the three novels discussed in this last section. Although the similarities between Yamashita's first novel and Latin American magical realism are conspicuous and the novel openly tries to capture a certain South American (Brazilian) atmosphere, it is still a novel written by a Japanese American writer.[136] Yamashita has openly acknowledged the influence not only of Brazilian culture and reality,[137] but also of Latin American magical realism, although she at times rejects the magical realism label for her work.[138] I want to argue that there may be no ghosts or spirits in Yamashita's novel, but it abounds in other magical realist characteristics: bizarre characters and situations, time-space compression, and apparently un-scientific events or miracles (e.g., Gilberto's recovery, the prophetic pigeon messages, etc.). A quick perusal of the numerous critical studies of Yamashita's *Through the Arc* will prove that, as happened in the case of *Tropic of Orange*, here the magical realist aspects have also been explored in conjunction with, or as subordinated to, a discussion of globalization, capitalist expansion, and ecological crisis.[139] Nevertheless, two of these studies do focus on the relevance of magical realism in Yamashita's novel: "Of a Magical Nature," in Benito, Manzanas, and Simal's *Uncertain Mirrors* and Shu-Ching Chen's "Magic Capitalism and Melodramatic Imagination." While the former argues that much can be gained from the intersection between a magical realist and an ecocritical approach, Chen's article convincingly claims that the dialectics between deterritorialization and reterritorialization is echoed in the novel's very ambivalence in terms of narrative mode: "Parallel to the struggle between two contradictory forces that shape the life of the local place, Yamashita's novel is also intersected by two narrative styles, one magic realistic, the other melodramatic," each with its own specific uses.[140]

Anthropological magical realism, therefore, does not seem to be the perspective chosen by critics when they approach *Through the Arc*; and yet, since the Amazonian rainforest becomes the centripetal force and locale in the novel, one could easily—and dangerously—associate the "magical" side of the oxymoron with the pervasive Amazonian metaphor, as Carpentier had done with the jungle in *The Lost Steps*.[141] As Danow points out in reference to Carpentier, by setting the action near the Amazonian rainforest, which hardly anybody had set foot in, at that time, the Cuban writer had successfully heightened "the sense that seemingly anything can happen inevitably":[142] "Here we are . . . on the threshold of the unknown, in the proximity of possible wonders."[143] Even if, as we have just seen, *Through the Arc* could easily have been described in Carpentierian terms as reflecting the very marvelous reality of the Amazonian context, Yamashita's purposeful combination of characters from all over the world—including the three-armed American CEO and the Japanese immigrant with his plastic ball—who carry their own personal, non–South American histories with them, successfully defeats the anthropologizing argument of "primitive tropicalism."[144] Although several factors contribute to keeping exoticism at bay, the one character

that proves instrumental in deflating the anthropologizing tendency is Mané da Costa Pena. Mané is initially regarded as "a poor, barefoot regional type"[145] and is expected to stand for the "indigenous" Brazilian farmer, even if not explicitly indigenous himself. Perceived by others as a person in touch with the original Amazonian land and in possession of the magical knowledge surrounding feathers, Mané soon becomes a stressed workaholic who is paraded around the world as the new guru of "featherology": "Mané Pena sighed. This feather business had gotten rather complicated . . . Once, Mané Pena had been a rubber tapper in the forest, then a simple farmer on infertile soil. Then he had been a mason . . . Now he had left the labor of his former days for a different kind of toil. He had to be places at a specific time. He had to get on airplanes to get there. He had to squint into bright lights. He had to talk about the same things over and over."[146] As the novel advances, Mané not only becomes disengaged from the simple life he used to lead, but his association with magic (through featherology) soon vanishes. After all, the magical events of the novel do not seem to emanate from him and his knowledge but from the Matacao plastic and, ultimately, from the politics of waste typical of late, global capitalism that has produced and shaped the Matacao plateau.

Throughout this essay, I have tried to alert readers to the simplifying, exoticizing dangers of attributing the collective, historical phenomenon of Latin American magical realism, in "a naïve essentialist" move, "to the supposed marvelous reality of the continent or ascribed to the unidirectional flow of metropolitan influence,"[147] since the magical realist boom was the result of multiple factors. Much the same can be said of magical realism outside the Latin American context, where it is impossible to tell what is contrived and what actually seeps in from the cultural milieu. As Christopher Warnes cogently argues, although there may be a few books—he mentions Asturias's *Men of Maize* (*Hombres de Maíz*) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*—that can be explicitly imagined as "the product of a world view in which there exists no clear line between . . . natural and supernatural," even in those cases one cannot extricate this "anthropological" element from the writers' "literary and philosophical agendas."[148] Likewise, the (conscious and unconscious) echoes of magical realism in the work of Asian American writers from Kingston to Yamashita can also be ascribed to different intertwined factors, ranging from aesthetic choice to the avowed influence of non-Western cosmologies, often in the guise of New Age orientalism.

Insofar as Asian American authors continue to use the magical realist literary mode, either in a consistent way or in the sporadic form of magical moments, it is only logical to explore such texts within the paradigms traditionally associated with the mode. And yet, it is equally urgent for us to remain aware of the dangers involved in anthropologizing magical realism. Difficult though it may be, critics of Asian American literature should avoid the geographical fallacy of linking magic with the distant, Orientalized, "original" homeland (Taiwan, mainland China, India, Korea, etc.) or with some other "surrogate exotic" (e.g., the Amazonian forest or, more generally, South America, in Yamashita's novels). If, as several theorists of the literary mode have argued,[149] magical realism is more a question

of attitude than of cultural and geographical determinism, the question that readers and critics alike should be asking is not where these magical gourds and secret senses come from, but whether they are effective or not. As I have tried to demonstrate in the last section of my analysis, in recent times three books by young Asian American writers, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, *Tropic of Orange*, and *The Hell Screens*, have successfully defied both generic boundaries—amalgamating as they do conventions and techniques of different genres, including magical realism—and our expectations as regards Asian American fiction.[150] Together, these novels not only help to reconfigure the map of Asian American literature, but they also point at different ways in which magical realism may remain useful for both critics and writers in its non-Orientalist, deanthropologized avatar.

Notes

1. Throughout the article I will be using the adjective "magical" instead of the noun "magic," even if the first English-speaking critics to explore the subject tended to use the noun (as in "magic realism") instead of the grammatically correct adjective ("magical realism"). Such a widespread phenomenon was probably caused by the similarity that the Spanish adjective in *realismo mágico* (from the Spanish noun, *magia*) had with the English noun, "magic."
2. Wendy Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 29.
3. See Sandro Abate, "A medio siglo del realismo del mágico: Balance y perspectivas," *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 26, no. 1 (1997): 145–60; and Alicia Llarena, "Un balance crítico: La polémica del realismo mágico y lo real maravilloso americano (1955–1993)," *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 26, no. 1 (1997): 107–18.
4. Wendy Faris, "Scheherezade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 167.
5. Seymor Menton, "Magic Realism: An Annotated International Chronology," in *Essays in Honor of Frank Dauster*, ed. Kirsten F. Nigro and Sandra M. Cypess (Newark, NJ: Juan de la Cuesta, 1995), 125–53; Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 15–31; Alejo Carpentier, prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1995), 11–16; Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 89–108; and Carpentier, "Marvelous Real in America," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 75–88.
6. Amaryll Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 141.
7. Carpentier, prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, 11. Original text: "la sensación de lo maravilloso presupone una fe. Los que no creen en santos no pueden curarse con milagros de santos."
8. See Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 301–25; and Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 133.
9. Liam Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism: Modernism, Anthropology, and Critical Practice," *ARIEL* 29, no. 2 (1998): 95–110.

10. Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 125–26.
11. Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 301–25.
12. Ibid., 302.
13. Spindler reserves the adjective "ontological" not for the magical realism that arises from the belief that the American continent is inherently "marvelous," as González Echevarría and other critics had done (Faris, "Scheherezade's Children," 165), but for some other subgenre. What previous critics had named "ontological" (in contrast with "epistemological" versions of magical realism), Spindler will call "anthropological."
14. William Spindler, "Magic Realism: A Typology," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 29 (1993): 79.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 80.
17. Ibid., 81.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 82.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 83.
24. See Paula Rabinowitz, "Naming, Magic, and Documentary: The Subversion of the Narrative in *Song of Solomon, Ceremony,* and *China Men*," in *Feminist Revisions: What Has Been and Might Be*, ed. Vivian Patraka and Louise Tilly (Ann Arbor: Women's Studies Program, University of Michigan, 1983); and Lois Parkinson Zamora, "Magical Romance/Magical Realism," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 542.
25. Begoña Simal-González, "Magic Realism in *The Woman Warrior*," in *Proceedings of the XX Internacional AEDEAN Conference*, ed. P. Guardia and J. Stone (Barcelona: S. P. Universitat de Barcelona, 1996), 575–80.
26. Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," 96.
27. Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*; Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); and Zamora and Faris, eds., *Magical Realism*.
28. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Vicente F. Gotera, "I've Never Read Anything like It': Student Responses to *The Woman Warrior*," in *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's* The Woman Warrior, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim (New York: MLA, 1991), 64–73.
29. Phil McCluskey, "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the Outback: Contextualizing a Structural Magic Realism," *SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 36 (1993): 88–94; Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America"; Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments.*
30. Theo L. D'haen, "Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 191–208; Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 249–63.
31. Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Random House, 1989).
32. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín has developed this concept in *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent US Latino/a Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Weisgerber has likewise pointed out the desirability of focusing on magical realist moments or aspects of books that otherwise do not fully correspond to the magical realist mode (Jean Weisgerber, ed., *Le réalisme magique: Roman. Peinture. Cinéma* [Brussels: L'Âge d'homme, 1987], 215). In the case of Asian American literature, this happens in Kingston's work (not only in her first two books but also in *Tripmaster Monkey*) and also in Shawn Wong, *Homebase: A Novel* (New York: Plume, 1991); Nora Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman* (London: Virago, 2001); and Lois Ann Yamanaka, *Blu's Hanging* (New York: Avon, 1997). Although Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* at times seems to flirt with the magical realist mode, bizarre episodes, such as Donald's matter-of-fact conversation with an imaginary Fred Astaire, are ultimately explained away as dreams or hallucinations. Due to space constraints we shall only be dealing with a few magical realist narratives by Tan, Kingston, Yamashita, and Lu.

33. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997).
34. Gita Rajan, "Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*: Deploying Mystical Realism," *Meridians* 2, no. 2 (2002): 215–36, 216.
35. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 21–22. Emphasis added.
36. Ibid., 47–48.
37. Ibid., 88.
38. Maxine Hong Kingston, "Personal Statement," in Lim, *Approaches to Teaching*, 23–25.
39. Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 56.
40. Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005).
41. Ibid., 73.
42. Ibid., 74.
43. Carter Wheelock, "Borges, Cortázar, and the Aesthetic of the Vacant Mind," *International Fiction Review* 12, no. 1 (1985): 3–10; Eugene L. Arva, "Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 38, no. 1 (2008): 60–85; Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*.
44. Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 90–91, 64, 67.
45. Ibid., 101.
46. Gayle K. Fujita Sato, "*The Woman Warrior* as a Search for Ghosts," in Lim, *Approaches to Teaching*, 138–45. In *Ordinary Enchantments*, Faris gives a different interpretation of these ghost battles, which for her emphasize the "communal female voice" (177).
47. Amy Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (New York: Putnam, 1995), 50–51.
48. Ibid., 99.
49. Ibid., 199.
50. Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism," 257.
51. Amaryll Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland, 1985).
52. For a view of the magical realist self in Levinasian terms, see chapter 5, "From Identity to Alter-entity: Trans-selving the Self in Magical Realist Narratives," in Jesús Benito, Ana Maria Manzanas, and Begoña Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 177.
53. Tan, *The Hundred Secret Senses*, 255.
54. David Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 73.

55. Jeanne Barker-Nunn, "Telling the Mother's Story: History and Connection in the Autobiographies of Maxine Hong Kingston and Kim Chernin," *Women's Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987): 55–63.
56. For a detailed analysis of other magical realist characteristics of Kingston's memoirs, see Begoña Simal-González, "Magic Realism in *The Woman Warrior*," in *Proceedings of the XX Internacional AEDEAN Conference*, eds. P. Guardia y J. Stone (Barcelona: S. P. Universitat de Barcelona, 1997), 575–80; for Tan's novel, see Simal, "American and Chinese Landscapes in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*: Mirroring the Doubles," in *"Nature's Nation" Revisited: American Concepts of Nature from Wonder to Ecological Crisis*, ed. Hans Bak and Walter Hölbling (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2003), 240–46; "En el país de las maravillas": El realismo mágico en la tradición literaria asiático-americana," *Literatura de las Américas 1898–1998*, vol. 2, ed. José Carlos González Boixo, Javier Ordiz Vázquez, and María José Álvarez Maurín (León: S. P. Universidad de León, 2000), 707–16; and "Sisters in Arms: The Ethnic Doppelgänger in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses,*" in *Family Reflections: The Contemporary American Family in the Arts*, ed. Carmen Flys Junquera and Maurice Lee (Alcalá de Henares: S. P. Universidad de Alcalá, 2007), 153–65.
57. Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 85. Emphasis added.
58. Benito, Manzanas, and Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors,* 177.
59. Llarena, "Un balance crítico," 107–18.
60. Horst Rogmann, "'Realismo mágico' y 'Négritude' como construcciones ideológicas," in *Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas*, ed. Alan M. Gordon and Evely Rugg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 632. Original text: "lo atractivo y peligroso del realismo mágico-maravilloso es su afán de presentar la realidad latinoamericana . . . como algo mágico y maravilloso, es decir de no limitarse a realidades literarias sino de declarar que éstas reflejan o reproducen una realidad *característicamente* Americana."
61. Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 131.
62. D'haen, "Magic Realism and Postmodernism," 198.
63. Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," 99.
64. Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 222. Recent critics, however, point at the dangers of focusing exclusively on formal matters, on the text, and not on the context. Warnes, for instance, argues that, after finally gaining worldwide "definitional legitimacy," magical realism is now too often approached in a decontextualized manner, which is not altogether positive. I aim to circumvent this problem by also paying attention to the extratextual components of magical realism, although not with an anthropologizing purpose in mind. Christopher Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural: Faith, Irreverence, Magical Realism," *Literature Compass* 2, no.1 (2005): 7.
65. Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," 100.
66. Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 223.
67. Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," 100.
68. *Mestizaje* literally refers to mixed ancestry, as in *mestizos/as* (see the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* at www.rae.es/drae). However, its literal meaning was soon broadened and extrapolated to cultural hybridity and syncretism. In this latter sense, *mestizaje* has been embraced by many writers and critics. For a detailed definition of cultural *mestizaje*, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2007), 121–22.

69. Carpentier, prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, 14; Mario Vargas Llosa, "Latin American from the Inside Out," *Salmagundi* 153/154 (2007): 32–41.
70. Stephen M. Hart, "Cultural Hybridity, Magical Realism, and the Language of Magic in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*," *Romance Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2004): 308. It goes without saying that the anthropologization that has haunted Asian American and Latin American literature has, in its own specific ways, affected these other "ethnic" literatures. A discussion of parallelisms and divergences among these different literary traditions, interesting though it might be, lies beyond the scope of this article. For a cross-ethnic exploration of US magical realism, see Benito, Manzanas, and Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors*.
71. José David Saldívar, "The Real and the Marvelous in Charleston, South Carolina: Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*," in *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing As Transgression*, ed. Deirdre Lashgari (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1995), 177.
72. The Spanish term *criollo/a* derives from Portuguese *crioulo/a*, which in its turn comes from the verb *criar* (to raise, hence the Portuguese *crianças* for children). The *OED* defines *criollo/a* as "native of Spanish-speaking South or Central America, *esp.* one of pure Spanish descent." Even though the adjective/noun was originally derogatory *vis-a-vis* the term *español(a),* which referred to someone born in Spain, not in the colonies (see *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* at www.rae.es/drae), the connotations that have accrued to the term *criollo/a* over time, both in Spanish and in English, are those of superiority in comparison with *indígenas, mulat@s,* etc. However, this racialist paradigm is not only dangerously fallacious, but also rather difficult to apply to Latin American writers. Thus, the Guatemalan Nobel Prize winner, Miguel Ángel Asturias, for instance, although literally not a *criollo*, but a *mestizo*, constitutes an obvious case of *cultural criollismo*. Rogmann even accuses Asturias of wanting to be "la voz de su pueblo, de los indios, sin vivir la vida de ellos" (Rogmann, "'Realismo mágico' y 'Négritude' como construcciones ideológicas," 634). For the importance of European influence in Asturias and other magical realist writers, see Vargas Llosa, "Latin American from the Inside Out;" Abate, "A medio siglo del realismo del mágico;" and Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 140.
73. Marilyn Chin, "Writing the Other: A Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston," *MELUS* 16, no. 4 (1989–90): 57–74.
74. See Begoña Simal-González, "Conversation with Maxine Hong Kingston," *REDEN: Revista de estudios norteamericanos* no. 14 (1997): 173–83.
75. David Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival: Magical Realism and the Grotesque* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 70–71.
76. Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America."
77. "Although tempting, the geographical fallacy, locating the bizarre unlikelihoods of magical realism in the bizarre landscape of Latin America, collapses many levels of textual evidence and seems, flatly, to deny the parallels between Latin American (or Anglo-Indian or Canadian) magical realism and the tradition of European fantasy exemplified by, say, Kafka or Bugakov. The analysis of a textual feature such as fictional space reestablishes magical realism's deep linkages both to a shared Euro-American traditions of fantasy and to the transcultural problem of the way(s) of writing." Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 223. See also Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 407–26; Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 1–16.
78. Rogmann, "'Realismo mágico' y 'Négritude' como construcciones ideológicas," 634; Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 138.

79. D'haen, "Magic Realism and Postmodernism"; Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*; Benito, Manzanas, and Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors*.
80. Scott Simpkins, "Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism," *Twentieth Century Literature* 34, no. 2 (1988): 140–54.
81. Ibid., 151; Arva, "Writing the Vanishing Real," 80.
82. David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1992), 114.
83. Arva, "Writing the Vanishing Real," 68.
84. Ibid., 60.
85. Ibid., 81.
86. Ibid.
87. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments, 88.*
88. John Erickson, "Metoikoi and Magical Realism in the Maghrebian Narratives of Tahar ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 428.
89. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 170–219.
90. Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," 311; David Mikics, "Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and the Caribbean Writer," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 373–74.
91. Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 222.
92. Michael Dash, "Marvellous Realism: The Way out of Négritude," in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 199–201.
93. Frederick Luis Aldama, "Oscar 'Zeta' Acosta: Magicorrealism and Chinaco Autobio-graphé," *LIT* 11 (2003): 199–218, 199.
94. D'haen, "Magic Realism and Postmodernism," 200; Christopher Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 14–15; Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 137–38.
95. D'haen, "Magic Realism and Postmodernism," 201.
96. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1978), 73.
97. Vargas Llosa, "Latin American from the Inside Out," 40; Sarah Pollack, "Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* in the United States," *Comparative Literature* 61, no. 3 (2009): 346–65.
98. Rajan, "Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*," 218.
99. Sheng-mei Ma, "'Chinese and Dogs' in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*: Ethnicizing the Primitive à la New Age," *MELUS* 26, no. 1 (2001): 29–44.
100. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon," in *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, ed. Palumbo-Liu, David. (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995), 174–210.
101. Ma, "Chinese and Dogs," 34.
102. For an in-depth study of Orientalism in Asian American literature, see Sheng-mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). For Orientalism in *The Woman Warrior*, see Sheryl A. Mylan, "The Mother as Other: Orientalism in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," in *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Brown Guillory (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 132–52; and Su-lin Yu, "Orientalist Fantasy and Desire in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*," in *Transnational, National and Personal Voices:*

Asian American and Asian Diasporic Women Writers, ed. Begoña Simal and Elisabetta Marino (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 67–86.

103. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 146; King-kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?," in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 234–51; Shu-Ching Chen, "Magic Capitalism and Melodramatic Imagination: Producing Locality and Reconstructing Asian Ethnicity in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*," in *EurAmerica: A Journal of European and American Studies* 34, no. 4 (2004): 587–625.
104. Vargas Llosa, "Latin American from the Inside Out," 35.
105. Aldama, "Oscar 'Zeta' Acosta," 200.
106. Kirsten Silva Gruesz, "Utopia Latina: The Ordinary Seaman in Extraordinary Times," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 1 (2003): 54–85.
107. Pollack, "Latin America Translated (Again)," 350–51.
108. "Nos hemos acostumbrado a repudiar un viejo tópico que los europeos solían utilizar para describir nuestra América . . . Cuando algún europeo insiste hoy [1980s] con esa imagen nos alzamos ante él para reputarlo de ignorante o de perverso. Y sin embargo ¿no es la imagen que promueve entre nosotros y fuera de nosotros una de las corrientes literarias reputada a su vez como más representativa de nuestra identidad? ¿No podría decir este europeo que aprendió dicha imagen no en lo viejos libros de su continente sino en la literatura del realismo mágico cuyos relatos le aseguran que América es así como él creía?" Quoted in Llarena, "Un balance crítico," 111.
109. Vargas Llosa, "Latin American from the Inside Out," 32. Alegría's "primitive tropicalism," the very "Otherness of "primitive mentality" discussed by the metropolitan intellectuals and especially the French Surrealists, is appropriated by Latin American magical realists in their narrative strategies of identity construction," a fact that, for Chanady, has in turn "contributed to their enormous success in Europe" (Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 138).
110. Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," 106–7.
111. Claudia Sadowski-Smith, "The US-Mexico Borderlands Write Back: Cross-Cultural Transnationalism in Contemporary US Women of Color Fiction," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 571 (2001): 91–112.
112. Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," 107–8.
113. Francisco Goldman, "State of the Art: Latino Writers," *Washington Post Book World*, February 28, 1999, X01.
114. Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan, "Racist Love," in *Seeing through Shuck*, ed. Richad Kostelanetz (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 65–79.
115. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1961), 154–55.
116. See Molly Wallace, "'A Bizarre Ecology': The Nature of Denatured Nature," *Isle: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 7, no. 2 (2000): 137–53; Ursula K. Heise, "Local Rock and Global Plastic: World Ecology and the Experience of Place," *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 1 (2004): 126–52.
117. Benito, Manzanas, and Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors*.
118. Ibid., 74.
119. Ibid., 45–46.
120. Steve Tomasula, review of *The Hell Screens*, in *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 21, no. 2 (2001): 168.

121. Ibid.
122. William Spindler, "Magic Realism: A Typology."
123. Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism."
124. Alvin Lu, *The Hell Screens* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000), 90.
125. Steve Tomasula, review of *The Hell Screens*.
126. Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism," 251.
127. Benito, Manzanas, and Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors*, 74; Caroline Rody, "The Transnational Imagination: Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*," in *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, ed. Donald C. Goellnicht (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 130–48.
128. Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejeda, "An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita," *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (1998), http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i2/YAMASHI.HTM. Michael S. Murashige, "Karen Tei Yamashita," *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers*, ed. King-Kok Cheung (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 320–42.
129. Julie Sze, "'Not by Politics Alone': Gender and Environmental Justice in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*," *Bucknell Review: A Scholarly Journal of Letters, Arts and Sciences* 44, no. 1 (2000): 29–42; Wallace, "A Bizarre Ecology"; Sadowski-Smith, "The US-Mexico Borderlands Write Back"; Ruth Y. Hsu, "The Cartography of Justice and Truthful Refractions in Karen Tei Yamashita's Tropic of Orange," in *Transnational Asian American Literature: Sites and Transits*, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim, John Blair Gamber, Stephen Hong Sohn, and Gina Valentino (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 75–99.
130. Johannes Hauser, "Structuring the Apokalipse: Chaos and Order in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*," *PhiN: Philologie im Netz* 37 (2006): 1–32.
131. Gier and Tejeda, "An Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita."
132. Johannes Hauser, "Structuring the Apokalipse," 5.
133. Claudia Sadowski-Smith, "The US-Mexico Borderlands Write Back: Cross-Cultural Transnationalism in Contemporary US Women of Color Fiction," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 57, no. 1 (2001): 91–112.
134. Rody, "The Transnational Imagination," 134; Benito, Manzanas, and Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors*, 74. In an interesting reversal of the argument, Yamashita's position is just the opposite: it is the very reality of Los Angeles that, like Carpentier's America, proves marvelous and "crazier than fiction" itself (Michael S. Murashige, "Karen Tei Yamashita," in *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers*, ed. King-Kok Cheung (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 339.
135. Balboa's "Mexican home features an altar to Frida Kahlo," which, Hauser rightfully notes, "possibly few Mexicans have. Additionally, his Mexican Dream is a space of exoticism; his Mexico is an aspiration full of magic and with only a small amount of realism." Hauser, "Structuring the Apokalipse," 12.
136. Even if some critics, unwittingly falling in the trap of the geographical fallacy, have called it Latin American (Heise, Chuh). Although she does not mention the specific "literary tropes" she refers to, Kandice Chuh has noted how, in her first novel, Yamashita takes up typically Latin American images, which, together with "the syntax of magical realism" facilitates her inclusion of the magical and the "otherworldly." Kandice Chuh, "Of Hemispheres and Other Spheres: Navigating Karen Tei Yamashita's Literary World," *American Literary History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 618–37, 631.
137. In 1975, she moved to Brazil, lived there for several years, and married a Brazilian.
138. Murashige, "Karen Tei Yamashita," 328.

139. Robert Wess, "Terministic Screens and Ecological Foundations: A Burkean Perspective on Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory* 7, no. 1 (2005): 104–15; Rachel Lee, "Asian American Cultural Production in Asian-Pacific Perspective," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 26, no. 2 (1999): 231–54. Or else, it is analyzed as a good example of postmodern—not explicitly magical realist—narrative techniques (Caroline Rody, "Impossible Voices: Ethnic Postmodern Narration in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*," *Contemporary Literature* 41, no. 4 [2000]: 618–41).
140. Shu-Ching Chen, "Magic Capitalism and Melodramatic Imagination," 595–96.
141. Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps* (New York: Avon, 1979). Originally published in 1953 as *Los pasos perdidos*.
142. Danow, *The Spirit of Carnival*, 68.
143. Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, 133. Original text: "cuando hollábamos las fronteras de lo desconocido y el ambiente se embellecía con la cercanía de posibles maravillas." Alejo Carpentier, *Los pasos perdidos* (Madrid: AKAL, 1953, 2009), 326.
144. In "Magic Capitalism and Melodramatic Imagination," Chen does engage in an anthropological exploration of the sense of loss and nostalgia (Brazilian *saudade*, Galician *morriña*), but stops short of deliberate essentialism (617–19).
145. Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1990), 18.
146. Ibid., 120–21.
147. Chanady, "The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America," 141.
148. Warnes, "Naturalizing the Supernatural," 11.
149. Luis Leal, "Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 119–24; Irlemar Chiampi, *El realismo maravilloso* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1981); Arva, "Writing the Vanishing Real," 68.
150. As Cheung noted already in 1997, works such as Yamashita's *Through the Arc* were prone to be "elided in both ethnic studies and multicultural studies" because of the apparent lack of so-called "ethnic content" in these books (King-kok Cheung, *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 19). Recent novels by Chang-rae Lee or Monique Truong prove that the trend is finally starting to change.

PART III

Prophetic Practices, Mythic Knowledges

CHAPTER 7

"We, the Shamans, Eat Tobacco and Sing"

Figures of Shamanic Power in US and Latin American Magical Realism*

Wendy Faris

I have theorized that in textualizing the two radically different perspectives of realistic description that reflects a solid grounding in empirically verifiable reality and of "irreducible elements" of magic that cannot be so verified, magical realist narrative resembles the activities of a shaman who bridges the world of everyday community life and that of the spirits to whose realm s/he is imagined to journey in search of special power.[1] Therefore, magical realism as a genre is "shamanistic," performing shamanism from its inside, as it were, irrespective of its thematic content, and hence the genre itself makes room for the presence of spirit within the discourses of realism and empirical reality.[2] Less importantly, I think, but not inconsequentially, in a number of cases, the shamanistic quality of the narrative is thematized and hence underscored by the presence of figures who can be seen to resemble actual shamans in some way.[3] But their actions and the often magical or near-magical events associated with them do not cohere into a recognizable program. Rather, they endow the narrative with a generalized mystical aura that can be absorbed by readers from a variety of traditions.[4] Many of these figures show traces of the traditional shamanic trajectory of separation from the ordinary social world, confrontation with a world of spirits, and return with special knowledge or power, but the pattern is often interrupted or incomplete. That incompleteness reflects the presence of different cultural traditions and belief systems (including shamanism) that characterizes contemporary magical realism, as well as the generally empirical outlook of modern and contemporary society and the dominant fictional mode of realism combined with other also current genres such as fantasy and science fiction. Reflecting the

* For SW, White Shaman

connection to different cultural traditions, many—though not all—of these figures connect back to actual pre-Enlightenment practices resembling shamanism. The difficulties of analyzing such an intercultural and multifaceted genre in turn resemble the problems anthropologists have encountered in attempting to analyze and understand shamanism, as evidenced in this description by James Dow in connection with his study of Otomí shamanism: "A division of the world into natural and supernatural phenomena confuses our understanding of shamanism, which does not make this distinction. We might think of shamans as attempting to use supernatural powers, but most shamans believe they are working within nature and not beyond it . . . The shaman often reveals an indomitable, personal, and spiritual side to natural things, and, thus, unifies the natural and the supernatural . . . The shaman works with the spiritual side of what we call natural and with the controllable side of what we call supernatural."[5] Be that as it may, it is the sense of interworldly congress that unifies the practice of shamanism and the narrative mode of magical realism, and which is occasionally manifested in what I am terming figures of shamanic power within it.

Furthermore, in a few cases, the shamanic voices of these figures are endowed with a metafictional aura that suggests a contemporary refocusing of traditional shamanic energies onto the processes of narration itself. In so doing they can perhaps be seen as working to correct the disappearance of the storyteller and his/her craft that Walter Benjamin sees as characterizing the rise of realist fiction that, accompanying an age of mechanical reproduction and information, focuses on reporting information.[6] Against that trend, just at the point when the realist mode weakens during early twentieth-century modernism, we see a reinscription of the storyteller's art in a focus on the scene of narration as well as a host of unreliable narrators in such modernist masterpieces as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or André Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, and, more recently, Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, Jorge Luis Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" and "The Garden of Forking Paths," Carlos Fuentes's *Distant Relations*, John Barth's *Chimera*, and many more. Such a metafictional charge provides a link with rather than a break with modernist practices.

In this context I will discuss several figures of shamanic power in US and Latin American magical realist fiction, including Macandal and Ti Noël in Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*, Susana San Juan in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, the narrators of Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl" and Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, Melquíades in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Toto and Joel in García Márquez's story "Light Is Like Water," Denver in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, La Loca and Caridad in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*, and the title figure in Téa Obreht's (very recent) story "The Tiger's Wife."[7] To analyze magical realism in this way implicitly places it within ancient traditions in both Europe and America, illustrating common cultural elements as well as explaining some of its tenacity and power in contemporary fiction.[8]

The particular cultural contexts and currents of course differ widely in these texts. To cite just one contrast: Macandal and to a lesser extent Ti Noël (in

Carpentier's novel) represent the survival of African traditions in the midst of mainstream Catholic colonial authority, while Castillo's sisters uphold the particular syncretic amalgam of both Catholic and Native American spiritual beliefs that characterizes the US Southwest in the face of the dominant Anglo culture, to which their other sister is devoted. Nevertheless, the similarity of these culturally quite distant characters suggests a common thread within American (and I would suspect all) magical realism.

Often the way such figures are described associates them with cosmic forces, including special relationships to times and spaces, and communication with lands imagined as inhabited by the dead. The narrator of *Pedro Páramo* enters such a land, but does not visibly return. And the novel is infused with a degraded Christian ideology, largely represented by Father Rentería, rather than with a shamanic spirit—though one can discern traces of the latter associated very occasionally with the mysterious figure of Susana San Juan—and which begin to question Father Rentería's predominant Christian ideology. Early on, Susana wishes for a kind of shamanic flight, telling Pedro Páramo that "[she]'d like to be a buzzard like that one, so [she] could fly to where [her] sister is," and soon she leaves the Media Luna for good, though apparently not by air.[9] Later on, after she has left, Pedro wonders to himself about the elusive Susana (of whom we hear later from inside Pedro's mind that she is "a woman who isn't of this world") as observers may wonder about shamans: "But which world was Susana San Juan living in? That was one of the things that Pedro Páramo never found out," although near the end of the text, he describes seeing her leave him as "watching you climb the path to Heaven. And Heaven opened and light streamed out. You left the shadows of this world behind you. You vanished into Heaven's light," finally defining her in a familiar Christian way.[10]

In this context of special relations to times and spaces, if a shamanic role is (in the words of Jacques Galinier) to be "the man who knows" and "to control spatio-temporal categories,"[11] then Melquíades's most powerful shamanic act is a verbal one, having written the history of Macondo "down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time" (382). And like a shaman who chants his rituals, Melquíades's "impenetrable writing[s] . . . when read aloud were like encyclicals being chanted."[12] His narrative abilities are seen early on when Aureliano is said to remember him for the rest of his life as "lighting up with his deep organ voice the darkest reaches of the imagination."[13] Melquíades's special powers are suggested by intriguing details surrounding his death that hint at cosmic life—like the little yellow flowers that grow from his false teeth in their water glass, the moss that flourishes on his skin, and his breath that smells like a sleeping animal.[14] Those powers include participating in both time and eternity, since in his history of Macondo he "had constructed a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant."[15] Likewise, not only has he claimed to have found immortality (for himself), but on his arrival in Macondo he had in a sense virtually done the opposite for the town since "Macondo was a town that was unknown to the dead until Melquíades arrived and marked it with a small black dot on the motley maps of death."[16] In the domain of space, he passes across frontiers of human and inhuman: at one point, we hear that

"Melquíades' tribe, according to what the wanderers said, had been wiped off the face of the earth because they had gone beyond the limits of human knowledge."[17] Soon, however, he reenters the human realm, returning to Macondo just as its inhabitants are building strategic machines to recover their memories after the insomnia plague, and he completes the process by giving José Arcadio a drink of memory-recovery juice: "He really had been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude. Repudiated by his tribe, having lost all of his supernatural faculties because of his faithfulness to life, he decided to take refuge in that corner of the world."[18]

Since the journey narrated in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* duplicates an earlier one in which everyone perished, and since the characters appear to communicate with earlier explorers as well as with their own and more general racial forbears (referred to ironically and yet also with a sense of awe as "the folk") symbolically the text resembles a shamanic flight to gain power from ancestral spirits and thus transmits a similar sense of unusual dominance of times and spaces to what we have seen in more limited fashion with Melquíades. Repeatedly, Harris's explorers feel themselves to be participating in two worlds: "How could I surrender myself to be drawn two ways at once? Indeed what a phenomenon it was to have pulled me, even in the slightest degree, away from nature's end and wish, and towards the eternal desire and spirit."[19] And often the visionary world is the land of the dead: "The truth was he no longer felt himself in the land of the living though the traumatic spider of the sun crawled up and down his arms and his neck and punctured his sides of rock."[20] Earlier, the crew of the current expedition is described by the narrator as sensing hidden presences in the forest they traverse; he and they are able to see into the realm of death. A member of the crew muses, "Ah been dreaming far far back before anybody know he born. Is how a man can dream so far back before he know he born?" (109). Similarly, "The murdered horseman of the savannahs, the skeleton footfall on the river bank and in the bush, the moonhead and crucifixion in the waterfall and in the river were over as though a cruel ambush of soul to show that death was the shadow of a dream. In this remarkable filtered light it was not men of vain flesh and blood I saw toiling laboriously and meaninglessly, but active ghosts whose labour was indeed a flitting shadow over their shoulders"[21] The timeless realm they ultimately reach and where they remain is a cultural amalgam of Christian and other images, primarily Amerindian.

Other images of shamanic journeying to other worlds appear throughout the text, some of them, like this one, frightening: "He felt himself drawn again into the endless flight that had laid siege to the ambivalent wall of heaven and every spidery misstep he made turned into an intricate horror of space and a falling coincidence and wing."[22] Still others translate a more generalized sense of cosmic connectivity:

> I stopped for an instant overwhelmed by a renewed force of consciousness of the hot spirit and moving spell in the tropical undergrowth . . . The whispering trees spun their leaves to a sudden fall wherein the ground seemed to grow lighter in my

> mind and to move to meet them in the air. The carpet on which I stood had an uncertain place within splintered and timeless roots whose fibre was stone in the tremulous ground . . . A brittle moss and carpet appeared underfoot, a dry pond and stream whose course and reflection and image had been stamped for ever like the breathless outline of a dreaming skeleton in the earth. The trees rose around me into upward flying limbs when I screwed my eyes to stare from underneath above.[23]

Here again, the narrator's description of his experience suggests although it does not specifically enact an image of traditional shamanic flight, it does share the imagery of such an interworldly flight and endows him with a mysterious power.

Such descriptions most often come from this narrator, himself a kind of verbal shaman, who travels alongside the earlier journey of colonial exploitation that his own journey duplicates. They suggest cosmic connections between animals, humans, and celestial bodies, and more generally the existence of spirit worlds within nature: "The light of space changed, impinging upon his eyeball and lid numerous grains of sound and motion that were the suns and moons of all space and time. The fowls of the air danced and wheeled on invisible lines that stretched taut between the ages of light and snapped every now and then into lightning executions of dreaming men"[24] Strangely enough, the one specific reference to shamanic power seems to be ironic, the narrator saying of one crew member that "he wanted space and freedom to use his own hands in order to make his own primitive home and kingdom on earth, hands that would rule everything, magical hands dispensing life and death to their subjects as a witch doctor would or a tribal god and judge," confirming that these characters tend to be incompletely shamanic, their powers not forming part of systematic practices.[25] By the end of the novel, however, the narrator seems to achieve a genuine if very generalized cosmic reach and grasp, the dominion over time and space that typifies shamanic power: "My feet were truly alive I realized, as were my dreaming shoulder and eye; as far flung and distant from me as a man in fever thinks his thumb to be removed from his fingers; far away as heaven's hand. It was a new sensation and alien body and experience encompassing the ends of the earth."[26] More specifically, in the novel's last paragraph, the traditions of shamanic flight, and identification with a power animal in such a way as to assume its special skills, can be seen in the way the narrator's voice merges with that of the peacock of the title, a final affirmation of his deeply felt and yet indefinable shamanic power: "This was the inner music and voice of the peacock I suddenly encountered and echoed and sang as I have never heard myself sing before" (152). More lyrical in tone than the descriptions of Melquíades's parchments, though similar in their musical resonance to Melquíades's "deep organ voice" that lights up "the darkest reaches of the imagination," passages such as these endow the narrator's mysterious shamanic power with a lyrical metafictional dimension, suggesting ancient poetic gifts but ones that are not directed toward clearly defined pragmatic ends.

Caridad and La Loca in Ana Castillo's *So Far From God* show similar traces of shamanic power over times and spaces, a characteristic that endows the text with a general aura of esoteric knowledge, though to uncertain purpose aside from a

possible validation of female power. Most obviously, perhaps, La Loca astounds everyone by rising up from her coffin to the roof of the church during her funeral, declaring that she has journeyed to hell, purgatory, and heaven, from where "God sent [her] back to pray for [them] all," then simply remaining at home, helping her mother, shying away from people, and caring for animals.[27] As if to confirm her interworldly travelling abilities, at one point, she calmly tells her mother, "Mom, I been to hell. You never forget that smell. And my dad . . . he was there too."[28] La Loca's shaman-like levitation begins the novel, but it is Caridad, especially, who keeps having near-shamanic experiences, although they remain largely inconclusive. After a trial of being severely beaten nearly to death, Caridad shows mysterious skills in self-healing, and then clairvoyance, foretelling her sister's and her dog's return home after undergoing a trance. More generally, her attitude of not hating people induces her friend the healer doña Felicia to make Caridad her apprentice and heir. At the Sanctuary of Chimayó, both "rubbed some of the earth along their brows and temples and on their forearms and put a little on their tongues."[29] Earlier, Caridad had accompanied doña Felicia in her gathering of plants for curing. Doña Felicia is an ever-present though peripheral figure, an acknowledged *curandera* who gives people treatments. But a disconnect between her traditional remedies and her apprentice suggest a disruption of this tradition. One chapter is devoted to "A Brief Sampling of Doña Felicia's Remedies," but Caridad never really takes on the role of using them. And her visit to Chimayó causes her not to develop added curing powers but to fall in love. After that episode, "'Ay! Doña Felicia,' Caridad said. 'I'm a lousy student for you! I see mirages and am filled with bad dreams! Right now I was dreaming of being pursued by a creature with huge wings like a giant eagle, but he had these small horns—or maybe it was a she—and he or she was wearing armor and I was flying as fast as I could to escape it until I hit a telegraph wire and crash-landed.'"[30]

After this, doña Felicia suggests Caridad go to Ojo Caliente for a mineral bath, but once again Caridad acts mysteriously but not programmatically and simply disappears into the mountains, voluntarily giving herself a second trial experience: "This was the last that anyone saw of her for a year."[31] She "herself could not explain . . . what led her up into those mountains that day." But on waking and seeing the sun begin to rise, "Caridad only knew that she wanted to stay there and be the lone witness to that miracle every dawn."[32] Her special powers are suggested by people wondering how she had kept herself warm during an especially bitter winter. And when one of the men who finally discovers her tells her that she's coming with them, Caridad just shakes her head, and miraculously becomes so heavy that they can't lift her forcibly onto her horse. And so she remains there: "The word spread quickly, however, that a woman hermit was living in a cave up there and that she had resisted with passive yet herculean strength three men who tried to carry her back home. Many people remembered the stories regarding La Loquita Santa and were not surprised that her sister also showed out-of-the-ordinary abilities."[33] And fabulous stories grow up around her: It would seem that Caridad has the remains of the shamanic calling but not the character or the socially coherent context to develop and use it. When she comes down out of the mountains, she

goes for the long-postponed bath at Ojo Caliente and finds the woman she had fallen in love with a year before as the attendant—perhaps simply a coincidence, but perhaps not given Caridad's previous experiences.

On a much smaller scale, Toto and Joel in García Márquez's story "Light Is Like Water" seem to be implicitly endowed with a mysterious (and mischievous) shamanic kind of power over space. Their "fabulous adventure" of "navigating at will among the islands in the house" in "a jet of golden light as cool as water," which pours out of a light bulb they have broken, miraculously activates what the narrator characterizes as a "frivolous remark [he made] while taking in a seminar on the poetry of household objects," about which "[he] did not have the courage to think . . . twice": "'Light is like Water,' I answered. 'You turn on the tap and out it comes.'"[34] The connection between the seminar and Toto asking him "why the light went on with just the touch of a switch" is not made clear, further shrouding the events in mystery, but the miraculous outpouring of light continues unabated throughout the text.[35] To further set the boys apart from the adult world of ordinary cultural events like seminars and cinemas, their ingenious activities of navigating streams of light with their classmates are contrasted with the more mundane nocturnal movie going of their parents: "While their parents were at the movies seeing *Last Tango in Paris*, they filled the apartment to a depth of two fathoms, dove like tame sharks under the furniture, including the beds, and salvaged from the bottom of the light things that had been lost in darkness for years."[36] The intriguing details belong to them: they transform their environment, resemble sharks—powerful and fearsome fish—and unearth lost objects—all of this more creatively active than the more passive parental thrills presumably experienced in viewing a sexy and trendy film. And that comparative scenario is repeated: the parents next go to see *The Battle of Algiers*, again seeking vicarious thrills created by established metropolitan artists, while the boys repeat their miraculous feats of navigation.

By the end of the story, we wonder at the boys' motivations. Do they perhaps have a nasty agenda of drowning their classmates? Is that why they have asked for diving suits? Since they are described as still navigating on the flow of light while their classmates are "eternalized in the moment or peeing into the pot of geraniums," they survive the drowning of "two entire classes at the elementary school of Saint Julien the Hospitaler."[37] In any case, the description of "Madrid, Spain, a remote city of burning summers and icy winds, with no ocean or river, whose landbound indigenous population had never mastered the science of navigating on light," with its faux-anthropological characterization of Europeans in terms that recall those used in studies *by* Europeans of "primitive" indigenous colonized peoples, achieves an implicit postcolonial "writing back," in which the colonials triumph over their former colonizers, and in which the original process of colonization is recalled and reversed by objectifying and recolonizing the Madrileños as a "landbound indigenous population" that has not mastered a particular skill.[38] It seems to have taken individuals from outside that population to imagine how to navigate on light, a skill that in contrast to the original colonial attitude of technological know-how is implicitly allied with a power that

resembles a shaman's ability to travel to a nonmaterial realm. Perhaps their skill relates to their familiarity with and hence validates the Caribbean ocean of their native Cartagena, or the Atlantic they crossed during their voyage to Spain. In either case, their skill on the water distinguishes them from their Spanish companions. Thus in addition to being possible shamanic-power kids, Toto and Joel are also perhaps postcolonial activists, although that idea is not explicitly stated. But this shamanic journey is truncated, and these minishamans operating in an alien cultural environment do not return home, at least not within this fiction.

In addition to revealing a special relation to time and space, many of these shamanic figures ally themselves with animals, as shamans often do, in order to help them connect with a nonhuman cosmic power and also frequently with an earlier epoch when humans were imagined to be able to communicate with animals.[39] Traces of that process appear in several magical realist texts, though not usually complete with a process of shamanic curing. They are one example of the presence of indigenous mythologies and pre-Enlightenment systems of belief that characterize much magical realist fiction. The sorcerer Macandal in Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* is an early magical realist shamanic figure, and the narrative lingers on his lycanthropic powers:

> They all knew that the green lizard, the night moth, the strange dog, the incredible gannet, were nothing but disguises. As he had the power to take the shape of hoofed animal, bird, fish, or insect, Macandal continually visited the plantations of the Plaine to watch over his faithful and find out if they still had faith in his return. In one metamorphosis or another, the one-armed was everywhere, having recovered his corporeal integrity in animal guise. With wings one day, spurs another, galloping or crawling, he had made himself master of the courses of the underground streams, the caverns of the seacoast, and the treetops, and now ruled the whole island. His powers were boundless.[40]

The variety is impressive, and the extent of his powers is emphasized by the ubiquity they permit, making him a more specifically worldly and political figure than a traditional shaman. And on his return from such journeys, his appearance seems changed, as if still marked by his transformations: "Something of his sojourns in mysterious places seemed to cling to him, something of his successive attires of scales, bristles, fur. His chin had taken on a feline sharpness, and his eyes seemed to slant a little toward his temples, like those of certain birds whose appearance he had assumed."[41] These animal connections can be seen as extending back to his African origins, further validating his power and knowledge, as Ti Noël hears him recount stories about "epic [African] battles in which the animals had been allies of men," being "instructed in these truths by the deep wisdom of Macandal," one that is validated by the narrator.[42] And soon his mutilation (losing an arm in the cane mill) serves as his near-death experience, confirming his special status, freeing him from regular work, and (in a chapter titled "What the Hand Found") allowing him the leisure in which he "developed a keen interest in the existence of certain plants to which nobody else paid attention" and "discovered the secret life of strange species given to disguise, confusion, and camouflage"—suggesting

the common practice of medicinal-plant collecting by shamanic healers.[43] While Macandal's ending is ambiguous, the slaves believing that he flies away and is "saved," and the narrator telling us that in the resulting tumult few noticed that he was caught and burnt, a final suggestion of the sorcerer's power is that after having been tied up while "howling unknown spells," and being burnt, "a good smoke" from his pyre blown toward the balconies where several ladies had fainted revived more than one of them.[44]

Ti Noël also partakes of this shamanic power. He remembers his master Macandal, and as agricultural labor becomes obligatory, decides that since human form brings such misfortune he'll assume various animal embodiments. Seeming to inherit Macandal's lycanthropic abilities, Ti Noël "climbed a tree, willed himself to become a bird, and instantly was a bird . . . He turned himself into a wasp, but he soon tired of the monotonous geometry of wax constructions," learning that such transformations bring their own misfortunes.[45] After he "employed his magic powers to transform himself into a goose," such a transformation does him little good since he is ultimately rejected by the socially conservative flock of geese as an "upstart, an intruder" ("un meteco"), and he transforms back into "a body of flesh to which things had happened."[46] Ti Noël seems to assume the full weight of the world as his heritage, feeling "countless centuries old. A cosmic weariness, as of a planet weighted with stones," and is finally swept out to sea by an apocalyptic wind, a shamanic flight of a questionable sort.[47] Much earlier, a minor shamanic power figure appears when Mama Loi, whose arms remain magically unscathed after she plunges them in boiling oil, examines Macandal's pouch of herbs and they discuss "men whom certain spells turned into animals. [And how] Women had been raped by huge felines, and at night, had substituted roars for words."[48]

Other examples of shamanic connections to animals include Consuelo, in Carlos Fuentes's *Aura*, who mysteriously seems to conjure Aura from a rabbit; the title character of García Márquez's "Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," who is in his very being something of a miracle and virtually charms multitudes from his humble chicken coop; the narrator of *Palace of the Peacock*, whose voice (as we have previously noted) finally merges with the bird's, resembling shamans who emit cries of birds or other animals as they enter a trance; Fleur, in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, whose footprints seem at one point to morph into those of a bear; repeated bird imagery in Lawrence Thornton's *Imagining Argentina* that surrounds and underlines the shaman-like powers of playwright Carlos Rueda, whose magical evocative skill of recounting the fates of the disappeared are associated with his own birds, and whom the narrator likens to "a magician conjuring familiars"; and the narrator of Cortázar's "Axolotl," who changes places with an amphibian.[49] While the encounter initially gives the narrator a sense of "a different life, of another way of seeing," by the end, "what was his obsession is now an axolotl, alien to his human life."[50] Even so, the sense of the interpenetration of worlds persists since the transformed axolotl consoles himself by thinking about the man on the other side of the glass "that perhaps he is going to write a story about us, that, believing he's making up a story, he's going to write all this about axolotls."[51] If we agree that some kind of shaman-like power manifesting itself in

the connection to a nonhuman world is operative here, it is neither well directed nor complete. And if a shamanic voyage has taken place, it is only the beginning of one, for instead of a temporary voyage and return, the traveler remains on the other side. I would not claim even that much of a similar shamanic power for the narrators of two of his other stories, "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris" and "Bestiary,"[52] however, which narrate frightening takeovers of human spaces by animals who can be seen to embody deep psychic dangers and fears.

Suggestions of a shadowy shamanic power figure with mysterious connections to animals are central to Obreht's "The Tiger's Wife," a very recent short story in which a woman is reported as having congress of some kind with a tiger in a way that seems to defy ordinary realities, a phenomenon that its narrator neither confirms nor denies, lending it an aura of uncertainty and the possible collision of domestic and jungle worlds that resembles not only *The Jungle Stories* by Rudyard Kipling that it references but also the various Latin American texts previously mentioned, and, indeed, many earlier fairy tales from around the world.[53] An avowed underdog of supposedly limited capabilities, the "tiger's wife" enters village life as a deaf-mute sold to her butcher husband in a bargain to cancel a debt. She is rumored to be his desired cover-up for (unnamed and unspecified) sins he is imagined to have committed, but she nevertheless gains an uncanny sort of power, not explicitly defined, but transmitted by the narrator, who is clearly intrigued by her. This narrator reports that the deaf-mute's husband, thinking to have obtained an object/wife whose silence will cover up his past sins, ends up by having "stumbled into an unwelcome complication. He had underestimated the power of her strangeness, the village's potential for a fascination with her."[54] The events are long in the past, adding to their uncertainty, but the narrator recounts having encountered the woman in a smokehouse, seemingly having had some kind of communion with the notorious tiger that has been terrifying the village. After the narrator's grandfather (hidden in the smokehouse) "felt the big, hot rushing heart [of the tiger] brush past and vanish [,] he heard the sound of footsteps, and moments later the deaf-mute girl [the "tiger's wife"], was kneeling at his side . . . Her hands . . . carried the heavy smell of the tiger, of snow and pine trees and blood."[55]

The narrator confirms the mysterious nature of the merging of different realities represented by the tiger's wife near the end of the story by declaring, "I still don't know who or what she was."[56] Like much magical realism, as well as other modernist and postmodernist writing, this story includes unreliable and varying narrators and focalizations. The narrator here mainly focalizes through herself, but the tiger's point of view at the start, in which we feel as if we are privy to his thoughts, and the communal one near the end, disturb a clear sense of traditionally realistic representation. After saying about three days of bombing by German forces—"I can tell you that this much is fact"—in the following paragraph we begin to deviate from such a factual realm: "The tiger did not know that they were bombs . . . he was alone and he was hungry, and that hunger had burned in him a kind of awareness of his own death, an imminent and innate knowledge that he could neither dismiss nor accept. He didn't know what to do with it."[57] The rest of this initial section on "The Tiger" stresses his instinct for preservation,

but since we have begun to see it from inside his anthropomorphically described mind, our normal perspective has shifted slightly. Such a varying of narrative viewpoint helps create what Rawdon Wilson has usefully called "textual enfolding" of space, or "world interpenetration," which creates the "hybrid space" of magical realism in which the reader experiences the copresence or intersection of two different worlds, in this case the historical record and the animal interior made present to us as it normally is not.[58]

The narrator's descriptions of this woman, together with her memories of her grandfather and his interactions with the woman, as well as other reports regarding them both, also situate the woman in a realm that hovers between different discursive worlds—of myth, dream, imagination, and actuality. The narrator tells us that the story of the tiger's wife "drew [him] in—not immediately but over the course of months and then years, during which [he] gradually realized that she stood in the back of [his] mind like a person in a dream, a person whose face you cannot see."[59] For her husband, "she was like an animal, he thought, as silent and begrudging as an owl."[60] At times, her actual existence is questioned as it almost seems to be conjured from the grandfather's copy of *The Jungle Book*: "I did not even question or consider the reality of the girl until after my grandfather's death, when a letter of condolence arrived from the village, . . . from Jovo . . . who mentioned the tiger and that winter, and who said he could still see my grandfather with *The Jungle Book* in his pocket, running after the girl."[61]

Partly as a result of its hesitant and interworldly focalizations, magical realism often expresses a communal rather than an individual sensibility, reporting a culture's tales so that verifiable facts are whittled down by multiple narrators and temporal distance. The reader experiences communal fiction creating a reality rather than a reliable narrator describing it. Such is the tale of this woman and her tiger: the narrator explains that "in the end, even I find myself making things up to explain what can't be accounted for, just as the villagers have done these past seventy years."[62] Continuing shortly in the same vein, but in keeping with varying focalization, and in a more authoritative tone, she tells us, "The truth is that the people of Galina had no idea what they were witnessing, but with that ignorance they crutched their way over to something, a necessary something that justified a shared moment in a time that was otherwise completely inexplicable—a tiger that seemed to come from nowhere, a valiant but dead blacksmith, a vanished butcher, a war delayed by the weather."[63] And then the authority vanishes back into uncertainty, and we hear that "by the end, so many details had piled up that the events no longer mattered. All that remained was a story and its infinite variations."[64] The story is literally created from these versions with their magical details that the narrator reports her grandfather hearing in the village:

> At the timber pile:
>
> "I heard she carved him up, right in his own smokehouse, and then in comes the tiger for dinner, and she feeds him strips of her dead husband like it's feast day."
>
> At church, holding Mother Vera's hand:

"That tiger. I seen him crossing the pasture by moonlight, big as a horse. Wild eyes in that tiger's head, I'm telling you. Froze me right down to my feet."

"What were you doing out so late?"

"That doesn't matter. Point is, that tiger came all the way up to the door of Luka's house, and then he gets up and takes off his skin. Leaves it out on the step and goes in to see his wife."

"Imagine that."

"Don't have to, I seen it."[65]

Not all, but substantial numbers of magical realist texts are written to give voice to silenced minorities, or to traumatic events too terrible to be realistically absorbed and recounted in a realistic manner.[66] The narrator seems to consciously enter her story into that group, saying near the end that the stories the villagers told about the tiger and his "wife" were always "based on the same common denominator, always stemming from her secret, silent world with the tiger, from the loneliness that had drawn them together, both of them strangers in the same foreign land, she the relic of an old war, he barely a survivor of the one that had just begun."[67] The site of historical trauma as one possible origin of the story is further emphasized when the narrator shortly associates it not only with the varying accounts of the villagers but places those accounts in a time of "a war delayed by weather" and as "something they could cling to through the darkest nights of that winter."[68]

By the end of the woman's story, the brutal butcher husband has disappeared, as if mysteriously wished away by her, the woman is pregnant and dressed in festive silks from her native Arabia, and the town fascinated, its curious women following her at a respectful distance. And one villager starts rumors of the woman's tiger-initiated pregnancy, which presumably account for the name she is given years afterwards that is the title of her story: "Now she's all alone, nobody bothering her, no one but the tiger"; "Oh, there's a belly—and I'll tell you something else. That belly ain't Luka's."[69]

She achieves this triumph of shamanic power from a traditional shamanic position of early outcast status, after communing with a power animal, and undergoing a trial by fire (when the brutal husband holds her hands in the flames to punish her for giving pork to the tiger). The final sentence of the story erases its own narrative authority, the individual voice fading into the communal: "All that remained was a story and its infinite variations—those of the village and of Jovo; . . . my grandfather's; and this one, which is mine—a hundred different wives for a single, solitary tiger, whose own disappearance no one had noticed, even after he had long since moved on."[70] Her mysterious power resonates through the years and through the tale, to which she has given its title. Thus she has achieved a kind of narratively oriented transformation; from a despised and worthless deaf-mute, she has become a prolific storyteller, multiplying herself in fiction, perhaps even empowering our narrator from afar.

The magical figure of Beloved in Morrison's novel of that name possesses a similar metafictional dimension, since she causes Sethe to tell stories about their mutual and other pasts, and she might also qualify as a figure of shamanic power,

since she bridges the nonmaterial and material worlds, and ultimately causes Sethe to heal the wounds of the past. With her preaching in the clearing, her near-miraculous propensity for attracting copious amounts of food for a feast, and her healing skills, however, Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs, holy, seems to be the most obvious figure of shamanic power in *Beloved*. But I wish to focus on another, less obvious one—an animal image with a more remote kind of power than those others: the name "little antelope" that Sethe calls Denver five times in Denver's favorite part of her own history.[71] It can be connected to Sethe's memory, narrated alongside that naming, of the slaves at Sweet Home "dancing the antelope."[72] That reference may well refer back to Bambara tribal rituals in Mali in which stylized wooden sculptures of antelopes (called "Chi Wara") are "danced" by being fixed on the heads of participants in agricultural rites, whose associated stories in turn apparently go back to issues of land stewardship. Those headdresses are some of the best-known African sculptures and come in two varieties, male, with a large mane, and female, with a small antelope perched on the back of the mother—very appropriate in this connection. That they are so well-known and in the past figured prominently in perfume advertisements in chic US magazines means that Sethe's invocation of the image in her time of need reappropriates it (and its power) for those to whom it is most closely tied culturally. It's something of a stretch to propose an animal as a figure of shamanic power, but this animal is not *just* an animal; it forms part of an aesthetically masterful ritual and hence can be seen to suggest shamanistic power grounded in ancient tradition. And it is associated with a person—Denver.

Figure 7.1.

The "little antelope" in Sethe's womb seems to possess a peculiar kind of power beyond her actual strength and spurs Sethe onward: "She could not, would not, stop, for when she did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb with impatient hooves. While she was walking, it seemed to graze quietly—so she walked."[73] (Thinking back to the Bambara ritual, perhaps the reason for tradition having selected the antelope as a fertility enhancer is this characteristic pawing of the ground, which is reminiscent of digging the earth prior to planting; here that gesture could be seen as ritually protecting the fertilized and nearly full-grown plant developed from the seed in Sethe's womb.) Next, Sethe thinks that "nothing was alive but her nipples and the little antelope," again, two images of fertility but focused on survival in a different kind of environment from the original antelope scenario.[74] Immediately after that thought, we see Sethe respond to the little antelope's strength again: upon thinking "at least I don't have to take another step," which by her own admission was "a dying thought if ever there was one," the narrator tells us that "she waited for the little antelope to protest," again inspiring her to continue living.[75]The fourth time the little antelope is mentioned, she again spurs Sethe on to an act that most likely saves both their lives, a groan that attracts Amy Denver's attention: "The thought of herself stretched out dead while the little antelope lived on—an hour? a day? a day and a night?—in her lifeless body grieved her so she made the groan that made the person walking on a path not ten yards away halt and stand right still."[76] Such a "little antelope" who has such a significant impact symbolizes a combination of female reproductive instinct and cultural traditions associated with cosmically imagined fertility, maybe even a specifically female-centered shamanic power. And one that appears in unexpected places, since Amy Denver, and Denver named after her are not obviously powerful figures. And it is one that is exercised without much fanfare, as we hear in the passage describing Amy's voice surrounding the fifth little antelope invocation: "The sound of that voice, like a sixteen-year-old boy's, going on and on and on, kept the little antelope quiet and grazing."[77]

The repeated appearance of this image at the moment of Denver's birth implies its continuing power as a fertility figure and (although the object to which it applies has changed from vegetable—the planting of crops—to human—the birth of a child) perhaps explains in part her fondness for the story. Likewise for the evocation of slaves "dancing the antelope" even as they have been harvesting someone else's crop, since its spirit survives that cultural and economic alienation, to say nothing of the middle passage that has intervened between the original and this surviving ritual dance. Like shamans who are often said to change shape from animal to human, as Sethe remembers these dancers of the antelope, "they shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other, whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach."[78] Sethe's image suggests the survival of a sense of visceral cultural identity associated with this antelope figure, and one that makes demands, perhaps even recourse, suggesting a reconfiguration of the position of these dancers, offering them the role of communal owners of the products of their agricultural

labor instead of tools for another individual's enrichment, given the figure's origin in rites associated with proper respect for the land and its stewardship. In that context, the image of unchaining is also meaningful, suggesting the positive power of a cultural tradition to unchain slaves whom we have seen suffering in that exact position in the text as well as the demand to do it.

Given all of those elements, in addition to Sethe's admission that she'd never even seen an antelope, as well as how camouflaged the reference is in the text itself, the figure is an especially good example of hidden racial memory and cultural survival. Additionally, the textual repetition of the name "little antelope" four times near together and a fifth time a few pages farther on, mimes the physical and verbal repetitions of ritual dancing and chanting in a minimal and unobtrusive way. Denver is not portrayed as particularly powerful in a shamanic sense, and at the end of the novel, as she runs off with a presumed potential boyfriend, her return to a normal adolescent life is the primary, and, indeed, individually fulfilling suggestion now that her house has ceased to be haunted by the past. But having been called prenatally the "little antelope," perhaps touches her, however lightly, with something akin to a shamanic tradition that will enable her to "remember the ancestor," to connect with a distant, even a mythic and empowering past that would otherwise be lost to her, further allying her with Beloved as figures implicitly redressing past inequities.[79] Hence it can be seen as a buried shamanic reference that figures communal connections to the cosmos.

Such connections are often signaled by particular bodily characteristics or reactions; as Michel Perrin explains, "For the Guajiro, acquiring shamanic power means fitting into a particular order different from the ordinary social order . . . This gradual insertion into the shamanistic order is reflected in specific bodily reactions. Whether desired or not, these reactions attest to a calling or a distinction conferred upon the individual by the supernatural world and recognized by the world of humans."[80] La Loca, Remedios the Beauty (in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), Ti Noël, and perhaps Macandal rise up into the air; Caridad's body becomes so heavy that three men cannot carry her away from her mountain hermit's retreat; Juan Preciado loses his ability to breathe normally since "there wasn't any air," slowly becoming part of the world of the dead he visits in Comala;[81] After her lover Mauricio Babilonia is shot and she is taken from him, Meme Buendia "had not spoken again nor would she do so for the rest of her life";[82] Beloved appears in the form of a grown young woman, her body having magically matured during death (when we first see her, "a fully dressed woman walked out of the water"[83]); and Clara's sister Rosa in Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* was born "white and smooth, without a wrinkle, like a porcelain doll, with green hair and yellow eyes," and at death is said to have "been subtly transformed into the mermaid she had always been in secret."[84]

Following these bodily transformations, many of these figures of shamanic power disappear at the end of their texts, a phenomenon that implicitly comments on the ephemeral nature of the magical realist compound. Both narrative and cultural situations are fragile, so that readers are left with a sense of both value and longing. We would like to hear more of Macandal, Ti Noël, the old

man with enormous wings, the narrators of "Axolotl" and *Palace of the Peacock*, La Loca, Caridad, and even Beloved (frightening as she often is), but they are gone, created for a specific purpose, as if returned to their mysterious origins from whence their narrative power emanates. That disappearance can remind us to remain alert to the complexities of such fictional figures. On the one hand, since shamanism is an "archaic" technique, and shamans (as described by Jacques Galinier with respect to Otomí practices) "are the guarantors of Native knowledge," providing "effective resistance to brutal acculturation," shaman-like characters often have the effect of seeming to connect the reader with and even to thereby defend the rights of indigenous peoples.[85] On the other hand, we are not encountering actual shamans here but fictionalized shamanic characters, and so, as Frederick Luis Aldama cautions in his study of "postethnic narrative criticism," we need to be wary of assuming a seamless connection between such imaginary figures and actual ethnic politics.[86] Nevertheless, such figures are persistent and powerful enough within the genre to form a substantial part of its appeal, culturally problematic as such an appeal may often be.

Notes

1. The phrase in the epigraph comes from a Guajiro shaman's chant collected by Michel Perrin, "Formas de comunicación chamánica: El ejemplo guajiro (Venezuela y Colombia)," *Abya-Yala, Colección 500 Años* (Quito, Ecuador) 1 (1988): 64–65 (my translation), cited in Mario Califano, "Los Rostros del Chamán: Nombres y Estados," in *Chamanismo en latinoamérica: Una revisión conceptual*, ed. Jacques Galinier, Isabel Lagarriega, and Michel Perrin (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdéz, Editores, 1995), 124. Califano does not give the name of the shaman he cites. I have taken the term "irreducible element," which I like so much, from the (relatively) early treatment of magical realism by Robert Young and Keith Hollaman in the introduction to their anthology, *Magical Realist Fiction* (New York: Longman, 1984). Michael Taussig and others have deconstructed Eliade's formulations as too desirous of an impossible cultural purity. However, such qualifications do not seem to me to invalidate the connections I am making here between shamanic and magical realist practices. See Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 187; his *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge), 1992; as well as my discussion of Eliade and Taussig's critique of him in connection with magical realism in my *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 147–67.
2. See my *Ordinary Enchantments*, especially chapter 2, "'From a Far Source Within': Magical Realism as Defocalized Narrative."
3. My discussion of a particular thematic strain in magical realist characters resembles Anne Hegerfeldt's analysis (in her chapter on "Magic Realist Focalizers") of the way that the figures and perspectives of circus performers, madmen, fools, and children, inasmuch as they are frequently portrayed in such a way that they represent an at least partially validated alternative to normality, serve to advance the general magical realist tendency to overturn established ideas. See Anne C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies That Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 130–56. Furthermore, because shamanism presupposes

a faith in nonempirical reality, the thematic I discuss here belongs to the "faith-based" side of magical realism that Christopher Warnes distinguishes from the "irreverent" strain that highlights the play of the signifier. That they are powerful suggests "a desire to enlarge realism's purview to make space for alternative world views," which characterizes that strain; Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 82.

4. It may be this quality that has been responsible for the worldwide popularity of magical realism and its consequent problematic "takeover" of Latin American identity in world literature, critiqued by a number of individuals and groups of writers, such as the McOndo and Crack movements in Latin America. For a discussion of magical and subsequent realisms and the politics of literary marketing, see the recent article by Sarah Pollack, "Latin American Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* in the United States," *Comparative Literature* 61, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 346–65, 350–53.
5. James Dow, *The Shamanic Touch: Otomi Indian Symbolic Healing* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 7.
6. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schoken, 1969 [1936]), 83–109. As just one example, "Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, . . . [and thus the storyteller's] tracks are frequently evident in his narratives" (92).
7. See the article by Daniel C. Noel, who calls himself someone "who was already doubtful about Western science's understanding of matters spiritual," discussing Carlos Castañeda's legacy. Daniel C. Noel, "Adios, Don Carlos, We are the Dumbos: Castañeda's Spiritual Legacy as a Literary Trickster," *Quest* 87, no. 1 (1999): 6–7. The revelation that Castañeda's shamanism was actually a neoshamanism, a fiction, means he belongs in some sense to this group of fictional figures of shamanic power; however, he is one who greatly influenced the development of a fascination with such figures in the United States. Noel also notes the inter-American nature of this neoshamanism, the "strange twist of cultural history that had someone born in Cajamarca, Peru, where Pizarro first defeated the Incas, now saying the superstitious natives know more than the rational Europeans concerning such [spiritual] matters." While the texts I discuss here do not produce a "successful simulation of ethnography," as Castañeda's texts do, they, like his, contribute to the cultural fascination with such figures, bringing the "fantasy of shamanism" to Western readers "whose family histories had long since lost contact with any actual indigenous shamanistic practices."
8. Discussions of shamanic characteristics of literary texts appear from time to time, though they were (predictably) more common in the 1960s through the 1980s than they are now. Within European tradition, magical realism can be seen to continue the longstanding "orphic" tradition of poetry that spans the different worlds of the ineffable and the material since Orpheus sang of the former in terms of the latter. Such a duality embodies the "shamanist contradiction" (as described by Robert McGahey): the shaman feels himself to be an independent person yet is also the channel for forces outside himself; in other terms, he is involved in both material and immaterial realities. Furthermore, like magical realist narrative, Orpheus is also seen as bridging the gap between older and recent cultures: following Karl Jaspers, in his study of Mallarmé's orphic moment, McGahey considers Orpheus a "key operator," "carrying forward the older, shamanic mode of thought and being into the youthful logocentric age"; see McGahey, *The Orphic Moment: Shaman to Poet-Thinker in Plato, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé* (Albany: State University of New

York Press, 1994), intro. and 8. The connection of literature with shamanism is somewhat less clear in the Americas, but native shamanic traditions are even more currently present, as evidenced by such studies as (among many others) Jacques Galinier, Isabel Lagarriga, and Michel Perrin, ed., *Chamanismo en latinoamérica: Una revisión conceptual* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdéz, Editores, 1995); Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979); Michael Harner, *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing* (*San Francisco: Harper, 1990)*; and Mircea Eliade's chapter on "Shamanism in North and South America" in his seminal *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972 [1951]), in which Eliade speculates in the epilogue about the potential for studying shamanism as a source of epic and lyric poetry. Sometimes, they connect shamanism with a literary tradition, as does Daniel C. Noel in his *The Soul of Shamanism: Western Fantasies, Imagined Realities* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

9. Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1959 [1955]), 17.
10. Ibid., 93, 107, 116.
11. Jacques Galinier, *The World Below: Body and Cosmos in Otomí Indian Ritual*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 68.
12. Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Avon, 1970 [1967]).
13. Ibid., 15.
14. Ibid., 75.
15. Ibid., 382.
16. Ibid., 80.
17. Ibid., 45.
18. Ibid., 55.
19. Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 48.
20. Ibid., 105.
21. Ibid., 34.
22. Ibid., 108.
23. Ibid., 27.
24. Ibid., 108.
25. Ibid., 41.
26. Ibid., 145.
27. Ana Castillo, *So Far from God* (New York: Norton, 1993), 24.
28. Ibid., 71.
29. Ibid., 76.
30. Ibid., 81.
31. Ibid., 81.
32. Ibid., 89.
33. Ibid., 87.
34. Gabriel García Márquez, "Light Is Like Water," trans. Edith Grossman, in *Strange Pilgrims* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 158.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 159.
37. Ibid., 160.
38. Ibid., 161.
39. Among many examples, see the reference to "shamanic auxiliaries that can be animals, plants, objects, or intermediary beings. Everyone yearns to connect with these entities, which are conceived of as *part of* one's personal psychic makeup"

("la composicion animica personal"; Pablo G. Wright, "Cronicas de un encuentro shamanico: Alejandro, el 'Silbador' y el antropologo," in *Chamanismo en latinoamerica*, eds. Jacques Galinier, Isabel Lagarriega, and Michel Perrin (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdez, Editores, 1995), 167–86. Regarding the temporal dimension of human-animal connections, according to Fernando Urrea Giraldo and Diego Zapata Ortega, they refer back to "a *raw time* [*un tiempo crudo*], a paradise of unity between culture and nature, when "primitives, our ancestors, or, rather, the others [the "lower ones," *los aucos*] or the unbaptized were in charge and still possessed their full ability to change into animals; see their "Vegetalismo y sistema de representaciones en el curandismo inga-camentsa," in *Chamanismo en latinoamérica*, ed. Jacques Galinier, Isabel Lagarriega, and Michel Perrin (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdez, Editores, 1995), 218.

40. Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World,* trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Collier, 1970 [1949]), 41–42. Further references are given in the text.
41. Ibid., 147.
42. Ibid., 13–14.
43. Ibid., 23.
44. Ibid., 40, 52.
45. Ibid., 178.
46. Ibid., 182–84.
47. Ibid., 184.
48. Ibid., 25. Christopher Warnes considers that scene to represent the idea that "Ti Noël's coming to terms with the sudden presence of the supernatural in the midst of the natural should be read as part of the education he receives about African culture and history from Macandal"; see Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, 68.
49. Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988); "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," trans. Gregory Rabassa, *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Young and Keith Hollaman (New York, Longman, 1984), 55–59; Carlos Fuentes, *Aura,* trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975); Lawrence Thornton, *Imagining Argentina* (New York: Bantam, 1988 [1987]), 200.
50. Julio Cortázar, "Axolotl," in *The End of the Game and Other Stories*, trans. Paul Blackburn (New York: Harper and Row, 1967 [1956]), 9. Though she does not associate it explicitly with magical realism, Sharon Spencer analyzes the transformation of the narrator in "Axolotl" as a shamanic process and allies such processes with Cortázar's artistic process, "a perfected image of the deep psychic transference that is demanded by the act of making art"; Sharon Spencer, "The Art of the Shaman: Julio Cortázar Viewed as a Native American Writer," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 3, no. 3 (1984), 82.
51. Ibid., 9.
52. "Letter to a Young Lady" and "Bestiary," in *The End of the Game and Other Stories*, trans. Paul Blackburn (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).
53. That many writers and critics seem eager to discredit magical realism as an outworn and dated category makes it all the more intriguing when a well-written contemporary example of it appears.
54. Téa Obreht, "The Tiger's Wife," *The New Yorker*, June 8 and 15, 2009, 52.
55. Ibid., 49.
56. Ibid., 54.
57. Ibid.
58. See Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 220–28.

59. Obreht, "The Tiger's Wife," 52.
60. Ibid., 53.
61. Ibid., 54.
62. Ibid., 54
63. Ibid., 54
64. Ibid., 54
65. Ibid., 53–54.
66. On magical realism and historical trauma, see Eugene Arva, "Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 60–85. This is another controversial point, because some critics take that expression of historical trauma or silenced minority voices as a defining characteristic, which makes magical realism a postcolonial genre. Others maintain that it also belongs to mainstream writing, and early examples of the genre in Europe especially—such as texts by Ernst Jünger, Johan Daisne, Massimo Bontempelli, and others—do not necessarily represent the voices of silenced minorities, although others, like Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, often seen as a precursor of magical realism, do.
67. Obreht, "The Tiger's Wife, 54.
68. Ibid., 54
69. Ibid., 53.
70. Ibid., 54.
71. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 29–34.
72. Ibid., 31.
73. Ibid., 30.
74. Ibid., 30.
75. Ibid., 30.
76. Ibid., 31.
77. Ibid., 34.
78. Ibid., 31.
79. The phrase "remember the ancestor" appears in a discussion of Morrison's use of ancestors in La Vinia Delois Jennings, *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 88. From an inter-American perspective, the antelope as evoked here might be compared with the sense of surviving mythic traditions referring to a "time—another time—in which animals spoke and things were acquiring the shapes they now have," preserved in rituals or the memory thereof that Alfredo Lopez-Austin discerns in Mesoamerica; Alfredo Lopez-Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología: Las concepciones de los antiguos nahuas*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: UNAM, 1990), 55.
80. Michel Perrin, "The Body of the Guajiro Shaman: Symptoms or Symbols," in *Portals of Power: Shamanism in South America*, ed. E. Jean Matteson Langdon and Gerhard Baer (University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 105.
81. Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, 56.
82. García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 73.
83. Morrison, *Beloved*, 50.
84. Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*, trans. Magda Bogin (New York: Knopf, 1985 [1982]), 6, 30.
85. Ibid., 70.
86. See Frederick Luis Aldama, *Postethnic Narrative Criticism: Magicorealism in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

CHAPTER 8

Mythic Realism, Dreams, and Prophecy in James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*

Lori Burlingame

James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* chronicles the struggle for personal and cultural survival faced by Charging Elk, a young Oglala Sioux man who visits Marseille, France in 1889 as part of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, is hospitalized with influenza, and mired in senseless bureaucracy and political debates about the nature of his identity and citizenship, is unable to leave France for the next 16 years. With the exception of Charging Elk's flashbacks to his youth in America, Welch's novel follows a linear, realistic plot progression. However, through Charging Elk's dreams about the Ghost Dance and the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee and his recollections of Bird Tail's dream about the buffalo entering the caverns of the earth, the novel introduces elements of mythic realism and prophecy. Charging Elk's dreams illustrate his spiritual connections to his Lakota people at home, just as his experiences in France parallel his people's situation at home, and they also reflect his formidable anxieties about their collective future. Bird Tail's dream about the disappearance of the buffalo and his vision of their eventual return can be linked to Black Elk's vision of "the sacred hoop" and to traditional sacred stories about the White Buffalo Cow Woman and prophecies that suggest that the birth of a white buffalo calf will help to purify the world and bring back harmony and balance.[1] Although these dreams and visions seem to be a momentary disruption in an otherwise realistic text, they reflect traditional Native ideas about "mythic reality," or the ways in which the natural and what Westerners call the supernatural are one in traditional Native ideologies.[2] Taken together, Charging Elk's and Bird Tail's prophetic dreams affirm the sacred hoop that binds the Lakota people together and offer hope for the survival of the Oglala people and their traditions, even in the midst of change and assimilation.

The mythic dimension of Welch's novel is significant not only in terms of Charging Elk's complex struggle to survive and to forge a new identity for himself in France while also retaining his Lakota-ness, but also as a historical signifier for the reader, who, steeped in hindsight, can clearly recognize the import of Charging Elk's dreams before he does. Read from the perspective of hindsight, Bird Tail's vision in particular can be loosely interpreted as an example of what Jarold Ramsey calls "retroactive prophecy," and in the shift from myth to prophecy, it can be viewed as empowering for Charging Elk and the Lakota people.[3]

It is also worth noting that the American vice-consul in Marseille, Franklin Bell, has recurring prophetic dreams about Charging Elk's killing of the chef Armand Breteuil, after he is drugged at Breteuil's behest and sexually assaulted by him. Many critics have commented on Welch's balanced perspectives in *Heartsong*, and despite the limited portrayals of cross-cultural understanding in the novel and Bell's tendency to view Charging Elk's dilemma in self-interested and political terms, these dreams illustrate some depth of realization about the extent to which Bell has failed Charging Elk. They also illustrate the interconnectedness of all human beings; as Mary F. Sheldon observes, Welch's fiction confirms the idea that all of his readers "regardless of race or culture—hold within themselves the potential for dreaming and begetting life and the potential for hurting and destroying life."[4] Further, Bell's dreams underscore Paula Gunn Allen's point, grafted in part from her references to American psychologist Rollo May and to Thomas Mann, that "the mythic dimension of experience—the psychospiritual ordering of nonordinary knowledge—is an experience that all peoples, past, present, and to come, have in common."[5]

According to Allen, "Myth and ritual are based upon visionary experience."[6] Indeed, as Suzanne Ferguson notes, Charging Elk's story is rooted, in part, in the life history of the Sioux visionary Black Elk: both traveled with the Wild West Show, were left behind in France, and lived with a French woman and her family.[7] Significantly, both Black Elk and Charging Elk have dreams of home, and Charging Elk's description of the Ghost Dance is similar to Black Elk's.[8] In an interview with Kathryn W. Shanley, Welch notes that during a book signing for *Fools Crow* in Marseille, he met a man in the audience who indicated that his Lakota grandmother came to France with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1905, became involved with a Frenchman, and stayed.[9] As Welch indicates in the "Acknowledgments" section of his novel, he has also drawn Charging Elk's story from his imagined history of Featherman, whose death certificate he viewed while in Marseille.[10] In Shanley's interview, Welch comments that the germ of his idea for the novel was based on the idea of a member of the Wild West Show becoming ill in Marseille and being left behind when the show moved on.[11] There are a number of articles by Suzanne Ferguson, James J. Donahue, and others that explore with sensitivity and depth the issues surrounding Charging Elk's transformative journey in France, as well as the larger significance of the European setting of the novel and the question of whether Charging Elk can be seen as a representational character. While I will touch on those issues briefly here, as they relate to the mythic dimension of the novel, my primary concern is

examining Welch's portrayal of dreams and visions in the novel, particularly in terms of the ways in which the novel's mythic dimension relates to prophecy and spiritually connects Charging Elk to his Lakota people at home, despite his vast remove from them.

Critics, like Ferguson and Donahue, delineate the prescriptive limits of seeing Charging Elk's story as a metaphor for what the Lakota people in his homeland are experiencing. Ferguson argues that in "diverging from Black Elk's story by having Charging Elk remain in France, Welch bestows on his character the freedom *not* to have to confront the oppression of tribal life, a lonely freedom to find his individual destiny."[12] Similarly, Donahue notes that Charging Elk's character can be read as representational but not as "exclusively representational"; to do so would be to propagate an image of a stereotypical Indian figure and also to deny "the complex nature of identity."[13] "Through his use of Lakota in both his dreams and in his internal monologues, his recognition of a Sioux worldview with respect to marking time, and his continued belief in Wakan Tanka, Charging Elk is able to reconstruct and maintain his individual cultural identity without pressure from French stereotypes, while assimilating to certain aspects of French culture."[14] I too recognize the limits of viewing Charging Elk as overly representational; his story is a personal one, which involves both cultural preservation and assimilation, and Welch places him in an unequaled position and chronicles his individual development. However, examining in a representational way the structural and spiritual parallels between Charging Elk's story and the circumstances of his fellow Lakotas at home does not preclude seeing him in a more individualized context. As is often the case in questions of literary interpretation, seemingly opposed readings can be simultaneously true. Hence I would also concur with Ulla Haselstein that "Charging Elk's individual exile in Europe is a metaphor for an essentially diasporic condition that encompasses both the Native Americans who live on the reservation and those who live in an urban environment."[15] Andrea Optiz takes this a step further by postulating that "rather than offering merely an allegory, the novel theorizes Charging Elk's remembering as the racialized Other's remembering of the past, as an articulation of the present that threatens to reintroduce into the narrative of the nation, the history of racial violence."[16] I would argue that a key portion of that "remembering" in the novel comes in the form of Charging Elk's dreams, in which that "history of racial violence"[17] surfaces repeatedly, bringing with it questions about the future of the Lakota people.

Indeed, by setting Charging Elk's story in France, Welch defamiliarizes the cultural context and enables his readers to see these connections even more clearly. In conjunction with his dreams, Charging Elk's life story mirrors his people's experiences, particularly in terms of the history of boarding or residential schools. As part of the Wild West Show, Charging Elk performs a stereotypical version of his history; like the Native children in the boarding schools who acted in dramatizations of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, his main physical connection to his culture is in performing a colonized version of his history.[18] After he leaves the hospital and is arrested and imprisoned, his situation is similar to the situation of the 72

Plains warriors, who were captured in the mid 1870s, declared guilty without trial, and under the command of Lieutenant Richard Pratt, taken to Fort Marion, Florida, as part of an assimilationist educational experiment.[19] Three years later, the warriors were released, and in 1879, Pratt appealed to Native leaders, like Chief Spotted Tail, the leader of the Brulé Sioux, to send their children to such a school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.[20] Chief Spotted Tail only agreed to send some children because Pratt told him that if he had been able to read the words of the Black Hills Treaty, which illegally took the Black Hills from the Lakotas, they would never have lost their sacred land; Pratt suggested that if the children were educated in Western ways, they could help Spotted Tail in his position as Chief.[21] At Carlisle and the other 25 or so major industrial boarding schools that sprang up across the United States, children were taught English and Christian doctrine half of the day and learned manual trades the other half of the day.[22] They had their hair cut and were dressed in Western clothes, much as Charging Elk loses his badger-claw necklace, wears Western clothes, and has his hair cut. During the summers, the children lived with white families, as part of the "outing" program; when Charging Elk lives with the Soulas family in Marseille, he begins to learn French and works in the family's fish selling business.[23]

Charging Elk is exoticized during the Wild West Show and by René, Marie, and Breteuil, just as Native peoples have been in America.[24] After killing Breteuil, who coerces Marie into drugging Charging Elk so that he can sexually assault him, Charging Elk is put on trial.[25] Ironies abound regarding Charging Elk's legal identity in France. Earlier in the novel, he is identified by a French doctor, who refuses to admit that he has made a mistake, as the deceased Featherman. Nevertheless, after killing Breteuil, Charging Elk is put on trial, as if this mistake was never made and as if he were a US citizen; at the trial, speaking in Lakota to the jury, Charging Elk is regarded as an uncivilized savage, simply because he does not speak French. Similar assumptions were made about the Native warriors and children who went through Pratt's educational program; indeed, Pratt's motto was "Kill the Indian: Save the Man." Charging Elk's prison sentence at La Tombe could be representative of either the prisons that the military boarding schools often were for the children who experienced them or the idea of reservation life as a prison for Native peoples.[26] Additionally, Richard Pratt spoke of using solitary confinement, which is Charging Elk's induction into La Tombe, as a method of punishing Native children.[27] Although Charging Elk is not a child, it is nevertheless true that as an adult, he does go through something of a developmental process in France, and metaphorically, the events of his life can parallel what Native young people went through at the schools. At the end of the novel, Joseph speaks angrily about his eight years at a residential school: "'They taught me many things—how to cut off my hair, how to wear clothes just like them, how to use my knife and fork properly, how to say 'Yes, sir, yes, ma'am.' Oh yes, they taught me many things so that I could be smart—just like them.' He snorted loudly, a sound of disgust."[28]

The uncertainties surrounding Charging Elk's citizenship and identity in the novel are reflective of the fact that Native Americans' sovereign nation status has

not always been respected in US history and that Native peoples did not have US citizenship until 1924. Based on this fact, after 11 years, Charging Elk is ultimately released from La Tombe, having been reclassified as a political prisoner since he does not have US citizenship. This too is ironic since, as René notes, Native peoples are the original citizens of the Americas.[29]

When Charging Elk works both in prison and at the Gaziers' doing agriculturally based labor, it is similar to the ways in which his people are being pushed into a more agrarian society at home; for instance, Charging Elk thinks about his *kola* (an adopted brother through a fellowhood pact) Strikes Plenty planting potatoes. When he is released from prison, marries Nathalie, and moves back to Marseille, where he works loading and unloading at the docks, his experiences reflect a more urban Native reality and the fact that cross-cultural marriages are becoming more common.[30] His Lakota identity survives, but adaptation and assimilation are also part of this journey, and it is an identity journey that will also be faced by his and Nathalie's future child. Charging Elk does find some community in his union of fellow dockworkers, but as Suzanne Ferguson notes, it is not necessarily the same as the community he had among his fellow Lakotas.[31] Although I am not certain that I would carry the argument this far, Hans Bak even suggests that Charging Elk's "exile has ensured the preservation of his Lakota-ness (unlike that of the reservation Indians who have been subject to a process of cultural erosion), even as it has subjected him to a process of slow, subtle but inevitable adaptation."[32]

While readers recognize the parallels between Charging Elk's life story in France and the history of the Lakota people in America, it is in the mythic dimension that Charging Elk himself feels a spiritual connection to his people at home, and it is here, rather than in the day to day circumstances of his life, that he defines himself as Lakota. The inclusion of mythic realism in the novel acts as a bridge between Charging Elk and his fellow Lakotas and, for the reader, as a link between history and prophecy and hope.

Early in the novel, when Charging Elk is watching a Christian celebration of Christmas, he recalls his sacrifice during the Sun Dance when he was 17: "The pain ended and he was in another world. It was as though he could see himself dancing and blowing the eagle-bone whistle and, at the same time, entering the Great Mystery, where he saw the ancestors and the great herds of buffalo under the wind and sun and moon. He saw many sacred beings in this world and he knew it was the real world. He heard the beat of the drum and he knew it was the heartbeat of the *can gleska*, where all becomes one."[33] Charging Elk describes his connection to this spirit world as being "the real world" here because in traditional Lakota ideologies, that which Westerners would call the "supernatural," mythic, or magic flows seamlessly and organically from everyday experience, and the worldview that Charging Elk lives by throughout the novel is one which recognizes this; hence even events in his life that might not be characterized as "mythic realism" are still filtered through the lens of mythic understanding.

Another example of Charging Elk's mythic understanding of the world occurs when he is eating at the restaurant in the Old Port, and he sees some American

sailors; his initial reaction is to ask them where he can find a ship bound for America, but in their recognition of him as an American Indian, they clearly reveal their stereotypical biases and hostility toward him (even in France, this history of violence surfaces), and he thinks that they will attack him. Initially, Charging Elk feels anger, then fear for himself alone in a room of hostile *wasichus* (white people), and apprehension that if he is killed, his *nagi* or spirit will not return home. He begins to sing his death song, and is determined to fight to the death, when he is physically removed from the restaurant by the waiter and another employee who are trying to avoid a more violent scene: "But they needn't have worried. Charging Elk was in another country, a quiet country, and he was strong with meat and song."[34] Charging Elk has a sense of being strengthened by his mythic understanding of the world; his death song gives him the power to confront the situation with courage and calmness. Although Charging Elk recognizes that his death song did not function exactly as he wished, to make him invisible, he nevertheless feels that it rendered the sailors "powerless in their effort to harm him."[35] Although his perception of how his death song has functioned changes somewhat, he still imbues it with power and operates under Lakota principles of mythic realism.[36] Similarly, in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, the medicine man Betonie tells Tayo that Native ceremonies retain their power by changing in keeping with the world itself.[37]

As Joseph L. Coulombe notes, Charging Elk does have his moments of spiritual doubt, when he feels that his prayers to Wakan Tanka are futile, but then so do European characters, like René and Madeleine Soulas and Vincent Gazier.[38] Welch takes the risk of being honest here about Charging Elk's doubt, despite being aware that many of his Western readers might also harbor these somewhat ethnocentric doubts about Native spirituality, but in so doing he ultimately demonstrates "how such questioning can lead to a stronger belief."[39] Welch also reveals these religious doubts in *Fools Crow* during the main character's vision quest.[40] Not surprisingly, when people are confronted with as much upheaval as Native tribes in North American were in the mid to late nineteenth century, religious questions and uncertainties will abound, as they always do in times of crisis.

During the years between 1890 and 1894, Charging Elk has two dreams that he is unable to interpret at the time, but which readers will clearly recognize as visions of the Lakota Ghost Dance and the December 29, 1890, Massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.[41] Since Charging Elk is already in Marseille by 1889 and is unable to speak much French or read French newspapers, he has no way of knowing about these events; hence, his dreams are retroactively prophetic of or intuitively consonant with them. Throughout the course of the novel, Charging Elk is haunted by these dreams and is unable to make sense of them until he revisits the Wild West Show at the end in 1905. While this is partly because he is physically removed from his Lakota community, it is not uncommon for even those living within their traditional communities to struggle to interpret the meanings of their dreams. For instance, in James Welch's *Fools Crow*, White Man's Dog/Fools Crow has a dream about a "white girl," who evokes both

desire and fear in him. It is only with the perspective of hindsight that he understands that this is a dream about fellow warrior Yellow Kidney, who is in danger of making an ethically bad decision that will result in him contracting smallpox and being captured by the Crows during their horse-taking raid.[42] Similarly, in Ella Cara Deloria's *Waterlily*, Gloku, Waterlily's grandmother, has a dream in which she is told that after four days, she will become invisible; she interprets this to mean that she will die, but instead, she becomes invisible to Omaha warriors during a raid.[43]

In his first dream, Charging Elk sees visions of the Ghost Dancers, who based on the Paiute prophet Wovoka's 1889 vision, believed that dancing the Ghost Dance would bring back the ancestors, the buffalo, and the traditional way of life: "That night Charging Elk dreamed of returning to the Stronghold . . . he saw many people dancing in a circle. He didn't recognize the dance. It was not rhythmic and graceful like the old-time dances; rather, the people hopped and twirled in place, men shouting and wailing, women ululating and crying out. The drum group pushed the people even faster, until some of the dancers fell to the ground, where some lay motionless while others twitched and rolled around as though they were struggling to leave their bodies."[44]

After this dream, Charging Elk concludes that the people in his dream were not Oglalas or Lakotas. Although he misinterprets his dream, it is no accident that subsequent to it, Charging Elk raises questions about "the White Buffalo Cow Woman, who brought them the sacred pipe and the sun dance," and whether she had foreseen the coming of the "*wasichus*," and he also ponders Bird Tail's vision of the buffalo's return.[45] Like the Ghost Dancers, the subjects of his meditations are prophetically linked to the return of traditional Lakota culture, so in effect, his spiritual and emotional state after this dream mirrors the questions and hope his people harbor in the midst of the most tumultuous period in their history.

Even more frightening and disconcerting for Charging Elk is his dream about the Massacre at Wounded Knee. This dream haunts Charging Elk's memory throughout the novel.

> In his dream he was standing on one of the sheer cliffs of the Stronghold. Something was wrong and he was weeping. He wanted to jump off the cliff, but every time he tried, a big gust of wind blew him back. He tried four times, five times, ten times, but each time the wind pushed him back, until he was exhausted from his labors. But the next time he approached the cliff, too weak to even attempt to jump, he looked down and he saw his people lying in a heap at the bottom. They lay in all positions and directions—men, women, and children, even old ones. They lay like buffaloes that had been driven over the cliffs by hunters, and Charging Elk understood why he had been weeping. As he stood and looked down at his people, he heard the wind roar in his ears like a thousand running buffaloes, but in the roar, he heard a voice, a familiar voice, a Lakota voice, and it said "You are my only son." And when he turned back to his village at the Stronghold, there was nothing there—no people, no horses or lodges, not even the rings of rock that held the lodge covers down—not even one smoldering fire pit. Everything was gone.[46]

Charging Elk erroneously concludes from his dream that the Lakota tribe has been eradicated and that he is the only one left.[47] Haselstein notes, "At a structural level the visions represent Charging Elk's inscription in a Lakota history of suffering that affects all members of the tribe wherever they may live."[48]

At a subconscious and personal level, Charging Elk's dream signifies his deep desire to be with his people; he tries repeatedly to jump off the cliff and join them, even though joining them would mean death, but he is unable to do so. As a point of historical connection, Plenty Horses, a graduate of Carlisle, visited the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre shortly thereafter, and in revenge for what the US army had done to his people, he shot army Lieutenant Casey in the back with a Winchester rifle.[49] At his trial, Plenty Horses said that after attending Carlisle for five years, he was lonely for his people; like many graduates of Carlisle, and like Charging Elk at the end of the novel, he didn't feel that he was fully accepted by them any longer.[50] Plenty Horses indicated that he hoped that he would be hung so that the Indians would bury him as a warrior and he would find a place among them.[51] Being part of the community of his people meant more to him than his life. In a similar vein, when Charging Elk is in prison and thinks he will die, he accepts this and only worries that his *nagi* or spirit will return home. When Charging Elk observes Breteuil while looking in the window of Olivier's brothel for the first time, he has an intuitive sense, which may also reflect aspects of mythic realism in the novel, that Breteuil is a "*siyoko*," or evil spirit, and that in killing him, he has done the morally right thing, even though he is sure that it will cost him his life.[52] Hans Bak notes that Charging Elk's nightmarish dream about Wounded Knee leads to "increasing doubts about Wakan Tanka, and fears that he may have lost his warrior's courage and the tribal sense of solidarity and sharing, 'replaced by an attention only to himself and his own desires.'"[53] Yet, paradoxically, Charging Elk's sense of what community means broadens throughout the novel and encompasses those with whom he lives and interacts in France, the Soulas family, Marie, Causeret in prison, the Gaziers, and the members of his dockworkers' union, although as Ferguson notes, "Charging Elk will never recover the kind of community he had in his youth, because—as he learns from his prophetic dreams and the narrative of the Wild West Sioux he visits at the end of the novel—that kind of community has disappeared."[54]

It is not until the end of the novel with the perspective of historical hindsight that Charging Elk is able to understand his dreams more fully. Throughout the course of the novel, he, like the novel's readers, has struggled to understand the identity and significance of the enigmatic voice in his dream, saying, "You are my only son."[55] When he visits the Wild West Show performers at the end, Andrew Little Ring, Joseph, and Sarah tell him of the Ghost Dance, the killing of Chief Sitting Bull, and the massacre of 200 Lakotas at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Charging Elk connects this to his dreams, and it is Joseph who suggests that the haunting voice in his dream belongs to his mother, Doubles Back Woman, who is alone now because his father, Scrub, passed away three years ago. Joseph says that she wishes for her son to come home. Andrew Little Ring

tells Charging Elk, "You are Lakota, wherever you might go. You are one of us always."[56] Joseph gives Charging Elk a stone from the Black Hills (Paha Sapa) to keep with him always. As Haselstein observes, as Lakotas, both Charging Elk and Joseph "share a history of traumatic dispossession and a sense of belonging to a sacred place, the Black Hills, which, precisely because it is a mythological place, cannot be taken away from them and is bound up with a desired but obstructed future for the dispersed tribe."[57]

While Charging Elk will retain his Lakota identity, his sense of what community means changes again at the end of the novel when he elects to stay in Marseille. Before the Wild West Show, Charging Elk "was tormented inside, as though some animal were clawing at this guts. And the almost physical pain came because he was certain that he could have the one thing that he had wanted so desperately over the past sixteen years—and he didn't want to want it so much now."[58] Charging Elk is finally offered the chance to return home with the other Lakotas at the Wild West Show. He is cognizant of the ways in which he has changed during the 16 years that he has spent in Marseille—at times, he even thinks that Marseille has become his home—and Joseph has told him about the American boarding schools, where children are forbidden to speak Lakota, and the fact that the government denies the people their now necessary rations if they practice their ceremonies. Nevertheless, although it is clear that Welch chose not to take the novel in this direction, I think that Charging Elk would probably have returned home if he did not have Nathalie and the expectation of their firstborn. He chooses to stay for them.

A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff argues that "years of assimilation in France during a period when it was impossible for him to return to his homeland, and love of his new family preclude his return to Pine Ridge."[59] She cites Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's criticisms of Welch's ending as an embodiment of "the 'vanishing' theory so well known in Indian History" because although Welch grounds his novel in actual happenings, the vast majority of Lakotas who participated in the Wild West Show returned home.[60] Of course, it is also entirely possible, as Donahue and Coulombe note, based on Craig Womack's arguments that it is a "supremacist notion that assimilation can only go in one direction," that Charging Elk will not vanish but will instead influence French culture and carry his Lakota heritage through the line of his family there.[61] Ruoff does stress, however, Welch's emphasis on the "personal" nature of Charging Elk's choice, and she notes that Welch writes about "the challenges Native people faced in the contact zone" and thus expands "the range of Native American literature" by setting his novel in Europe.[62] In a similar vein as Cook-Lynn, Haselstein argues that Charging Elk's choice signifies "a rejection of traditionalism" and that it "equals the move toward urban Indian culture."[63] While I would concur with Haselstein's second premise, I would dispute her first. Although Charging Elk has adapted and assimilated to French society, he has also retained his Lakota identity—for instance, he goes to Christian services with Nathalie but has no wish to convert, and he briefly considers selling his sketches of traditional Lakota life and thus sharing his heritage with others—I would argue that his choice is less an affirmation of assimilation than

it is of his new family. Family has always been of central importance in Native communities, and it would certainly not be traditional for Charging Elk to abandon his wife and unborn child. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay takes this a step further suggesting that "it is personal affection and responsibility that connect people, not culture."[64] In actuality, it is both of those things that bring people together, as Charging Elk's connections to the Wild West performers at the end illustrate; his final decision affirms both the heart's affections and Lakota cultural values.

Despite Welch's choice to end the novel more optimistically for Charging Elk with a happy marriage and the expectation of new life, it is nevertheless clear that there is still a tentative quality to Charging Elk's hope for the future, though perhaps there is still more opportunity available to him in France than to his people at home. As Ferguson notes, he and Nathalie are both to some extent "dispossessed"; ultimately, neither can really return home again.[65] Charging Elk will probably never return to Lakota territory or see his mother again, and despite the choice he makes, that will always be painful for him. Although Nathalie has chosen to marry Charging Elk, she still longs for her former home in Agen and is very much alone while Charging Elk is at work all day.[66] Further, the couple has no real friends as of yet, and they barely have enough money and food to make it through the dockworkers' strike. The new life they have created signifies hope, but of course, as Charging Elk and the reader know all too well, their child will likely experience some of the same identity issues and biases that Charging Elk has known.

Ferguson suggests that Charging Elk's story is an extension of Welch's novel *Fools Crow*.[67] However, *Fools Crow* deals with Blackfeet culture, and Welch indicates in his interview with Shanley that he sees Charging Elk's novel as "a counter to *Fools Crow* because Fools Crow is within his own culture and everybody around him was of that culture" while Charging Elk "is in an absolutely foreign culture."[68] However, in both novels, Welch's portrayal of optimism is fragile. At the end of *Fools Crow*, the hero has had a vision in which he has seen the deaths of his people and the decline of their traditional culture due to Western encroachment, but Fools Crow learns "a happiness that sleeps with sadness."[69] Despite the horrors he has seen during the smallpox epidemic and after the 1870 Massacre on the Marias River, as Dexter Westrum observes, the birth of Fools Crow's son, Butterfly, is "an act of affirmation" and Welch proudly emphasizes the strength of the Pikuni people, whose children play hard.[70] The novel's ending that everything "was as it should be" is ironic in that readers know that within ten years of its end, the traditional Blackfeet life will be a memory; however, Welch chooses to posit hope for the future of the Pikuni people through his reinscription of Feather Woman's story, which suggests that things will be set right again for the Blackfeet when she is reunited with her husband Morning Star, her separation from whom is posited as being the cause of her people's suffering.[71] In *Heartsong*, when speaking about the survival of the Lakotas, Charging Elk mentions the child asleep in Sarah's arms and says, "'We will go on because we are strong people, we Lakotas.' Joseph smiled for the first time, uncertainly but perhaps a little hopefully. 'I don't know—maybe.'"[72]

The practical circumstances of Charging Elk's own life are cautiously optimistic, and Joseph expresses uncertainty about the survival of the Lakotas, but it is ultimately in the mythic dimension where Welch provides his strongest statement of hope for the survival of the Lakotas and the buffalo with Bird Tail's dream of the buffalo entering the deep caverns of the earth, awaiting there the time when they will reemerge into the sunlight again. Charging Elk is preoccupied with this dream throughout the novel.

When Charging Elk and Strikes Plenty were boys, they entered one of the gold miners' tunnels, as he says, "one of the *wasichu's* wounds in *maka ina's* breast."[73] When they tell Bird Tail, the "old *pejuta wicasa*," what they had done, he counsels the boys to fast, to ponder what they had done, and to come back the next day; the following morning, Bird Tail shares a dream he had with the boys about a buffalo going into a cave in Paha Sapa, after looking at the world as if to memorize everything that was there:[74]

> It looked for a long time, through the many winters of its ancestors, over the plains and rivers and mountains that they had crossed; it looked at times of good grass and times of hunger; it looked at times of trouble and times of peace. Finally, it looked up into the sky at the sun and its eyes turned as white and hard as polished stone. Then it whirled and entered the cave . . . "You see, the dream I had was of the future. All this time, we have mourned the passing of the buffalo. We thought the sacred hoop was broken when the *wasicuns* came into our country and our people lost their way. But now I have seen that the buffalo are not gone forever; they have only returned to their home deep in the heart of Paha Sapa. There they will remain until the hoop is *wakan* again."[75]

Like Fools Crow's vision, Bird Tail's dream can be loosely read as an example of what Jarold Ramsey calls "retroactive prophecy," defined in his book *Reading the Fire* as "one of a numerous set of Native texts, some mythological and others historical or personal, in which an event or deed in pre-contact times is dramatized as being prophetic of some consequence of the coming of the whites."[76] "Retroactive prophecy" does not discount the very real significance of authentic prophecy in Native cosmologies, but it does allow the perspective of hindsight to be brought to bear on prophecy or invented prophecy.[77] Although strictly speaking Bird Tail's vision of the return of the buffalo is not set in precontact times in the novel, it can be linked to the traditional story about the White Buffalo Cow Woman and to authentic Lakota prophecies about the return to harmony and balance after the birth of a white buffalo calf, and it is conceivable that Welch may be reinscribing these traditional sacred stories in *Heartsong*, just as I argue that he reinscribes Feather Woman's story from the Sun Dance in *Fools Crow*.[78] Bird Tail's dream is also evocative of Black Elk's vision, as Hans Bak notes, "with its promise of the broken sacred hoop made whole again."[79]

Throughout the novel, Charging Elk ponders Bird Tail's dream. After his dream about the Ghost Dance, he thinks of the White Buffalo Cow Woman, who brought the Lakotas their sacred pipe and "the Seven Rites," discussed by Black Elk as "the Keeping of the Soul"; "Inipi: The Rite of Purification" or sweat

lodge; "Hanblecheyapi: Crying for a Vision"; "Wiwanyag Wachipi: The Sun Dance"; "Hunkapi: The Making of Relatives"; "Ishna Ta Awi Cha Lowan: Preparing a Girl for Womanhood"; and "Tapa Wanka Yap: The Throwing of the Ball," "which represents the course of a man's life, which should be spent in trying to get the ball, for the ball represents *Wakan-Tanka*, or the universe."[80] Charging Elk connects this to "Bird Tail's dream of the last buffalo and he thought that it must be roaming deep in the bowels of Paha Sapa, perhaps reproducing itself, perhaps learning new ceremonies from the White Buffalo Cow Woman. Perhaps one day they would emerge, leading a river of the great animals into Lakota country."[81] In the "Teaching Flaming Rainbow" (the 1931 Interviews) section of *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, Black Elk says, "A long time ago (about seventy years) there was an Indian medicine man, Drinks Water, a Lakota, who foretold in a vision that the four-leggeds were going back into the earth."[82] Although it may not necessarily be based on this, the dream/vision that Welch gives to Bird Tail in the novel is somewhat similar in that when the buffalo go back into the earth, it is a vision of despair. After the Massacre at Wounded Knee, Black Elk says in *Black Elk Speaks* that "the nation's hoop is broken and scattered" due to the presence of the *wasichus*.[83] As Neihardt notes, Black Elk prays for his people "that they may once more go back into the sacred hoop and find the good red road, the shielding tree!"[84]

Welch suggests through Bird Tail's dream in the novel that despite the tremendous upheaval that threatens Charging Elk and his people, they are still living in a Lakota mythic world order, which as Ramsey notes, is also a facet of "retroactive prophecy."[85] Bird Tail's dream prophesies that one day the sacred hoop will be made whole again and the buffalo will return; implied in this is that there will be a return to "harmony and balance," which as Allen notes, is the goal of ceremonial or sacred literatures.[86] The novel's allusions to elements of Black Elk's vision, the traditional Lakota stories about the White Buffalo Cow Woman, and prophecies about the birth of a white buffalo calf are also "retroactive" in that Welch, as author, is writing about these things with the perspective of hindsight. As Charging Elk's story suggests on a number of different levels, Welch's vision is one which acknowledges irrevocable change and loss.[87] Charging Elk faces tremendous challenges to his personal and cultural survival and, by metaphoric extension, they represent the difficulties that the Lakotas in America are confronting. Indeed, these challenges to survival are still faced today by Native peoples, and to a considerable extent they still stem from late nineteenth-century governmental programs and policies like the boarding schools and the 1887 General Land Allotment Act, among others. Having the perspective of hindsight, however, Welch is also very much aware that the buffalo have returned, though perhaps not as they once were, that at least one white buffalo calf named Miracle has been born in 1994, that the Lakota people are still practicing the Sun Dance, and that there are concerted efforts to keep alive traditional Lakota cultural values, practices, and language.

In 1995, Joseph Chasing Horse and Paula Giese published an online illustrated account of "White Buffalo Calf Woman Brings the First Pipe," with

the following commentary: "No matter what happens to Miracle in the coming months and years, Joseph Chasing Horse says the birth is a sign from the Great Spirit and the ensuing age of harmony and balance it represents cannot be revoked. That doesn't mean, of course, that the severe trials Native Americans have endured since the arrival of Europeans on these shores are over. Indeed, the Lakota nation mounted the longest court case in U.S. history in an unsuccessful effort to regain control of the Black Hills, the sacred land on which the White Buffalo Calf Woman appeared 2,000 years ago."[88] Still despite their ongoing struggles, Native Americans are heartened by the appearance of a white buffalo in Janesville, and have hope for a harmonious and prosperous future.

In *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, Welch's use of mythic realism, particularly in the form of dreams and visions, spiritually connects Charging Elk to the larger circle of the Lakota people, just as his journey of survival in France metaphorically reflects his people's struggles at home. Through Charging Elk's simultaneously retroactive but prophetic dreams about the Ghost Dance and the Wounded Knee Massacre, Welch places this history of violence against the Lakota people in the mythic dimension alongside of his recollections of Bird Tail's dream about the buffalo's disappearance and his prophecy of their eventual return. Functioning as what Ramsey calls "retroactive prophecy," Bird Tail's dream reinscribes aspects of the Lakota sacred story about the White Buffalo Cow Woman and the prophecies about the birth of a white buffalo calf, and it alludes to Black Elk's vision of the sacred hoop; in so doing, Bird Tail's dream, which encompasses shifts from history to myth to prophecy, offers hope for the collective survival of the Lakota people and culture through the sacred hoop becoming "wakan again."[89]

Notes

1. For accounts of the White Buffalo Cow Woman, see Black Elk and John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); Black Elk and John Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1985); and Joseph Epes Brown, ed., *Black Elk's The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989). There are, of course, other tellings, including one by John Fire Lame Deer in Richard Erdoes and Alphonso Ortiz's *American Indian Myths and Legends* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) and another by Lone Man, in Alan R. Velie's *American Indian Literature: An Anthology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979). I also reference a contemporary telling, which includes commentary and illustrations, posted online; "White Buffalo Calf Woman Brings the First Pipe," 1995, Joseph Chasing Horse and Paula Giese, May 28, 2010, http://www.kstrom.net/isk/arvol/buffpipe.html.
2. See Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in Native American Traditions* (Boston: Beacon, 1986, 1992), 67–69.
3. For more information about "retroactive prophecy," see Jarold Ramsey, *Reading the Fire: Essays in the Traditional Indian Literatures of the Far West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, revised and expanded, 1999), 195.

4. Mary F. Sheldon, "Reaching for a Universal Audience: The Artistry of Leslie Marmon Silko and James Welch," in *Entering the 90s: The North American Experience: Proceedings from the Native American Studies Conference at Lake Superior University, October 27–28, 1989*, ed. Thomas E. Schirer (Sault Ste. Marie: Lake Superior University Press, 1991), 114.
5. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 104.
6. Ibid., 107.
7. Suzanne Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home in James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 2nd ser., 18, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 51.
8. Ibid.
9. James Welch, interview by Kathryn W. Shanley, in *Native American Literature: Boundaries and Sovereignties*, special issue, *Paradoxa* 15 (2001): 17–37.
10. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (New York: Anchor, 2001), 440.
11. Welch, interview by Shanley, 31.
12. Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home," 38.
13. James J. Donahue, "A World Away from His People": James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and the Indian Historical Novel," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 2nd ser., 18, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 54–82.
14. Ibid., 76.
15. Ulla Haselstein, "Double Translation: James Welch's *Heartsong of the Charging Elk*," in *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*, ed. Elvira Pulitano (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 245.
16. Andrea Optiz, "A Haunted Nation: Cultural Narratives and the Persistence of the Indigenous Subject in James Welch's *Heartsong of the Charging Elk*," in *All Our Stories are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature*, ed. Brady Harrison (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 168.
17. Ibid.
18. See Christine Lesiak, David G. McCullough, WGBH (Television Station: Boston, MA), WNET (Television Station: New York, NY), KCET (Television Station: Los Angeles, CA, Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium, Nebraska Educational Television Network, PBS Video, *In the White Man's Image*, video recording (Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1991) for information about the performance of Hiawatha at the boarding schools. See Hans Bak, "Tribal or Transnational? Memory, History, and Identity in James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*," in *Transnational American Memories*, ed. Udo Hebel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 110, for a more in-depth discussion of the ways in which the Wild West Show and Charging Elk's participation in it reflects "the colonizer's version" of history.
19. Lesiak, *In the White Man's Image*.
20. Ibid.
21. Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867–1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 222–24.
22. Lesiak, *In the White Man's Image*. See Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 57, for a list of the major boarding schools and their founding dates.
23. See Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 156–63, for a detailed discussion of "The Outing Program." This is also discussed in Lesiak, *In the White Man's Image*.
24. This point has been readily observed by critics and readers, and it is discussed in a number of texts. In A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, "Images of Europe in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* and James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*," in

Sites of Ethnicity: Europe and the Americas, ed. William Belhower (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2004), 194, Ruoff discusses the ways in which René Soulas and Marie Colet exoticize Charging Elk. Also see Joseph Coulombe, "Writing for Connection: Cross Cultural Understandings in James Welch's Historical Fiction," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 2nd ser., 20, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 1–28, in which Coulombe discusses this in conjunction with Breteuil.

25. Ruoff notes that Welch had told her "that there was a similar murder in Marseille, which the resident of that city who guided him called to Welch's attention. An Indian, however, did not commit the original murder" (190). Ruoff, "Images of Europe," 190.
26. Haselstein also notes that "Charging Elk's stays in prison equals Indian life on reservations." Haselstein, "Double Translation," 245.
27. This is discussed in Lesiak, *In the White Man's Image*. Adams also alludes to this when he says that "superintendents were permitted to inflict corporal punishment and even to imprison students in the guardhouse." Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 121.
28. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 432.
29. Ibid., 114.
30. See also Haselstein, "Double Translation," 245.
31. Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home," 41.
32. Bak, "Tribal or Transnational?," 110. In Optiz, "A Haunted Nation," 178, the author cites a 2007 online review, which I could not access, in which Suzanne Methot also argues that "Charging Elk's exile 'has ensured his perpetual Lakota-ness' and that, in fact, he is the 'only true Lakota left in the world' because he has escaped the influence of 'reservation life and residential schools.'"
33. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 67.
34. Ibid., 202.
35. Ibid., 204.
36. See also Coulombe, "Writing for Connection," 13.
37. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977), 126.
38. Coulombe, "Writing for Connection," 14–16.
39. Ibid., 14–15.
40. Lori Burlingame, "Empowerment through 'Retroactive Prophecy' in D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun: A Story of Indian Maize*, James Welch's *Fools Crow*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1–18. See also Coulombe, "Writing for Connection," 14–15.
41. Charging Elk's dreams are readily recognized by readers and critics as signifying the Ghost Dance and the Massacre at Wounded Knee. Among the critics who have commented on this are Ruoff, "Images of Europe," 179–98; Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home," 34–53; Haselstein, "Double Translation," 225–48; Donahue, "A World Away from His People," 54–82; Coulombe, "Writing for Connection," 1–28; and Bak, "Tribal or Transnational," 105–27.
42. James Welch, *Fools Crow* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 17–18.
43. Deloria, *Waterlily* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 44–47.
44. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 128.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 235.
47. See also Haselstein, "Double Translation," 242; and Bak, "Tribal or Transnational?," 120.
48. Haselstein, "Double Translation," 240–41.
49. Lesiak, *In the White Man's Image*.
50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.
52. This discussion of the novel comes from Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 209. Haselstein, "Double Translation," 234, also comments on the ways in which Charging Elk's intuitive perceptions of Breteuil support his "mythological understanding of the world . . . It is a significant moment in which the epistemological foundation of the realist novel is appropriated and absorbed by Native American myth, investing Charging Elk's perception with moral authority."
53. Bak, "Tribal or Transnational?," 120. Bak cites Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 243.
54. Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home," 41.
55. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 235.
56. Ibid., 436.
57. Haselstein, "Double Translation," 244.
58. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 420.
59. Ruoff, "Images of Europe," 195.
60. Ibid. Ruoff cites Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Literary Criticism: What Is the Future of the Native American Novel," *Ikce Wicasta: The Common People Journal* 4, no. 12 (Winter 2001): 7.
61. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12. See also Donahue, "A World Away from His People," 59–60; and Coulombe, "Writing for Connection," 12, 25.
62. Ruoff, "Images of Europe," 196.
63. Haselstein, "Double Translation," 245.
64. Georgi-Findlay, "Transatlantic Crossings: New Directions in the Contemporary American Novel," in *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*, ed. Elvira Pulitano (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 100.
65. Ferguson, "Europe and the Quest for Home," 49.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 38.
68. Welch, interview by Shanley, 29.
69. Welch, *Fools Crow*, 390. I also discuss some of these issues in conjunction with *Fools Crow* in my essay "Empowerment through 'Retroactive Prophecy.'"
70. Dexter Westrum, "James Welch's *Fools Crow*," *San Jose Studies* 14 (1988): 49–58, 53; Welch, *Fools Crow*, 390.
71. Welch, *Fools Crow*, 391; Burlingame, "Empowerment through 'Retroactive Prophecy,'" 4–7.
72. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 435.
73. Ibid., 127.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ramsey, *Reading the Fire*, 195.
77. Ibid.; Burlingame, "Empowerment through 'Retroactive Prophecy,'" 1.
78. Burlingame, "Empowerment through 'Retroactive Prophecy,'" 6–7.
79. Bak, "Tribal or Transnational?," 116. Bak cites Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 127–28.
80. Brown, ed., *Black Elk's The Sacred Pipe*, 127. The list of the "Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux" is also taken from this text. In his more contemporary telling, "White Buffalo Calf Woman Brings the First Pipe," Joseph Chasing Horse lists the "seven sacred ceremonies" (2) brought by the White Buffalo Calf Woman as the sweat lodge or purification, child naming, healing, making relatives or adoption, marriage, vision quest, and Sun Dance, "the people's ceremony for all of the nation" (2).

81. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 129.
82. Black Elk and Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather*, 290.
83. Black Elk and Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 270.
84. Ibid., 274.
85. Ramsey, *Reading the Fire*, 195.
86. Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 55.
87. I also make this argument about *Fools Crow* in "Empowerment through 'Retroactive Prophecy,'" 6–7.
88. Chasing Horse, "White Buffalo Calf Woman Brings the First Pipe," 3–4.
89. Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 127.

CHAPTER 9

Blood Re(a)d

Native American Literature and the Emergence of the Mythic Real

Allison E. Brown

> Culminating with *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne constructs a white America with a blood-red Indian legacy at its heart. That legacy may be blood-stained and horror-filled, but for Hawthorne it is also a treasure.
>
> —Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny*[1]

Nathaniel Hawthorne isn't the only one. Hawthorne evokes the figure of the spectral Native American by associating his primary characters with Indians; Hester Prynne and her daughter, Pearl, are two of the most recognizable characters from one of the most recognizable books in the American literary canon, and their characterizations stem as much from their percieved association with"Indianness" as they do from Hester's blood-red "A." Throughout the novel, Hawthorne subtly connects Hester and Pearl to notions of vanishing and otherworldly "Indianness" to emphasize their outsider status and their liminal space on the edges, literally and figuratively, of Puritan society.[2] Like Hawthorne, other early American writers repeatedly invoke images of spectral, supernaturally evil, or eerily vanishing Native Americans in writings ranging from sermons, to political speeches, to personal narratives, and to fiction and poetry. These images appear in early American writings written from within the Euro-American mainstream and even from some that were written outside of it. While many early American writers include references to Native American characters or cultures in their works, several notable writers from America's infancy and adolescence use the idea of the ghostly or otherworldly Indian explicitly, and often repeatedly. In addition to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Mary Rowlandson, and the poet Philip Freneau all build their now-canonical texts on the idea of Indian magic, evil, wildness, and ghostliness. Similarly, James Fenimore

Cooper relies on the relegation of Native Americans to the past; his *The Last of the Mohicans* is predicated, famously, on the notion of a romanticized dying race. In a slightly different but not wholly unrelated manner, Rowlandson repeatedly and explicitly juxtaposes her own expressions of Puritan piety against language that describes Native Americans as other than human by referring to them as "ravenous beasts" and "barbarous creatures" whose "roaring" made their camp "a lively resemblance of hell."[3] Irving builds "The Devil and Tom Walker" on the idea of the Judeo/Christian Devil's supernatural ownership and stewardship of a fort that had previously belonged to Native Americans, and that had, in fact, been the "last foothold of the Indian warriors" before their violent yet seemingly inevitable deaths.[4] Philip Freneau also structures a text around the mythical demise of unnamed but eerie and ever-present Indians; his poem "The Indian Burying Ground" includes references to ghostly Native "shadows" who "chide the man that lingers" on their hallowed ground.[5] William Apess, the United States' first bona fide Native American writer, also uses these images in his *A Son of the Forest* even as his text attempts to resist Indian marginalization.[6] His terminology is particularly chilling; he describes his boyhood fears of other Indians as fears of "tale[s] of blood."[7]

The characterizations of Native Americans in much of American literature are indeed tales of blood; Indians are usually presented as long-dead peoples who exist only in the murky depths of the American psyche, while those who are still alive are presented as tragically endangered. This literary image of the violently ghostly, supernatural, or otherwise otherworldly Indian has spread into US national culture from our literary culture; children tell ghost stories about Indian burial grounds, and when these same children play cowboys and Indians, they never need to discuss which participant—the cowboy or the Indian—wins and which one dies. It is understood, even among children, that Native Americans are to be symbolically relegated to a liminal space somewhere between the tangible world and the invisible world. Whereas the violence of Native American colonization and removal are well known and widely acknowledged, the violence of our national literature, which for many years treated Native American genocide as a fait accompli, is less widely acknowledged.

Renée L. Bergland asserts that these violent images functioned in early American literature as one of the ways in which European America characterized Native Americans as (terminally) passé in order to solidify its own nascent nationalism. Though these images are already noteworthy because they helped engender the formation of a US national canon, they gain additional significance when they are analyzed in light of similar images in later eras of US literature. As the accounts of European colonial expeditions and the Puritan jeremiads of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries progressed into the fiction and poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, something began to happen to these violent, ghostly, and magical images; Native American writers themselves started using them, and using them judiciously and trenchantly, in order to address the American national psyche using its own heavily mythological language. This reorientation of supernatural imagery by contemporary Native American authors

is a noteworthy shift; in the hands of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Native American writers, this mode of writing becomes less and less a tool for US literary nationalism. However, what the mode of writing is becoming instead is still largely undefined. There is, in short, a crisis of categorization affecting—we might even say 'haunting'—Native American literature. This categorical crisis began early in US literary history, and is currently being remade into a politicized tool of resistance in the works of several Native American writers, especially when those works feature magic, myth, or the invisible world.

This crisis of categorization is a problem that troubles anyone who approaches contemporary Native American literature. Whether a reader approaches with an eye for scholarship or purely for enjoyment, the images we expect to find in Native American literature are ingrained deep within our national culture. While many twenty-first-century Native American writers may bristle at the scholarly obsession with classification, and might take similar umbrage at potentially patronizing terms like "haunt" or "crisis" to discuss American Indian literature, many scholars nevertheless continue to discuss Native American writing as a categorical anomaly, as something that is wholly indivisible from the ethnicity of its writers or its main characters. Because of this history of the ghostly Indian, the literary community in general tends to neglect the issues of a text's genre, structure, theme, mode, and sometimes even its time and place of origin, in favor of a more convenient but ultimately less literary and less precise mode of inquiry. Thus this crisis of categorization affects the way readers and scholars receive, evaluate, and ultimately come to interact with and understand Native American literature.

This problem has been evident to critics from across decades and even across continents. Likewise, the problem remains evident in the very language we appropriate, and even in the language we *create*, to address the Native American literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Scandinavian Americanist Bo Schöler wrote in his 1985 article titled "Mythic Realism in Native American Literature" that "a unique quality characterizes Native American literature."[8] He then noted that the quality is sometimes explicitly thematic, while it is sometimes "just a feeling one is left with."[9] Similarly, Stephen F. Evans refers to the "imaginative literary realism" of Sherman Alexie's portrayals of Native Americans in Alexie's early writings.[10] Evan's article was published in 2001, a full 16 years after Schöler's article, yet both articles use the same language of uncertainty to address the styles of different Native American authors. Using these examples, we can note that, while we might use terms such as *magical realism*, *religious imagery*, or even *figurative language* when dealing with literatures that hail from non-Native ethnic or social circumstances, we tend to turn to language that is more vague, less accessible, and ultimately less accurate when we deal with Native American writings.

Another Americanist, Andrew Dix, presents a possible rationale for this use of uncertain language; he begins his discussion of Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* with a quote from critic Gerald Vizenor in 1989.[11] This might seem anachronous given that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

was first published in 1993. This ostensible chronological misstep makes sense, however, in light of Dix's analysis of the quote; Dix quotes Vizenor in order to bring to attention several prominent "paradigms" in the study of Native American literature.[12] According to Vizenor, "Claude Levi-Strauss and Alan Dundes have been cited more than Mikhail Bakhtin or Jean-François Lyotard in critical studies of tribal literature in the past decade."[13] Another way of stating this is to assert that tribal literature has been treated more as part of a sociological or anthropological exercise than as *literature*. While it is true that Native American literature, like all literatures, emerges from a specific cultural time and space, this cultural space exists in conjunction with the literary aspects of a text. While Dix notes that many contemporary Native writers are now read "under the sign of the postmodern," Dix still posits that the tendency to view Indian literature as social science persists.[14]

Dix is correct; rather than reading and discussing these texts *as texts* whose authors are members of specific ethnic groups, or as *texts* that may or may not address a particular set of issues, critics tend to overlook many textual or political implications of these works in order to search for a mystical and romanticized past that is wholly beyond the realm of traditional Western understanding. This dangerously essentialist reading expects American Indian authors either to reinforce or debunk racial stereotypes or to address a rather limited group of predetermined and sufficiently "tribal" topics. This reading is problematic in a number of ways. On the one hand, Native American authors are already writing as members of—and products of—the American literary tradition. That this tradition has relied on violence against Indians since its very inception means that Native literary voices are already encumbered by a long history of misuse, marginalization, and erasure. That these voices are simultaneously expected to address only a narrow set of issues and themes is a double bind; it adds insult to injury. Even so, a number of Native American authors manage to write within this tradition despite the essentialist limitations placed on them, and one of the ways they do so is by employing the very notions of Native otherworldliness that have previously been used against them. Their writings address "tribal" topics and often use archetypes of magical Indianness, but they do so in such a way that their texts reorient rhetorical power; writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, and Sherman Alexie use tropes of Indian magic, ghostliness, and myth within the context of a myth-based and culturally inscribed mode of writing.

Perhaps this mythic narrative mode is the distinctive and seemingly indefinable quality that so many readers have noticed. Likewise, as we discuss this particular vein of literary realism, perhaps we should eschew the language of uncertainty and adopt a term that acknowledges both the cultural *and* the literary specificity of this type of realism in recent Native American writings. I posit that we adopt *mythic realism*, the term Bo Schöler presents in his essay "Mythic Realism in Native American Literature," but I offer that that we define the term in such a way that the term encompasses three aspects of Indian literary presentation as they have materialized throughout US literary history: the cultural, the historical, and the narrative. The term *mythic realism* does just this; it takes into account

both the cultural origins *and* the distinct literary and narrative elements of a text while simultaneously recognizing that the mythic realism of today is the natural evolution of—and Native American response to—the tales of Indian blood upon which so much US literature is predicated. Whereas various American authors have, throughout centuries, relied on notions of Native American death, magic, and supernatural spectrality, contemporary Native American authors are using this expectation of otherworldliness and reorienting it to express tribal, political, *and* literary concerns. To recognize the term *Native American mythic realism* is, in effect, to recognize that representations of the magical or invisible world in contemporary Indian writings are part and parcel of the long association of Native Americans with imaginative realities in US literature. Yet, while images of Native Americans may have been used (or misused) as nationalist fodder in earlier eras of American literature, the contemporary use of the *mythic* realist mode allows Native writers to harness these images, to place them within a specific cultural landscape, and, ultimately, to situate them within a larger *magical* realist literary project that reasserts Native sovereignty and highlights Native voices.

Before we explore the ways in which writings by three Native American writers use aspects of the mythic real, we must first explore both this term and its kinship relation to the magical realist mode. While the term *magical realism* is well known within literary criticism, it is often misapplied. Its broadness as a term and its well-documented popularity among writers from across the postcolonial and neocolonial worlds combine to create a categorical cacophony that requires organization. Wendy B. Faris clarifies that magical realism must contain an "irreducible element" of magic and that this "irreducible element goes beyond the uncanny, which . . . exists as an incidental element in various kinds of narrative."[15] Faris later explains another characteristic of the magical realist mode, noting "[a] second characteristic of magical realism is that its descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world. This is the realism in magical realism, distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory."[16] With this statement, Faris underscores that for a text to be considered an example of magical realism, the text must exhibit both magic *and* realism.

The definition of a Native American mythic realist text is similarly specific. While a magical realist text must contain an "irreducible element" of magic, a Native American mythic realist text must contain an irreducible element of *myth*. This mythic element might be recognizable as an aspect of cosmological or religious truth to the writer and to those who share his or her cultural worldview, but readers who approach the text from outside of this worldview will only be able to approach it—at least initially—as myth. In other words, mythic realism, like magical realism, must move "beyond the uncanny," to borrow another of Faris's phrases.[17] Whereas earlier American writings rely on presentations of the supernatural Indian in order to create narratives that are unsettling and mysterious, twentieth- and twenty-first-century Native American mythic realism transcends this uncanniness by using specific and culturally inscribed mythic scenarios *in conjunction with* an objective presentation of reality that is easily recognizable to readers from the cultural mainstream. These mythic scenarios do not necessarily

need to be ancient, oral traditions in order to be considered mythic. Sherman Alexie, for example, relies in several of his works on the legendary figures of rock stars, bluesmen, and storied military generals as part of his mythic presentations. These figures are not derived from ancient creation stories or from generations of cultural tradition, yet they are nevertheless mythic; they have passed into our cultural lore and represent ideas that are larger and more nuanced than the individuals—the generals and musicians—could have been during their lifetimes.

This movement beyond the literary trope of the Native American uncanny is a gargantuan literary achievement. The idea of a permanently "wild" Indian who occupies a liminal space between the past and the present, and the visible and invisible worlds, is deeply entrenched in US culture. In drawing out this largely unexamined aspect of contemporary American literature, a brief lesson in the politics of semantics is in order. As Paula Gunn Allen notes, the term *myth* has different connotations in mainstream American culture than it does in many Native American cultures. She explains that "it is difficult if not impossible at the present time to speak coherently about myth because the term has become so polluted by popular misuse. Yet no discussion of American Indian literature is complete without an examination of what mythic narrative and the concept of myth itself mean in a tribal context."[18] Allen then explains at length the detrimental denotations and connotations of the term *myth*:

> Popularly among Americans, *myth* is synonymous with *lie*; moreover, it implies ignorance or a malicious intent to defraud. Thus, any attitude or idea that does not conform to contemporary western descriptions of reality is termed myth, signifying falsehood. Labeling something a myth merely discredits the perceptual system and worldview of those who are not in accord with the dominating paradigm. Thus, current dictionary definitions of *myth* reinforce a bias that enables the current paradigm of our technocratic social science-biased society to prevail over tribal or poetic views just as it enables an earlier Christian biblical paradigm to prevail over the pagan one. Indeed, terms such as *pagan*, *tribal*, and *poetic*—often used interchangeably—imply ignorance, backwardness, and foolishness. They allow dismissal by western readers, just as their allied term, *myth*, does.[19]

Given the negative implications associated with the term *myth*, readers of magical realism might be inclined to dismiss all Native American texts that are based on myth or the invisible world as disposable or irredeemably insular. Thus it is possibly this destructive understanding of the term *myth* that is responsible for the reluctance to categorize Native American mythic writings, and for the reluctance to view Native American mythic realism as related to magical realism.

While myth is not used in a pejorative way here, and several Native American magical realist texts do rely specifically on indigenous myth, the presence of myth alone does not mean that text should be considered mythic realist. Leslie Marmon Silko incorporates tribal myth into her writing perhaps more than any other prominent Native American author, yet even within her works, readers should distinguish between literature and the presentations or explanations of myth. Her retelling of several Yellow Woman/Kochininako stories, for example,

should not be considered magical realist or mythic realist literature. Her versions of these stories appear in her book of essays titled *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*, and, while the essay form alone should be enough to distinguish these retellings of tribal myth from the mythic realist literary mode, there are still several aspects of these myths that classify them squarely *as myths* and not as magical or mythic realist literature. During one retelling, Silko states that Yellow Woman meets and falls in love with Buffalo Man, who can transform himself from a human to a buffalo "in the wink of an eye."[20] Silko then explains that, because of the liaison between Buffalo Man and Yellow Woman, "the Buffalo People agree to give their bodies to the hunters to feed the starving Pueblo. Thus Kochininako's fearless sensuality results in the salvation of the people of her village, who are saved by the meat the Buffalo People 'give' to them."[21]

While Buffalo Man's transformation from a human into a buffalo is undoubtedly a magical and mythic act, it should not be considered magical realism or mythic realism because it appears here solely within the bounds of cultural myth. Had this transformation from a human to an animal occurred during the course of a piece of literature such as a novel, a short story, or a poem, this instance of anthropomorphic transformation could certainly be viewed as a mythic realist moment within the text. However, Silko explains this Laguna Pueblo cultural myth *as myth* and within the bounds of a nonfiction essay. The myth is called a "story" even within the bounds of the essay, and is thus firmly removed from the mythic realist mode, regardless of whether or not it seems natural to the author.[22]

Readers of this essay might be struck by the differences between the essay and Silko's fictional works. While Silko's novel *Ceremony* incorporates Laguna Pueblo belief systems and myths, including Yellow Woman, Thought Woman, and Spider Grandmother, the novel is presented to readers as literature, as opposed to myth or nonfiction, and the mythic threads exist throughout the novel alongside decidedly realist depictions of events. While *Ceremony* is not as obviously magical realist as other Native American literary works (and, indeed, some might argue that the text does not adhere at all to the magical realist mode), the myths in the novel are of an obviously different breed than the Yellow Woman myth retold here, if for no other reason than that the myths around which Silko builds *Ceremony* are contained within a piece of creative literature and not a nonfiction or anthropological form.

As *Ceremony* demonstrates, it is possible for a specific cultural worldview *and* a specific literary mode to coexist in a piece of writing. Readers can see both the mythic realist mode and cultural factors at play in Louise Erdrich's story cycle, *Love Medicine*. As Karen Castellucci Cox notes, "We find such 'fabrications' coexisting in contemporary story cycles with conventional fictional elements—the fantastic conjoined with the credible, the ghostly with the corporeal, dream with reality. Interestingly, supernatural manifestations often coincide with the inexplicable breaks in the text, so that their appearance is forewarned, occurring at a textual point which already signals narrative disorientation and breakdown of

genre."[23] These "fabrications" are the magical or mythic elements of an otherwise realistic text, elements that, at least in Erdrich's story cycle, originate from and speak to a Native American cultural worldview that necessarily incorporates what mainstream culture would call "myth" into notions of reality.

Cox devotes her article to an analysis of the story cycle genre as it is used by two women writers. As such, her discussion focuses more on genre and gender than on the mythic elements of Erdrich's text. Yet, within her analysis of form, Cox addresses the supernatural facets inherent in *Love Medicine* itself and within the story cycle genre as a whole. This genre (which Alexie also uses in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, another Native American mythic realist text that will be discussed later in this essay) lends itself quite readily to both the magical realist and mythic realist modes. Throughout *Love Medicine*, "Erdrich insert[s] into the open-ended story cycle 'magical' episodes that we can perceive as giving shape to a revised historical consciousness."[24] One such "magical episode" occurs in the first story in the cycle, titled "The World's Greatest Fishermen." This story details the last day before the death of June Kashpaw. The story itself is separated into three sections, and only the first section deals explicitly with June's life and death; the other two sections focus on June's niece, Albertine, and her reaction to her aunt's passing.

During the first section, the third-person narrator describes the impoverished June's interactions with a man at a roadside bar. June is on her way to visit the family home on a Chippewa reservation and is waiting for her bus to arrive. The man at the bar flirts with June and she does not rebuff his advances. Readers come to understand that June is accustomed to coping with advances from strange men; the narrator explains that "the last of the money that the man before this one had given [June] was spent for the ticket. She didn't know exactly when she'd eaten last."[25] From this passage, readers learn not only the June is almost destitute, but also that she acquires much of her meager income through encounters with men. This economically enforced friendliness toward men is one of the primary reasons for June's family's decidedly unemotional reaction to her death. In the second and third sections of the story, June's family reacts with nonchalance, and at times with mild hostility, to the news of June's death. Albertine learns of June's death through a letter that states, "We knew you probably couldn't get away from your studies for the funeral . . . so we never bothered to call and disturb you."[26] Similarly, the family never "bothered" to ascertain the exact reasons for June's demise; they argue over the circumstances of her death, with one relative asserting that "there was bruises" and another family member arguing, "Wasn't either. You never saw her."[27] Still another relative counters that she "heard [June] was with a man and he dumped her off."[28] The irreverence with which this family discusses June's death is at odds with the first section of the story, wherein her death is described in terms of "the traditional Chippewa" understanding of death, an understanding that maintains that dead people do not die so much as they undertake "the long walk home to the village where all the dead are reunited, where they eat, gamble, love, and thrive."[29]

Albertine rebels against her family's nonchalant and demeaning notions of June's death by imagining, or rather envisioning, her aunt's walk "home." Albertine's idea of June's death is the same as the version that is told during the first section of the story. This section ends by describing June's awkward and impersonal sexual encounter with the man from the bar, after which the narrator tells us that June leaves the man asleep and is unsure "whether she was more drunk or more sober than she'd ever been in her life."[30] June begins walking through a severe snowstorm but is miraculously unharmed and unhindered by the weather; the narrator describes her "death" both in realistic and supernatural terms:

> Her boots were thin. So she stepped on dry ground where she could and avoided the slush and rotten, gray banks. It was exactly as if she were walking back from a fiddle dance or a friend's house . . . She crossed the wide fields swinging her purse, stepping carefully to keep her feet dry. Even when it started to snow she did not lose her sense of direction. Her feet grew numb, but she did not worry about the distance. The heavy winds couldn't blow her off course. She continued. Even when her heart clenched and her skin turned crackling cold it didn't matter, because the pure and naked part of her went on. The snow fell deeper that Easter than it had in forty years, but June walked over it like water and came home."[31]

The use of the phrase *came home* rather than *went home* could be confusing for some readers, especially as readers know that June is on her way to her family's house before her death. The story's interchangeably realist and mythic realist descriptions of June's journey and body could be similarly confusing if this passage is read outside of *either* a mythic realist context or the context of a traditional Chippewa worldview. Without an understanding of Chippewa culture, the idea that June "came home" through a deadly snowstorm even after her heart stopped and her skin became cold is almost nonsensical. Likewise, the notion that June was miraculously able to withstand the storm's strong winds and to navigate her way homeward through this wind and snow would be difficult for readers to believe unless the word *home* is understood in a mythic sense. June's almost messianic ability to walk over the snow "like water" adds a simultaneously religious and mythic realist overtone to this passage.[32] That June is able to continue walking after her body presumably dies adheres to the tenets both of Chippewa tradition and the mythic realist understanding of textuality. June's walk home is spiritual and traditional; it is also supernatural, ghostly, and mythic.

While this essay argues that certain pieces of Native American literature can and should be categorized as both Native American *and* magical realist, the authors themselves might not agree. Louise Erdrich has expressed her dissatisfaction with the label, as Karen Castellucci Cox notes in her article "Magic and Memory in the Contemporary Story Cycle: Gloria Naylor and Louise Erdrich."[33] Cox briefly, and dismissively, addresses the possibility that some of the stories in Erdrich's *Love Medicine* are written in the magical realist mode with her assertion that "it has become convenient for critics to label these disruptive features 'magical realism' though the authors themselves may resist such a swift cataloging. Erdrich argues that the events people select from her books as magical 'don't seem

unreal to me . . . the term [magical realism] is one applied to writers from cultures more closely aligned to religious oddities and to the natural and strange world.'"[34]

Despite Cox's and even Erdrich's claims that magical realism is absent from *Love Medicine*, aspects of the mode are nevertheless present; Erdrich's assertion that these instances seem "natural" to her may indicate that she did not *intend* to write in the magical realist mode, but it does not confirm nor deny the presence of the mode (or a cousin category of the mode) in her writing. Similarly, her assertion that the natural world *is* strange would seem to align her writing to a magical or mythic realist modality. The worldview of her work often links the natural (some might call it the real) with the strange, which readers might know as the magical, the mythic, or the otherworldly. That Erdrich sees these mythic or strange aspects of her writing as "integral" to her worldview "even if another cultural perspective labels them as impossible" adds to the notion that the particular realism of Erdrich's works and the works of other contemporary Native American authors demands a new and specific understanding of these realities.[35] In her article, Cox uses the word "mythic" in reference to works by African American writer Gloria Naylor, but not in reference to Erdrich's works.[36] Yet Erdrich's disavowal of the magical realist label despite her texts' prismatic representations of reality requires that readers create new language for the new cultural spaces these texts present; the term *magical realism* may be aligned with "religious oddities," but the term *mythic realism* is aligned squarely with the suprarealities found in *Love Medicine*.

Literature like Erdrich's that is not written entirely within a Western, Eurocentric discourse could be called magical realist because, according to this hegemonic Western discourse, it is. In other words, to the people whose worldviews are not the same as the author's, and by extension, to the people to whom these methods of storytelling *do not* seem natural, magical realism becomes a convenient, though not adequately specific, umbrella term. The convenience of this umbrella term in relation to Native American literature is, admittedly, non-Native centric—that is, it is convenient for those who read the reality presented in these texts as suprareality, but it is not convenient for those whose worldviews allow them to read these texts as plausibly realistic or as part of their existing realities. Some might argue that such a use of the term is hegemonic, racist, or even neocolonialist. These arguments have some merit, yet the expansion of the American canon to include multicultural works and writers relies on this very idea of convenient literary classification; the expansion of the American canon to include works by culturally diverse writers relies on redefining the category of *American*. When non-Native readers encounter a Native text—just as when non-Asian American readers, for example, encounter an Asian American text—these readers must approach the text from places that are already knowable and culturally comfortable. Non-Native readers cannot approach a Native text with a complete understanding of and familiarity with the particular Native worldview presented in the text, so these readers approach a text from their own cultural space until *the text itself* guides readers into its reality. In this way, an approach to Native texts that appears, at first glance, to be an exercise in

recolonization becomes, instead, a tool of *decolonization*; it becomes the tool through which the subaltern speaks, and speaks in his or her own terminology, to the dominant culture.

Erdrich's uneasiness with the magical realist mode aside, her use of the English language, and her inclusion of Western realism along with traditional Chippewa beliefs, speaks to the inherent postcoloniality of her work. Likewise her inclusion of apparently mythic episodes, regardless of whether they are magical or natural to her, argues for the categorization of her work as mythic realist. Cox locates the explanation for the inclusion of these mythic episodes in the story cycle genre. "The juxtaposition," she explains, "of *Love Medicine's* first section, June's story, with the second section, the malicious story told about her, urges the reader to author June homeward in the Chippewa tradition, so that we too resist with Albertine the second story and its stereotypes to embrace a constellation of memories June's loved ones can offer up to point her homeward."[37] While this understanding of the story cycle genre is compelling, it ignores the magical or mythic realist impulses of Erdrich's text. Cox seems to agree that tribal tradition alone cannot explain this section of the story. After all, as Silko's nonfiction retellings of the Yellow Woman myths make clear, the presence of myth or ritual alone within a piece of writing does not necessarily influence the categorization, mode, or genre of that piece of writing. Perhaps the story cycle genre *is* partially responsible for the depiction of June's death in the story. Yet, however much the genre of the story is responsible for its depiction of June's death, surely the mythic realist mode is equally as responsible. It is the mode and not the genre that allows readers to simultaneously understand that June has both died and gone home, and that her body, though dead, is still mobile and is guided by a supernatural sense of direction. While the story cycle genre may be important to Erdrich's text, and while the Chippewa worldview is certainly integral, the mythic realist mode is also represented here.

Silko and Erdrich are not the only Native American writers to incorporate both traditional tribal and Euro-American imagery into mythic realist fiction and nonfiction. Alexie compliments the aesthetic power of mainstream American musical genres and lauds non-Indian historical figures throughout his novel *Reservation Blues*. Similarly, he integrates the US justice system and American military history into his story cycle, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. There are two stories in Alexie's story cycle that merit analysis in any discussion of Native American mythic realism. "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" and "Distances" are connected not only because they are parts of the same story cycle, but also because the first story directly engenders the second story. The last line of "The Trial" is "Thomas closed his eyes and told this story."[38] The reader is then forced to turn the page to discover that the story Thomas told is, in fact, "Distances," the next story in the cycle. In this way, "Distances" is both connected to and separate from "The Trial." While the interconnectedness of stories within a story cycle is the most notable facet of the form, Alexie treats this interconnectedness differently than Louise Erdrich. Erdrich's stories are interconnected because they all tell the stories of members of the same family, yet Alexie's stories

interconnect in a more direct, metafictional way. Whereas Erdrich could hypothetically exclude a story from *Love Medicine* without damaging the other stories in the cycle, "The Trial" must necessarily be followed by "Distances" in order for the first story to have a viable denouement. While both of these stories contain traces of the magical realist mode, there are clearly areas through which their adherence to the mode could be called into question. Through framing the second story, "Distances," within the logic of the first story, one could argue that the elements of magic in the second story are not magical at all but all are, rather, fictional even within the bounds of a piece of short fiction. In other words, because the first story gives rise to the second story, and because a speaker in the first story is named as the storyteller of the second, one could argue that the elements of magic in "Distances" are not irreducible but are, rather, in keeping with the metafictional aspects of the story.

Nevertheless, despite these questions regarding the presence of the *magical* realist mode in "Distances," there are several aspects of the story that fit within the *mythic* realist mode. "Distances" is set in a postapocalyptic world. This world is postapocalyptic either because of a worldwide disaster such as a nuclear meltdown, or, as the narrator of the story suggests, "because the Ghost Dance finally worked"[39] The Ghost Dance to which Alexie's narrator refers is the Ghost Dance religion that rose to prominence within Native American communities in the late nineteenth century. Alexie begins "Distances" with a long quote attributed to Wovoka, the Paiute holy man who preached the Ghost Dance gospel. Alexie calls him "the Paiute Ghost Dance Messiah."[40]

This messiah also went by the name of Jack Wilson.[41] He preached that if enough Indians danced the Ghost Dance religion, "the great expression of faith and love would sweep evil from the earth, renewing its goodness in every form, from youth and health to abundant food."[42] This religion also had a destructive bent to it; one of the facets of the religion was that if the Ghost Dance were successful, the Earth as we know it would be destroyed and a new, Indian, more harmonious civilization would replace white civilization. Wovoka also taught that the spirits of Indians who had "passed into the afterlife" would join the living if enough Indians danced the new religion.[43] While some scholars have countered that this religion was not new but was, rather, a combination of traditional Native American beliefs and prophetic Christian beliefs, the galvanizing religious and political effects of the Ghost Dance religion on many different tribes is well documented.[44]

Sherman Alexie's inclusion of the Ghost Dance in "Distances" is one of several supernatural and destructive elements of the story. In the quote that Alexie's narrator attributes to Wovoka, the preacher states,

> All dead Indians come back and live again. Old blind Indian see again and get young and have fine time. When Great Spirit comes this way, then all the Indians go to mountains, high up away from whites. Whites can't hurt Indians then. Then while Indians way up high big flood comes like water and all white people die, get drowned. After that, water go away and then nobody but Indians everywhere and

> game all kinds thick . . . Indians who don't dance, who don't believe in this word, will grow little, just about a foot high, and stay that way. Some of them will be turned into wood and burned in fire.[45]

Whereas Wovoka's prophecy is religious and therefore mythic, several other aspects of "Distances" do not rely on this religion at all. A notable mythic realist moment in the text is the instance in which Tremble Dancer, the narrator's lover, is taken away by a member of the tribe. This man "brought her back with a big belly. She smelled of salt, old blood. She gave birth, salmon flopped from her, salmon growing larger. When she died, her hands bled seawater from the palms."[46] This depiction of a monstrous or magical birth mirrors an earlier birth in the text during which a woman gives birth to a "monster."[47] While this first monstrous birth could be attributed to radiation poisoning given the possibility within the story of a nuclear holocaust, the salmon that Tremble Dancer births cannot be attributed to any naturally occurring or human-made phenomena. In this way, readers who do not consider "Distances" to be a metafictional continuation of the previous story could categorize it as mythic realism. While the order of the stories and Alexie's story cycle may cause some readers to believe that "Distances" is merely a continuation of "The Trial," the two stories are, at least according to the form and genre of the book, supposedly separate and distinct.

The mythic realist mode is utilized quite differently in "The Trial" than it is in "Distances." The title character in this story is a prolific storyteller. The narrative explains, in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner that Thomas had "once held the reservation postmaster hostage for eight hours with the idea of a gun and had also threatened to make significant changes to the tribal vision."[48] During his trial, Thomas tells, as his official testimony, several stories wherein he is the first-person narrator. During the course of these stories, Thomas's narrator changes form several times. During one story he is a horse who survived Colonel George Wright's historic slaying of 800 Spokane horses in 1858.[49] This horse/narrator carries with it a letter written by Wright that explains his decision to kill the horses.[50] During the course of the story, Thomas briefly stops talking to observe his audience before closing his eyes and resuming the story.[51] Thomas tells another story while giving his testimony, and in this story the first-person narrator is a young Spokane warrior who is fighting Colonel Wright's army. During the course of this story, the young warrior dies, and he explains his death by stating, "After I was beaten down, they dragged me to the noose and I was hanged with six other Indians, including Epseal, who had never raised a hand in anger to any white or Indian."[52] While Alexie's story-within-a-story technique renders "The Trial" at least as metafictional as it is magical realist, the stories that Thomas *tells* have decidedly mythic realist properties.

Likewise, Thomas's supernatural linguistic ability is also related to magical and mythic realism. Not only is Thomas able to hold someone hostage with an idea, he is also able to "form syllables that contained more emotion and meaning than entire sentences constructed by the BIA. A noise that sounded something like *rain* had given Esther courage enough to leave her husband."[53] Thomas's

stories during the trial also have a curious effect on his Native American listeners; the narrative explains that "Thomas opened his eyes and saw that the Indians in the courtroom sat up straight, combed their braids gracefully, smiled with Indian abandon."[54] The narrative later includes a depiction of the passionate response Thomas elicits from his audience; "the bailiff," the story tells us, "had to restrain Eve Ford, who had made a sudden leap of faith across the room toward Thomas."[55] Thomas's miraculously powerful language and the mythic realism that appears within the stories he tells legitimatize a mythic realist interpretation of this story.

Reservation Blues, a novel by Alexie, is so clearly within the bounds of the magical realist mode that no argument is necessary as to its categorization. With the inclusion of legendary blues guitarist Robert Johnson, and the presence of a supernatural, human-like guitar, Alexie's novel displays characteristics of the magical realist mode throughout. Within this magical realism however, there are several mythic elements of the text, and the combination of these mythic elements with the presentation of recognizable mainstream realities in the novel places the book under the mythic realist heading. Among these elements, two of the most prominent are the character of Big Mom and the recurring appearance of (sometimes) anthropomorphic characters called "shadow horses." The construction of time within the novel is also related to the mythic realist mode. During the first chapter of the novel, when Big Mom and the horses are first introduced, time seems to move along a continuum that has little in common with Western, teleological and linear notions of time. "Finally, the horses stopped screaming their song," the narrative explains, "and Big Mom listened to the silence that followed. Then she went back to her work, to her buckskin and beads, to CNN. The horses' silence lasted for minutes, maybe centuries, and made her curious."[56] Space is similarly problematic in the novel; later in the same chapter, during the narrative's depiction of the horses' violent deaths, readers are told that the last colt "fell to the grass of the clearing, to the sidewalk outside a reservation tavern, to the cold, hard coroner's table in a Veterans Hospital."[57] When Big Mom reaches the scene of the horse massacre, "she counted the dead, she sang a mourning song for forty days and nights, then wiped the tears away, and buried the bodies. But she saved the bones of the most beautiful horse she found and built a flute from its ribs. Big Mom played a new flute song every morning to remind everybody that music created and recreated the world daily."[58] The narrative then explains that Big Mom is apparently impervious to age, as she waits "for seven generations" for the horses' return.[59] Her eternal, mythic qualities are emphasized with the revelation that "with each successive generation, the horses arrived in different forms and with different songs, called themselves Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, and so many other names. Those horses rose from everywhere and turned to Big Mom for rescue, but they all fell back into the earth again."[60]

The juxtaposition in this chapter of Spokane tribal imagery, mythic realist storytelling, and musical icons from mainstream American culture point to a multifaceted, multigenerational, and multiethnic approach to the realism in *Reservation Blues*. Likewise, the presence of a supernatural female character with

shamanic or divine powers and the telling inclusion of the phrase *seven generations* indicate that the realism in this novel is based soundly within a Native American cultural consciousness. The slaughter of the horses recalls the historic slaughter of approximately 800 Spokane horses, an event that is also prominent in the *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*.

Like Big Mom, the horses have an important role in the novel, apparently despite their violent slaughter in the novel's opening pages. While the horses occupy a prominent place at both the beginning and the end of the novel, they also appear sporadically, and usually unexpectedly, in the novel's interim. The horses who sang to Big Mom also scream at the characters in the book, though the characters do not seem to hear, and never acknowledge, the horses' sounds. Yet despite the obliviousness of the novel's characters, the phrase "the horses screamed" appears numerous times.

The horses also make a notable, and magical, appearance at the end of the book when they help to guide three of the novel's characters off the reservation and toward the city. Alexie writes that three of the novel's main characters, Thomas, Chess, and Checkers, leave the Spokane reservation accompanied by a herd of "shadow horses." "It was dark," the narrator explains, before continuing,

> There were shadows. Those shadows took shape, became horses running alongside the van. Chess, Checkers, and Thomas all looked at each other with fear and wonder. A shadow horse was running so close to the van that Chess could have reached out and touched it. Then she rolled down her window and reached out to touch that shadow, that horse. It was hot and wet. Checkers reached out of her window and touched a horse of her own, while Thomas drove the van, illuminating more shadows galloping down the road in front of them. Those horses were following, leading Indians toward the city, while other Indians were traditional dancing in the Longhouse after the feast, while drunk Indians stood outside the Trading Post, drinking and laughing. Robert Johnson and the-man-who-was-probably-Lakota played a duet. Big Mom sat in her rocking chair, measuring time with her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth there on the Spokane Indian Reservation. She sang a protection song, so none of the Indians, not one, would forget who they are.[61]

This passage is inarguably written in the mythic realist mode, yet there is another, more specific layer to the magic in this scene. This magic refers specifically to Indians, as the passage itself emphasizes by enumerating the many activities of the people on the Spokane reservation. Just as galloping horses and the presence of a genetrix figure are symbolically important to many Native American cultures, so is Alexie's repetition of the term *Indian* important to the end of the novel. With the notable exclusion of Robert Johnson, all the people mentioned at the end of the novel, all the people for whom Big Mom sings and for whom the horses run, are Native Americans; the mythic horses, it would seem, are as culturally aware as the people they guide.

Readers should resist the urge to dismiss the novel as elitist or essentialist propaganda, however; while the horses interact with the Indians on the reservation,

the horses are embodied by a multiracial group of American musicians. As the narrative explains in the first chapter, some of the horses came back as musicians such as Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix.[62] As this passage clearly illustrates, the novel relies heavily on Native American cultural symbols and addresses issues facing Native people in the contemporary United States, yet it does not seem to espouse racist or exclusionary politics. Instead, the novel advocates for the continued presence of Native American cultural beliefs within an America that encompasses people of various ethnicities, genders, and cultural understandings of the universe.

The ending of *Reservation Blues* is, in some ways, a complete reversal of the early American literary paradigm of the ghostly Indian. Early American writings based on Native American mythic liminality were written from a position of Euro-American social dominance and used Native characters and characteristics as plot tools or as secondary concerns. Alexie's inclusions of popular non-Native figures like Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Robert Johnson in a novel that details an Indian intangible world both recalls and reverses the representations of Indians throughout much American literature. Yet Alexie's use of non-Native elements is vastly different than, for example, Hawthorne's use of non–European American elements in *The Scarlet Letter*. Whereas Hawthorne includes Native American mythic images as tangential to white characterizations, Alexie uses non-Native cultural legends as complementary to the mythic world presented in the novel. Like Erdrich's depiction of death in *Love Medicine* and Silko's depictions of mythic invisible worlds in *Ceremony*, Alexie combines expected notions of ghostly and supernatural Indianness with substantive literary narratives. The old, canonical texts of American literature rely on Native American deaths, hauntings, and magical, often evil, happenings. They were truly, to borrow William Apess's phrase, "tales of blood." Yet while these tales created mythologized expectations of Indianness in literature, the Native American writers of today build upon and reorient these magical and mythical tales of blood and reform them into narratives that have social, mythological, *and* literary merit. They have, within their writings, seen through the bloody mythos of earlier images and created texts that sometimes use, but no longer rely on, notions of mythologized literary violence. Earlier American writers created mythologized images of Indians; contemporary Native American writers have created the mythic real.

Notes

1. Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 158.
2. Ibid. This page details several examples of Hawthorn's use of the language of "Indianness" in *The Scarlet Letter*. Bergland identifies passages that connect Hester, Pearl, Roger Chillingworth, and Arthur Dimmesdale with the invisible Indian world.
3. Mary Rowlandson, "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 7th ed., vol. A, *Beginnings to 1820*, ed. Nina Baym et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 238.

4. Washington Irving, "The Devil and Tom Walker," in *The Complete Tales of Washington Irving*, ed. Charles Neider (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1998 [1975]), 439.
5. Philip Freneau, "The Indian Burying Ground," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 7th ed., vol. A, *Beginnings to 1820*, ed. Nina Baym et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007): 745–46.
6. Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 126–27.
7. Ibid., 127.
8. Bo Schöler, "Mythic Realism in Native American Literature," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 17 (1985): 65.
9. Ibid.
10. Stephen F. Evans, "'Open Containers': Sherman Alexie's Drunken Indians," *American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 69.
11. Andrew Dix, "Escape Stories: Narratives and Native Americans in Sherman Alexie's 'The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,'" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 31 (2001): 155.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 7.
16. Ibid., 14.
17. Ibid., 7.
18. Paula Gunn Allen, "Something Sacred Going on Out There: Myth and Vision in American Indian Literature," in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 [1986]), 102.
19. Ibid.
20. Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit," in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1996]), 70–71.
21. Ibid., 71.
22. Ibid., 70.
23. Karen Castellucci Cox, "Magic and Memory in the Contemporary Story Cycle: Gloria Naylor and Louise Erdrich," *College English* 60, no. 2 (February 1998): 158–59.
24. Ibid., 158.
25. Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005 [1984]), 2.
26. Ibid., 7.
27. Ibid., 13.
28. Ibid.
29. Cox, "Magic and Memory," 169.
30. Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, 6.
31. Ibid., 6–7.
32. Ibid., 7.
33. Cox, "Magic and Memory," 159.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 169.
38. Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: Grove, 2005 [1993]), 103.
39. Ibid., 104.

40. Ibid.
41. Alice Beck Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1989), 3.
42. Ibid., 7.
43. Ibid., 7–8.
44. For more information on this, see Gregory E. Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 [2006]), 152. His chapter titled, "Culture Wars, Indianness, and the 1890 Ghost Dance" goes into great detail in discussing the religious movements, both Native American and Christian, that gave rise to the Ghost Dance. Smoak begins the chapter with a statement made by a European-American reservation agent wherein the agent states, "This extermination and resurrection business is not a new thing here by any means as it has been quite a craze with them [the Indians on the reservation] every few years for the last twenty odd years to my certain knowledge."
45. Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*, 104.
46. Ibid., 108–9.
47. Ibid., 106.
48. Ibid., 93.
49. Ibid., 96–97.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 97.
52. Ibid., 99.
53. Ibid., 94.
54. Ibid., 98.
55. Ibid., 99.
56. Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* (New York: Grove, 1995), 9.
57. Ibid., 10.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., 305–6.
62. Ibid., 10.

PART IV

Antinomies

Magic, Memory, and Space

CHAPTER 10

Lifting "the Weight of the Continent"

Magical Realism on the North American Landscape

Shannin Schroeder

Shortly before the turn of the twentieth century, historian Frederick Jackson Turner argued that "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" was along the American frontier—though only for an implicitly white population of pioneers—before summarily pronouncing the frontier closed.[1] Nearly one hundred years later, Gloria Anzaldúa would describe *la frontera*, a borderland between the United States and Mexico, as "a vague and undetermined space created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary."[2] The inhabitants of this "closed country," Anzaldúa says, be they Chicano or indigenous or black, are denied Americanization even as they are alienated from their preconquest identities. Thus both the borderland and the frontier represent an unobtainable homeland for marginalized peoples in North America. Yet, in drawing on the magical realist mode and its capability to navigate anything that may be seemingly inaccessible, numerous contemporary authors reinhabit these closed, postcolonial spaces to speak about and for the margins. As the Turnerian thesis—and the iconographic images (such as the log cabin, buffalo, or wagon train) and people (pioneers, settlers, and cowboys and "Injuns") on which it has come to rely—continues to persist in American sensibilities, authors employ the magical realist mode to reopen a larger frontier, reclaiming liminal spaces in order to confront the encroachment of the Westernized ideals when those ideals would erect borders or reserve for themselves a distinctly Anglo North America self-identity.

The magical realism of the United States and Canada frequently manifests itself as an extension of the "Other" of Western culture and society, as illustrated by the revision of accepted religious, historical, and even supernatural beliefs by authors Thomas King, Ana Castillo, Robert Kroetsch, whose texts are inhabited by a wide spectrum of marginalized peoples. Jeanne Delbaere argues that "marginality and silenced voices—Canada vis-à-vis the United States; women

and animals vis-à-vis male domination—[are] the issues most often addressed in magic realist fiction."[3] Delbaere surveys the application of magical realism in relation to discussions of marginality and, drawing from several such critics, explains,

> There is broad consensus on [the fact that magical realism speaks from the margins]. Noting that magic realism comes from the south of the United States and from Canada but that "there's not a lot of it in the United States itself[,]" Linda Kenyon also wonders whether it does not develop more frequently on the margins; Stanley E. McMullin analyses the phenomenon in terms of heartland and hinterland; [Jean] Weisgerber and Stephen Slemon both remark that in a literary context magical realism is most obviously operative in cultures situated at the fringes of the mainstream literary traditions[;] and Robert Kroetsch sees the very strong South American oral traditions of storytelling as an expression of "the energy of the margins." Margins, he thinks, "are interesting places, because that's where different forces are mixing, on the margins instead of at the centre."[4]

Her claim seems particularly fitting for *Green Grass, Running Water*, *So Far from God*, and *What the Crow Said*.[5] King, Castillo, and Kroetsch, as they make use of magical realism, salvage the respectability, the importance, and the usefulness of the mode for North American literary study; they offer comparativists an opportunity to uncover new ideas about what "Americanness," borders, frontiers, and magical realism signify. Kroetsch and King reinvent a frontier ripe with settlers and cowboys and Indians who invert the order of the knowable, mapped West; while Castillo and Kroetsch translate the border into a realm where the supernatural can challenge the assimilative tides of religion or the brutal realities of an uninviting cultural or physical landscape. Magical realist literature and the revisions it allows ultimately make powerful statements about North America as both the First World and as "Othered" among other North Atlantic nations by dint of its New World/postcolonial experiences, with the foundation of these primarily social or cultural assertions originating in the American West.

"The frontier," Frederick Jackson Turner asserts, "is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization,"[6] forming "a composite nationality for the American people."[7] At its heart the claim was simple, yet Turner's 1893 speech at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago would bring the young historian fame and would capture the imagination of American culture. He argued that "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil; and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier."[8] The definition of a courageous, individualistic, and (invariably) masculine pioneer of the western frontier is implicit throughout Turner's work. Turner wishes to distinguish his vision both from previous histories that had focused on slavery

as American's dubiously defining characteristic, as well as from those "lawless characteristics of the frontier," which were "sufficiently well known."[9] Though he admits that many contradictory "aspect[s] have left traces on American character, language, and literature, not to be soon effaced,"[10] in so distinguishing, Turner attempts to limit the influence of "the vices of the frontier"[11] from the more favorable characteristics like "humor, bravery, and rude strength"[12] that he would rather see define his frontier man. And while he concluded that "he would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased," Turner maintained that "never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves" and described an "ever-retreating frontier." Indeed, he concludes, "the frontier has gone."[13]

Unfortunately, Turner's notion of the West had no gifts to offer those whose heritage could not be codified as Anglo-Saxon whiteness. According to Reginald Horsman, "By 1850 American expansion was viewed in the United States less as a victory for the principles of free democratic republicanism than as evidence of the innate superiority of the American Anglo-Saxon branch of the Caucasian race."[14] While the intermingling of other Europeans like the Dutch, Swedes, or even Jews did not change "the basic character of the Anglo-American population,"[15] Horsman notes that "even those who had been attracted by the ideas of a superior 'American' race balked at the idea of the creation of a 'mongrel' America with traits drawn from a mass of new immigrants."[16] These undesirable characteristics—much like those Turner dismissed in his theory—were rhetorically linked with marginalized groups: "At the heart of the American and Western European consignment of other races to an inferior, lesser human status was the need to justify exploitation and destruction."[17] Though American journalist John O'Sullivan, in "coining the phrase *manifest destiny* [in 1845,] . . . predicted that pioneers would acquire the entire continent for the United States peacefully,"[18] for historian Thomas Hietala, O'Sullivan "provided Americans then and since with an invaluable legitimizing of the myth of empire."[19] Manifest destiny became a conscience-clearing rationale. Further "moral" justification lay in expansionists' assertions "that Americans had a natural right to land not being fully utilized by its inhabitants,"[20] despite the fact that exclusively Eurocentric notions of "full utilization" were brought to bear on the Mexican and Native American lands into which such expansion occurred. As is true of Horsman's point about racism and the economic focus of colonization, Turner's focus on the landscape itself similarly avoids the "burdens of a formal empire."[21]

Precisely because of its ethnocentric shortcomings, Turner's thesis has been much maligned by the majority of American historians, yet most agree that the Turnerian frontier's popularity and persistence are both astonishing (as so few actually heard his words in 1893) and incontrovertible. The lingering positivism surrounding the term "frontier" derives *not* from a new connotation of the word but rather endures from Turner's time. According to Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Logic and history say that the frontier was, in fact, a place where violence served the causes of racial subordination, but a more powerful emotional understanding says that the frontier is where people of courage have gone to take a stand for the

right and the good. For people of a wide range of ethnicities, logic and history yield to the much greater power of inherited image."[22] Thus even though such minorities as indigenous peoples or Mexican Americans are, at best, peripheral in Turner's seminal essay, his land-centered language evokes a space in which the margins can themselves be pioneers.

Much like contemporary historians tackling Turnerian theory, King approaches an *idea* of the West rather than the thing itself, a frontier largely generated and promoted by Hollywood and tourism. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the western landscape has never *not* been a site of contention, yet King relies on magical realism to layer creation stories onto an ever-flexible (and clearly defined as American) frontier. Ultimately he usurps the powers of Hollywood, the American cowboy and cavalry, and North American consumerism. In fact, *Green Grass, Running Water* confronts the burden of Old World history head on. King's text explores the frontier as far back as the discovery myth of Columbus, resurrecting the voyage in a Western landscape in order to implode the hyper-Christian rhetoric of manifest destiny.

Green Grass, Running Water is situated within the confines of an extremely complicated system of frames, in which a narrator called "I" helps four old Indians[23] teach Coyote the story of creation.[24] King's frames enhance the main narrative; eventually, the progression of the two seems interdependent. Indeed, while relating an alternate version of the creation story, one that usurps traditional white male texts, King begins to introduce characters who participate in the main narrative and who are largely responsible for the magical realism in the novel. Unlike Ana Castillo's version, Catholicism in *Green Grass, Running Water* is exclusively white. Yet Castillo's Christianity and the Native American experience King creates in *Green Grass, Running Water* both counteract their own spiritual origins by (often humorously) reframing the traditional myths.

In the novel, King appropriates and rewrites *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick*, the Bible, the radio-originated television character of the Lone Ranger, a mythical "classic" Western, and numerous historical figures. The four Native Americans, who turn up in the present-day of the narrative as escapees from an American mental hospital, are the four originary women of the story: First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman. Each woman first rejects one of the Christian myths—"Ahdamn" and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Mary's immaculate conception, and Christ (Young Man Walking On Water); adopt their (male) names from the white Anglo texts; and are responsible for establishing the narrative frame around the story.[25] In the tale, then, King also irreverently modifies Native American myths, since he uses four cross-dressing, cross-naming women to effect changes in the "present" of the text and since Coyote, the audience for their tale, is traditionally the story-teller. Jeanne Delbaere says of magical realism, "Like Coyote it can assume many different forms, appear and disappear in many different places and remain for ever [sic] elusive though magically alive."[26] But King's magical realism "out-Coyotes" Coyote, since it plays tricks with the trickster character. In fact, though Karla J. Sanders argues for Louise Erdrich's works that "if the magic is abused or bastardized,

it fails,"[27] King's distortion of the magic seems to be precisely the reason it can effect changes in the community.

In the act of the four Indians attempting to tell their creation stories, the novel continually returns to several other beginning points as well, including the Genesis creation story and even Columbus's "discovery" of the inhabited "New" World. Dr. Joseph Hovaugh represents both Genesis and the white American West: "In the beginning all this was land. Empty land. My great-grandfather came out here from the Old World. He was what you might call an evangelist. It wasn't how he made his money . . . He made his money in real estate. He bought this land from the Indians" (102). But the text reaches back to "J. Hovaugh's" biblical connections to the text. While the story of Genesis "comes later" than the creation story the four Indians piece together, the story for the white characters begins with Dr. Hovaugh looking down on his "garden" and being "pleased" (13).

Dr. Hovaugh's narrative also places the four Indians in the American West as early as 1891 (102), precisely at the time when Turner's frontier is developing epistemologically but waning ontologically. Of course, reality is no boundary for magical realism; King's novel allows the frontier to remain open for the Indians. But the Indians in his text are having trouble reconciling the Canadian government's antiquated system of white relations with a twentieth century that is supposed to allow them to forget a painful past. The project manager for the dam, Sifton, tells Eli, "You know what the problem is? This country doesn't have an Indian policy. Nobody knows what the hell anyone else is doing" (154). And when Eli says, "It's not exactly the nineteenth century," Sifton replies, "Damn it. That's my point. You can't live in the past. My dam is part of the twentieth century. Your house is part of the nineteenth" (155). Eli points out that "you can't hold water back forever," but Sifton says of the dam, "Oh, it'll crack and it'll leak. But it won't break. Just think of the dam as part of the natural landscape" (157). Of course, there is nothing natural at all about the dam *or* about its being on Indian land, a fact emphasized by its placement above Eli Stands Alone's mother's log cabin, which—though "right in the middle of the proposed spillway for the Grand Baleen Dam" (121)—was not one of "the [three originally] recommended sites" (120). This contemporary reappropriation of Indian lands leads us full circle to Bursum again, who is sitting on his reclaimed property when Parliament Lake drains away through the broken dam and whose name (Bill Bursum) also recalls the failed Bursum Bill of the 1920s, which would have taken back land belonging to the Pueblo people of New Mexico.

Alberta's lecture to her college class covers a period of the Indian/white conflict beginning in 1874, a systematic US army slaughter of Indian tribes in the Southern Plains, a removal to reservations that played an unspoken but necessary role on the Turnerian frontier. Her student roster includes Henry Dawes, John Collier, Mary Rowlandson, Elaine Goodale, and Hannah Duston. In essence, Alberta's job is to teach the frontier to a classroom representing the myopic, Turnerian, Anglo versions of history already established as "truth." Mary Rowlandson's telling questions—"Do we have to know all these guys' names? I mean, will

they all be on the test?"—serve as a foil to Helen Mooney's question about what happens to the Indians sent east from the frontier and imprisoned at Fort Marion in Florida. Through King's magical realism, at least four of those prisoners are at work in the current-day narrative, challenging the veracity and counteracting the influence of the historically white versions of the Indian/white conflict.

If *Green Grass, Running Water* is supremely aware of its placement on the frontier and of the conflicts between its white and Indian characters, the novel is even more specific about exactly who clashes in that conflict. When the Indians disappear from Dr. Hovaugh's hospital, he thinks that his colleague John "must think it was all a game. Hide-and-seek Cowboys and Indians" (50). Later, when Latisha remembers George Morningstar courting her, she remembers that "George had kept his hands in his pockets. After fighting off the local cowboys and Indians, it was nice to be with a man who didn't think that her shoulder or her waist or her butt was part of the public domain" (147). And Karen's dad calls the Western novels Eli reads "sleazy little cowboy and Indian shoot-'em-ups" (185). Like the students sitting in Alberta's class, Hollywood's films and even its hot spots prove a constant reminder of the conflicts between whites and Indians, as well as of the persistence of the white version of frontier history. Charlie's dad, Portland Looking Bear, becomes Iron Eyes Screeching Eagle for Hollywood, which deemed him not Indian enough to play Indians. One director told his father "that he could have the part but that he would have to wear a rubber nose" (168). "He was a Sioux eighteen times, a Cheyenne ten times, a Kiowa six times, an Apache five times, and a Navaho once" (166). When Charlie and Portland are back in Hollywood years later, the acting jobs for Portland have dried up. Unfortunately for this father and son, the cowboys are still besting the Indians: those dressed as cowboys work inside the steakhouse where they find employment. "It's the Indians who park the cars" in "fluorescent loincloth[s]. . . . [with] 'Remmington's' . . . written across the front" (235), Charlie discovers; he will even park John Wayne's car one night. In name and clientele, the steakhouse evokes both Eliphalet Remington, inventor of the Remington rifle that would help whites "tame" the West, and Frederic Remington, the artist who helped to create the iconic imagery of the West and cowboys in particular but who "relished the prospect of a race war in which he could take his Winchesters and 'get [his] share' of 'Jews, Injuns, Chinamen, Italians, Huns—the rubbish of the world [he] hate[d]."[28] Once again, whites prove "better armed" for the classic cowboy and Indian conflict, whether the battle will play out on the frontier or on Hollywood's recreation of that space.

King's characters see the potential for rewriting history on the physical land as well. The challenge becomes reimagining the colonial forces on North America; often, his humor or magical realism revisit the site of those colonial scars and offer alternate readings. When they are boys, Charlie Running Bear asks Lionel, "What would John Wayne do?" and mimes scalping when the white doctor is considering taking Lionel's tonsils out (31). His aunt Norma repeatedly accuses Lionel, who imagines himself as John Wayne as a child and who will even wear Wayne's jacket "on loan" from the four Indians, of wanting "to

be a white man" just like his Uncle Eli (36). Lionel is a salesman for "Buffalo Bill Bursum," as Charlie nicknames his former boss (44). By locating Lionel as a player in Buffalo Bill's vision of the Wild West, Charlie reduces Lionel to a "fake" or sell out, much like those indigenous actors in Buffalo Bill's turn-of-the-century performances, always and willingly cast as the "bad guys." Interestingly, historian Richard White declares that the real Buffalo Bill Cody enacted history "in a way that prefigured the movies" (35) with which we associate Bursum. Later, in the hotel lobby in Salt Lake City where Lionel goes to read a fellow Department of Indian Affairs' employees paper at a conference, there's "a painting of the Battle of the Little Bighorn. George Armstrong Custer stood at the center of the drama, looking splendid in a fringed leather jacket" (65). Lionel will wear a similar jacket, but because it's only a Hollywood prop, he cannot disconnect his Indian heritage from his life. He returns to the reservation and, learning from Uncle Eli, will use the visit to reconnect with his obligations to the Blackfoot land.

While the United States dictates the form of the West for King's Indian characters, no matter which side of the line they find themselves on, the border between Canada and the United States is often little more than a demarcation deciding which tourists will be more gullible or will spend more money. The rental car lady signing out a car to Charlie, unaware that he is not a tourist, "chirped away about the points of interest in and around Blossom. There were old Indian ruins and the remains of dinosaurs just to the north of town and a real Indian reserve to the west" (164). Latisha's Dead Dog Café sells hamburgers marketed as dog meat. Lionel says, "The Blackfoot didn't eat dog." Norma replies, "It's for the tourists" (59–60).

Although the border stations each look the same (with, as Babo observes, the same crooked flagpoles) at the American/Canadian border, and though they provide no interference for the Americans headed north to intrude on the Sun Dance, eat at the Dead Dog Café, or even to chase down missing Indians, both Lionel and Alberta's family discover that a Canadian Indian traveling south encounters a racism and intolerance of Indian traditions that recalls the very "taming" of the West itself. Latisha, who crosses the border only in her marriage to the American George Morningstar, fights his ethnocentric attitude toward Canada throughout their marriage: "Early on in their marriage, George began to point out what he said he perceived to be the essential differences between Canadians and Americans" (172). His generalizations include, respectively, dependent versus independent, conservative compared to adventurous, traditionalists versus a modern American. "Americans liked adventure and challenge. Canadians liked order and guarantees" (175), George claims. Latisha's efforts to defend the white colonial history of Canada against the white colonial history of the United States only lead to her frustration:

> "Look at western expansion, and the frontier experience. Lewis and Clark were Americans."
>
> "What about Samuel de Champlain and Jacque Cartier?" Latisha had asked.

> "Europeans," George laughed.
>
> . . . It hadn't bothered Latisha at first. But as George made these comparisons a trademark of his conversations, Latish became annoyed, then frustrated, and then angry.
>
> "All of the great military men in North America," George began, "were American. Look at George Washington, Andrew Jackson, George Armstrong Custer, Dwight D. Eisenhower." (172, 174)

Only after dismissing her numerous attempts to defend Canada does George allow for "the exception" of Billy Bishop's martial expertise. Despite Latisha's conviction that, "if anything, George's comparisons became even more absurd" (175), her anger is tempered by her own experience with the tourists who visit her café and whom she encounters at the Sun Dance. The Canadians "[file] off the bus in an orderly line," waiting on each other and walking "two abreast" to the front door (171). Canadians, in her experience, always order the special. Yet American tourists are as unlikely to embody the admirable traits George lists as the Canadians are to defy theirs. Americans are the ones who grab at her rear, in front of their wives, while ordering; one memorable year at the Sun Dance, a family appears in a station wagon en route from Michigan and starts taking pictures, defying a crowd of hostile Blackfoot (151), much like George will do when he returns after abandoning Latisha for several years.

King's application of magical realism on the female body is more subtle than either Robert Kroetsch's or Ana Castillo's at first glance. But considering Babo's claim that the four Indians are, still, women—as they are in the creation stories each participates in—King avails himself of the ample opportunities to question the Christian and canonical versions of women. Each of the four Indians is associated with a biblical text that ascribes particular "Christian" values and actions and obligations on women, though with a King-worthy twist to incorporate competing contemporary obligations. If the woman's body is for procreation and continuing the line of humanity, the job bears the addition of Noah's rule that she will have large breasts; she is the site of original sin, despite the fact that the hapless Ahdamn's greed and lust precede their Fall. And most significantly to Christian theology, the woman's womb is the portal for Christ's appearance on Earth, though *Green Grass, Running Water* will complicate both the biblical story and its own version as well. When A. A. Gabriel (whose business card lists him as a Canadian Security and Intelligence Service agent *and* as the Heavenly Host) requires "virgin verification" and takes her picture next to a "snake" who is actually Old Coyote, Thought Woman refuses him and floats away again on the ocean. A. A. Gabriel shouts after her, "There are lots of Marys in the world . . . We can always find another one, you know" (301). Yet much like the Genesis story, Alberta has no say in Coyote's decision to give her the pregnancy she desires, offering Coyote the same agency (and denying Alberta her own) as God and Mary, respectively, during immaculate conception.

White texts are not the exclusive canon King features in the novel, as when Eli's white girlfriend Karen forgives him "his pedestrian taste in reading" (181) and tries to push him to read about his own heritage: "Most of the books that Karen brought by were about Indians. Histories, autobiographies, memoirs of writers who had gone west or who had lived with a particular tribe, romances of one sort or another. Eli tried to hint that he had no objection to a Western or another New Woman novel, and Karen would laugh and pull another book out of her bag. Magic. 'You have to read this one, Eli. It's about the Blackfoot.' What amazed Eli was that there were so many" (180). Years later, alone and sequestered in his mother's cabin in an ongoing battle against corporate Canada, Eli looked through some books and "decided on the Western. The cover featured a beautiful blond woman, her hands raised in surrender, watching horrified as a fearsome Indian with a lance rode her down. There was a banner stamped across the front that said, 'Based on the award-winning movie'" (178). Faithfully revisionist in its history of the conflict between whites and Indians, the novel at first seemingly allows the Indians agency by filtering the novel through Iron Eyes but soon demonstrates that the "noble savage" and Turnerian frontier dominates his point of view: "He was sworn to stop western expansion onto his people's land and he had spared [the heroine's] life because he wanted her to see that Indians were human beings, too" (182). Eli knows how the book will end, yet he skims the book as if hoping to be surprised by a writer whose Indian characters understand that fighting western expansion is as futile as obstructing the building of a dam.

The same Western movie from Eli's contemporary novel plays repeatedly throughout *Green Grass, Running Water* until finally, both through and on behalf of the Indian characters in the text, the four Indians intervene in King's invented classic John Wayne film. King ensures that every main character in the novel has watched a portion of the same Western on late-night television or on tape (or in the case of Eli, who lacks access to a television, has skimmed the film-turned-novel version). Alberta turns her hotel TV off in disgust: "Enough. The last thing in the world she needed to do was to watch some stupid Western. Teaching Western history was trial enough without having to watch what the movie makers had made out of it" (241). To Charlie, whose father, Portland, wore a rubber nose in order to play a "more authentic" stock Hollywood Indian character, the film becomes the tool through which Charlie comes to identify with his father. The white electronics store owner sees this John Wayne classic as the movie most fitting for "The Map," his towering display of televisions in the shape of the United States and Canada. "Bursum doubted that even [college-educated] Lionel understood the unifying metaphor or the cultural impact The Map would have on customers" (140). For Bursum, *The Mysterious Warrior*, the "best Western of them all" and a movie he has seen 20 times (211), emphasizes what he ultimately considers the "right" outcome—the triumph of the whites over Native Americans—in spite of his claims to help the Indians he had known his entire life.[29] Yet even Bursum cannot guess at the ways in which the "cultural impact" of his "unifying metaphor" will be played out and resignified across his map of northern America.

When the Lone Ranger, Hawkeye, Robinson Crusoe, and Ishmael view Bursum's favorite Western, they find mistakes in the production: "'The next scene,' said Bursum, 'used over six hundred extras, Indians and whites. And five cameras. The director spent almost a month on this one scene before he felt it was right.' 'He didn't get it right the first time,' said the Long Ranger. 'But we fixed it for him,' said Hawkeye" (351–52). The "predictable" (353) text then takes a turn for the different, though not necessarily worse. The four new "directors" of the movie colorize their version and remove the cavalry that charges in to save John Wayne: "There at full charge, hundreds of soldiers in bright blue uniforms with gold buttons and sashes and stripes, blue-eyed and rosy-cheeked, came over the last rise. / And disappeared . . . 'What the hell,' said Bursum" (357). And "as Lionel and Charlie and Eli and the old Indians and Bill and Coyote watched, none of the Indians fell. John Wayne looked at his gun. Richard Widmark was pulling the trigger on empty chambers. The front of his fancy pants was dark and wet . . . And then Portland and the rest of the Indians began to shoot back, and soldiers began falling over . . . John Wayne looked down and stared stupidly at the arrow in his thigh, shaking his head in amazement and disbelief as two bullets ripped through his chest and out the back of his jacket" (358).

The white viewers are clearly perplexed to find "their team" on the losing side. "Who would want to kill John Wayne?" asks Minnie (398), and Bursum's response is to stab at the remote in an attempt to stop the revision. But "Charlie had his hands out of his pockets, his fists clenched, keeping time to the singing [of the Indians]. His lips were pulled back from his teeth, and his eyes flashed as he watched his father flow through the soldiers like a flood. 'Get 'em, Dad,' he hissed" (358). The four rewriters of history, at least the cinematized "history" Alberta scoffs at, change the tide of the cultural impact intended by the movie. Despite Latisha's assurance to her kids that "if the Indians won, it probably wouldn't be a Western" (216), this Western refigures the seemingly hopeless struggle between the "cowboys and Indians." By allowing the Portlands, and not the John Waynes, to save the day, the four Indians return to Charlie a father, as well as a culture and a history, of which he can be proud.

Each journey—from those of the women falling from the Sky World to the Water World, to the four Indians merging into the "contemporary" story by hitching a ride from Lionel, and to Dr. Hovaugh's and Babo's search for the escapees—shares a common fact, one repeated throughout the text: "In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water." And the "beginning of the end" of King's novel also centers around water. By urinating on Babo's tire Coyote makes the puddle (20) that starts the flood. Babo notices how, "from a distance, the Pinto looked a little like a ship" as it floats away from the parking lot behind the hospital (25–26). Thus the water carries the black character Babo's red Pinto away to join the white doctor's white Karmann-Ghia and the Blackfoot Alberta's blue Nissan (448) as they make a multicultural assault on the dam. The section ends, "and the cars tumbled over the edge of the world" (454), enacting the very fate Columbus's enemies and doubters predicted for his ships. King implicates a history of oppressors and the oppressed, American and Canadian, Old World and

New World alike, in the breaking of this unnatural barrier to the running water. It is no accident that the white characters are first to see the cars on Parliament Lake or to describe the earthquake. If, in fact, "things [are] falling apart" (454), then it follows that the "center"—here, a white domination of the landscape—cannot hold.[30]

An even more complex and historical site, one problematized by the same "discovery" that King disassembles on the Canadian frontier, lies at the southernmost border of the United States. While many would have the Mexican-US border occur as a narrow line along a river, a fence, or even along a political site, Gloria Anzaldúa sees the border as a much larger—and less geographically specific—location. In her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa's borderland and "borderlanders" inhabit a space perpetually in contention. Any borderland, she claims, "is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition."[31] Such transition along the border of the southern United States and northern Mexico traces "Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors back to their migration across the Bering Straits [and] places Mexicans as distant cousins to the Indians, a provenance for ownership of the Americas."[32] Although "the 'closed country,' as [Anzaldúa] also names it, is peopled with gendered undocumented crossers,"[33] Anzaldúa specifically locates what she calls "the place of origin, Aztlán," thus making "Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest. Indians and *mestizos* from central Mexico intermarried with North American Indians. The continual intermarriage between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an even greater *mestizaje*."[34] Yet the colonial world has, for hundreds of years and in the guises of conquistador, priest, or neocolonizer, attempted to fragment any senses of ownership among these original settlers of the continent. One traditional compromise between those contrary forces and diverse cultures has been religion: "In the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, Central and South America the *indio* and the *mestizo* continue to worship the old spirit entities (including *Guadalupe*) and their supernatural power, under the guises of Christian saints."[35] Anzaldúa's references to *la Virgen* emphasize the homophonic nature of "Guadalupe" to the Nahuatl word for the goddess Coatlalopeuh, the serpent deity of Juan Diego's actual vision: "Today, *la Virgen de Guadalupe* is the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/*mexicano*. She, like my race, is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered."[36] Anzaldúa's text locates struggles not only in the geography but in the cultures, values, and practices of the people who inhabit *la frontera*.

When Anzaldúa claims that her "Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance,"[37] she initiates a conversation with authors like Ana Castillo. Through the female body, and specifically through a supernatural use of it, Castillo will create a site of resistance—perhaps the only possible site in a patriarchal society. Anzaldúa claims, "Humans fear the supernatural, both the undivine (the animal impulses such as sexuality, the unconscious, the unknown, the alien) and the divine (the superhuman, the god in us)."[38] In particular, women's

sexuality has been a site of religious and cultural debate. As the translation of the sexually powerful Coatlalopeuh into the "untouched" nature of the Virgin of Guadalupe suggests, the male response to feminine power has been, through religion, to constrain it: "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males."[39] And women generally reinforce such patriarchal rule with or for other women.[40] Castillo's characters from *So Far from God*, in actively refusing a patriarchy, experience a very traditional set of supernatural occurrences that the novel actively complicates. Castillo references resurrection, saints, *curanderas*, and La Llorona in such unconventional ways that the miracles can no longer be explained away by the religion that supposedly produces them. Castillo's borderlands are, like Anzaldúa's, nearly unbearable for women, particularly those who are unprotected. Sofí's daughters Fé (faith), Caridad (charity), and Espseranza (hope) experience little of their namesake virtues. La Loca, whose forgotten Christian name (given her sisters' monikers) may very well have been *Amor* or Love, *is* "the greatest of these"[41] *sisters*. She has been to hell and back, like Christ, yet retains a childlike quality after near-death experience as a very young child stunts her adulthood. Magical realism does not offer an escape from borderlands; on the contrary, it allows Castillo an exponential emphasis of some of the dangers of that space. But through la Loca, the voice of reason rather than insanity in the text, Castillo mobilizes a supernatural that will attempt—and fail—to compensate for the inadequacies of men and of the church.

The violence visited on the women in Sofí's family occurs as either acts of the land, of the church, of men, of industry, or of some combination of those elements. Each daughter seems to represent some part of the scarred history of colonization in the borderlands: Loca is evidence of the inadequacy of Catholicism for its practitioners; she has been to hell in person and has returned, a resurrected child who defies conventional Christina beliefs. Esperanza illustrates that violence has a common ancestry—after her death at the hand of torturers in another land, she returns to her family of women, more tied to the places they reside in her death than in life. Of her sisters, only Fé seems interested in assimilation into gringo culture—but that culture fails her, lies to her, uses her body as a literal dumping ground for waste materials, and finally denies her existence by the end of her life. Caridad combines the best elements of her four sisters. With Loca, she counts an animal as her closest friend—almost a familiar. Like Esperanza, Caridad searches for roots in an indigenous past, and she and Fé are the two most eager to find their own places outside the house.

If Caridad represents aspects of her three other sisters, she also figures as the site of the greatest violence, where the physical landscape is first destroyed and then rebuilt by her supernatural surroundings. After Caridad is attacked and left for dead on the roadside, her mother "was told that her daughter's nipples had been bitten off. She had also been scourged with something, branded like cattle. Worst of all . . . she had also been stabbed in the throat" (32). But the mysterious

attacker remains hidden from everyone until Caridad allows doña Felicia and la Loca into her dreams. They discover

> it wasn't a man with a face and a name who had attacked and left Caridad mangled like a run-down rabbit. Not two or three men . . . It was not a stray and desperate coyote either, but a thing, both tangible and amorphous. A thing that might be described as made of sharp metal and splintered wood, of limestone, gold, and brittle parchment. *It held the weight of a continent* and was indelible as ink, centuries old and yet as strong as a young wolf. It had no shape and was darker than the dark night, and mostly, Caridad would never ever forget, it was pure force. (77, emphasis added)

Caridad's own sense of her attacker as "pure force" lends credence to the argument that the event carries the entire burden of a postcolonial existence. As a bodily representation of the conqueror-ravaged land, evinced by her "pronounced [Spanish] ass" (27), she is essentially unsexed, marked, and silenced. The attack, in planting wounds on her body, not only wreaks havoc on the beauty of the land in an obscene and dehumanizing way but also, in removing her nipples, denies the motherland the ability to nourish its children. La Loca's prayers return Caridad's exterior to its former glory, but even so, Loca is unable to undo the internal damage.

The *mestizo* roots of Sofí and Domingo's family are apparent in the looks of their children; while Loca, Fe, and Esperanza have the "flat butts" of Pueblos, Caridad's "somewhat pronounced ass" (27) is a remnant of Spanish conquest. Despite Esperanza's attempts to understand and fit into the Indian culture through her attendance of the sweat lodges, she seems primarily driven by her desire for Rubén. For Esperanza, "no kind of white woman's self-help book" will, in fact, help more than the "courage she got from the sweat lodge and which she surely needed now more than ever" (47). Esperanza looks to the traditions, certainly, for her healing, but she does not look to her *own* mixed, or even Pueblo, traditions: "Esperanza had no Native women friends to verify any of what was being told to her by Rubén about the woman's role in what they were doing, she did not venture to contradict him" (36). As Anzaldúa notes, there are three traditional directions for women: "to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother."[42] There is a fourth choice for "a very few of us," Anzaldúa declares: "entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons."[43] Esperanza's MA in communications seems not to translate into opportunity; instead, she "felt like a woman with brains was as good as dead for all the happiness it brought her in the love department" (26). No matter how autonomous her career allows her to be, Esperanza still attempts to blend her "fourth choice" with a more traditional objective for women—yet she seems insistent that she will not find help within her own margin or among other women. By having her character rely on Native American "cures" that are not specifically Pueblo and that are translated for her through a man, Castillo puts an ironic twist on the ways in which the Spanish/Pueblo Esperanza attempts to recover what her marginalization has cost her and women like her.

Because Caridad's body offers the most direct line back to the conqueror and not to an indigenous past, she seems the daughter most identified—and most concerned with *identifying*—with the land itself. Caridad undergoes *curandera* training with a *mestiza* from Méjico Viejo (60), doña Felicia, who tells her that "everything we need for healing is found in our natural surroundings" (61). En route to the Ojo Caliente mineral baths at doña Felicia's suggestion, Caridad wanders to a mountain cave—and, after that first morning, "when she woke to a delicate scar in the horizon that gradually bled into day and saw the sun then raise itself like a king from its throne over distant peaks," she willingly stays lost for a year because she wants to be "the lone witness to that miracle every dawn" (89).

Castillo's magical realism does not turn its back on the strong Catholic and Pueblo ties in the region, yet through Sofí's daughters, Castillo begins to build a case that white religion is either misguided or, at times, willfully chooses not to assist the peoples of the borderland. The town of Tome is in "the territory controlled by the Spanish queen and friars for centuries with such ferocity that neither Mexican nor U.S. appropriation diluted the religious practices of the descendants of the Spaniards who settled there" (74). After Caridad's disappearance, doña Felicia at firsts prays to St. Anthony but then realizes the saint won't reveal the young woman's whereabouts. "The truth is," Castillo's unnamed narrator confides, "St. Anthony probably just didn't know where Caridad went, since like I said, he is for finding things, not people" (82). But the ancient *curandera* holds a harsher opinion of St. Anthony. She refuses to worship saints who "saved souls or abandoned them depending on their nationalistic faith" (82). Doña Felicia's selective uses of Catholicism are the culmination of *So Far from God*'s progressive abandonment of the religion that begins when Sofí's family forgets la Loca's Christian name after her death, resurrection, and levitation to the top of the church roof. Thus Loca traces Christ's path more literally than when the faithful join the Way of the Cross processional later in the novel.

Caridad's body is not the only location for Castillo's magical realism; Fé becomes the second. After Caridad flies away with the woman she loves, perhaps the only escape for the women in this story, Loca seems to take on the physical sins of her sisters as she prays for them. Though a formerly promiscuous Caridad would have been most likely exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, it is Loca who contracts AIDS. The least social sister, who shuns physical contact even with most family members, carries the burdens and diseases of her sisters' interactions with their society. And Sofí herself, though unofficial Mayor of Tome, creator of the co-op that feeds her community, and founder of MOMAS (Mothers of Martyrs and Saints), ultimately loses all of her daughters. When Loca picks up her father's "mindless habit of indiscriminate T.V. watching" after her sisters die, Sofí realizes her own fate: "Though no one would have ever thought of the television as any kind of psychic vehicle, one Sunday evening while Loca was staring at one of those 'news magazine' shows, Sofí got a premonition from it, and with a deep sigh, resigned herself to the fact that she was going to die alone" (219). She completes a line of women who, like Sofí's neighbors, her daughter Fé, and Fé's coworkers, are literally or figuratively sterilized by their environment.

Like the women Anzaldúa describes, Sofí has a tenuous hold on her land and faces, in her husband Domingo and the US government, two daunting obstacles to keeping it. When Domingo gambles away Sofí's ancestral home on a bet to a judge, the two obstacles act in concert to remove the only stability she's ever had. Though she stays in the home, she now pays rent, "something no one in that house had ever done before since her grandparents had built it with their own hands." Her complaints to her neighbor tie Domingo's actions to a long history of conquering the land on which her house was built: "First the gringos took most of our land away when they took over the territory from Mexico—right after Mexico had taken it from Spain and like my vis-abuelo used to say, 'Ni no' habiamo' dado cuenta,' it all happened so fast!" (217). Despite the fact that Sofí and her ancestors "labored with the natural elements, sun, air, and earth and prayed all the while as they worked together in silence—like their Spanish ancestors had done for nearly three hundred years on that strange land they felt was so far from God"[44] (101–2), *Castillo* leaves no doubt that the next wave of conquerors are the gringos who arrive to whittle away at theses borderlands: "There were a lot of outsiders moving in, buying up land that had belonged to original families, who were being forced to give it up because they just couldn't live off it no more" (139). Though less violent, this neocolonization leaves Castillo's characters "poor[er]" and even more "forgotten" (139).

As is true for the *mestizo* peoples along the Mexican-United States border, existence along the forty-ninth parallel has been inexorably tied to the Old World, manifest destiny, and the story of the American West. According to Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, "The concept of 'Manifest Destiny' justified but hardly explained this process that imprinted U.S. history and imagination with images of inexorable westward expansion. Nor did narratives of Manifest Destiny focus on the warfare required to conquer American Indians and Mexicans who already claimed the territory"[45] (185). Jameson and Mouat agree with Horsman, Limerick, and others that, in claiming a frontier past, Turner chose to ignore or downplay the most violent aspects of that expansion. But the line that would come to delineate two separate Wests has (in vague ways, as King suggests) a past that relates it more closely with Anzaldúa's notion of the border. Between 1812 and 1846, Britain and the United States agreed to "a vague 'joint occupancy'" of the region extending west of the Rockies, since the line between Canada and what would become the United States did not extend that far until the 1846 Oregon Treaty. "The border, however, remained dynamic and, for over a decade [after the treaty], unmapped, as two emerging nation states sought to assert control over the vast territories each claimed."[46] In fact, "this portion of the border, from the Great Lakes to the Rockies, was not *mapped* until 1872–1874."[47] According to Jameson and Mouat, "Few European colonists regarded westward expansion as Canada's manifest destiny, nor even as particularly desirable . . . Perhaps the greatest spur to the western expansion of the Canadian state was the anxiety of its politicians that failure to assert control over the region would lead to its absorption by the United States."[48] If so, Canada's growth west *is*, in fact, spurred on

by a notion of manifest destiny—that is, by the expansionist rhetoric of its ever-growing neighbor to the south.

The differences between the American West and its Canadian counterpart are more readily apparent than these few similarities, though Jameson and Mouat acknowledge that "people rather than nature created the differences assumed to exist on either side" of the forty-ninth parallel,[49] among whom Turner is perhaps most prominent. Canadian historians "challenged the Turnerian approach . . . for its inapplicability to Canada,"[50] believing that no clearly equivalent creation myth exists for Canada like Turner's "stubbornly influential" thesis did for the United States.[51] "Harold Innis is perhaps the closest Canadian equivalent to Turner[,] . . . challeng[ing] a previously Eurocentric narrative" in order to forge "a wholly Canadian explanation for Canadian development."[52] Innis's vision of Canadian development centered on market-driven workers who "were not frontiersmen who functioned as mythical heroes to forge a Canadian national character. They were simply workers in key industries."[53] Yet in declaring that "the border in Canadian history functions . . . as the line that divides U.S. cultural and economic savagery from Canadian civilization,"[54] Jameson and Mouat implicate Canadian workers, driven by market demands and key industries, as sharing the consumerist goals of the United States. Even George F. G. Stanley's "Canadian counter-narrative to Turner's frontier," written later in the twentieth century, borrowed the Turnerian strategy of asserting that its West could be connected with "law and order" in the late nineteenth century,[55] ignoring Canada's own past of discrimination and marginalization of its First Nation peoples. For Stanley, the nonexistent border between the two rising nations in the nineteenth century supposedly "separated American violence, lawlessness, and greed from Canadian civility, order, and managed development."[56]

Jameson and Mouat invoke the revolutionary process, at least for the eastern United States and existing territories, as another distinctly American unifying process that simply did not occur in Canada. "The isolated and distinct colonies of British North America . . . had no significant territorial ambitions until the second half of the nineteenth century" and were under direct federal control into the early twentieth century.[57] "Canada thus acquired its West much later than did the United States," assert Jameson and Mouat.[58] Interestingly, these delayed "ambitions" coincide with a movement from the American West into a "newer" Canadian frontier that still held the promise of open land for its settlers. And on one point these authors are clear: Whether or not Turner accurately predicted the fading nature of the American frontier, "Canada's frontiers have been drawn by geography. Thus, the Canadian North remains an enduring frontier, albeit a frontier with very different connotations than the expansive and opportunity-laden frontiers of Turnerian imagination."[59] And to extend Limerick's research, the *idea* of the frontier may yet persist in those spaces where the land itself has apparently "closed." In order "to understand the borders that separate the United States and Canada, and the borderlands in which we meet, we must understand what has separated and linked our histories, and the different ways we have constructed national historical identities. As Paul Sharp observed over half a century ago,

'western history is imperfectly understood and incompletely told when we . . . stop at a line which existed only on a map.'"[60] Magical realism reminds US and Canadian critics and readers of their similarities—even in the face of drastically different texts. In this quest to redefine themselves historically, politically, and socially, authors have paved the way with new narratives and have begun to rectify the anomalies of contemporary life in North America.

Robert Kroetsch's novel *What the Crow Said* positions the descendants of Canadian settlers in a pre–World War II limbo between their own pioneer past and the encroaching technology of the modern world. As Jameson and Mouat note, even following the Cold War, the West "defined a mythic U.S. national identity that acted as a foil for Canadian difference."[61] Yet Kroetsch unquestionably foregrounds ambiguous borders in this work,[62] as opposed to those clearly mapped delineations between geographies, genders, or races. The novel features multiple forms of marginalization, perhaps most especially because of its physical location. Set in an "indeterminate place straddling the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan,"[63] provinces not even created by the Canadian government until 1905,[64] "the Municipality of Bigknife lay ambiguously on the border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan; no one, due to a surveyor's error, had ever been able to locate conclusively where the boundaries were supposed to be" (Kroetsch 28). The Hutterite colony and prairie lie to the south, "bush country and an Indian reserve to the north" (28). According to Luca Biagiotti, "Kroetsch very carefully locates his fictitious town between two 'conflicting' toponyms, one imperial (Alberta), the other indigenous (Saskatchewan), and explicitly declares his difficulty in giving its exact place on the map."[65] Kroetsch's novel also hovers near the American West, in a region just north of Montana and the US High Plains region. The township of Big Indian rests in a state of limbo of sorts, an area much like Macondo in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, where the outside world has not yet managed to make much of a dent on the insular community of the novel.

Kroetsch uses this isolation to create an unexpected margin: In geographically locating his Anglo characters in a borderland "off the map," he denies them agency or white privilege in Canadian politics and progress. Kroetsch's "experience as a student, university teacher, and writer in both Canada and the United States has given him a sense that, as he puts it, Canada is itself a 'peculiar kind of borderland,' open to all manner of crossings."[66] According to Kroetsch himself, his novel *What the Crow Said* was his attempt "to find a mode of fiction that would provide a means to express both the marginal perspective of rural western Canadians, and also the Canadian perspective in relation to Britain and to the powerful neocolonial neighbor, the United States."[67]. While Kroetsch locates the border community within the larger borderlands of the Canadian-American division, at the same time his emphasis on this proximity to so many frontiers ensures that his characters are still driven by a sort of Turnerian pioneerism. In Big Indian, roles become fluid to compensate for an Anglo population on the margins of numerous borders. The supernatural elements of the text will allow this borderland and the Turnerian thesis to overlap. Through geography,

marginalization, and magical realism, Kroetsch offers his readers the possibility of a "frontier borderland."

Another boundary that the novel wavers between is that of a traditional, horse-centered agrarian life and the advancing edge of technology, a conflict at the very center of a closing frontier. While Robert R. Wilson claims that the novel "deals with a moment in Alberta history, the post-Second World War transition of rural Alberta into modern technology-based agriculture (and into the recognition that the rest of the world exists)," he more rightly acknowledges that "it is an imprecise time, nearly as much so as its imprecise space and location."[68] The frontier of *What the Crow Said* shares in common many features of the American West before the turn of the century, perhaps best explained by the fact that Canada "acquired its West much later than did the United States."[69] Historian Walter Sage, in a "1928 article[,] charted a North American frontier of immigrants who moved back and forth across the Canada-United States border, moving gradually westward in waves from the colonial period" and later argued that Canadian regions "had closer relations with the adjacent United States than with the rest of Canada."[70] For Sage, "the American frontier moved north into Canada after the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] was completed in 1885."[71] Paul Sharp would agree, citing the fact that "some 1.25 million Americans, as well as Europeans and eastern Canadians, sought new opportunities in the Canadian West" after 1890.[72] According to Jameson and Mouat, "The Turnerian opportunity of free land still beckoned, but it now transcended national loyalties as land-hungry settlers crossed the forty-ninth parallel."[73]

What the Crow Said features a European rainbow of settlers on the land, from Ukrainian Droniuks and Irish O'Holleran to the German Jew Liebhaber. Old Lady Lang's husband was a "homesteader" (82), illustrating the family's short tenure on the frontier. The most striking image of her son Martin Lang is as a corpse ice-glued to his plow outside the Lang home. But when Liebhaber is looking for words to describe Tiddy's first husband, he tries "pioneer" and then discards it (6). The generation following on the heels of Old Lady Lang's husband has changed settlers into men who are at once complacent and landed, with a clear sense of entitlement and at the same time lacking clear definition. The settlers here in Big Indian, while connected to their land through their homesteads and crops, still seem not quite entitled to their land and apparently illustrating Turner's claim that "at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man [of European descent]."(4). At one point, the men in the town begin an epic card game that lasts 141 days; they turn their backs on the obligations they have to the fields, leaving the women to do the chores. In missing threshing season, they quite literally neglect to reap what they've sown. Yet when "Tiddy realized that the women were running the world better than the men[,] she was content to let them go on with their game of schmeir" in her home, at least for the first four weeks. The only men not drawn into the game are the nearby Hutterites enlisted to take over the fieldwork, who "worked hard from dawn to dusk" (80) and who "spoke softly to each other in a German that was their own secret language" (79).

Closer to the Old World and perhaps less complacent about their land, the Hutterites represent the settler at his most isolated and most determined.

As if to emphasize how tenuous the white man's hold is over Big Indian, and though the land itself seems ever connected to the First Nation, the novel vacillates between disregard for the municipality's Cree roots and a continual appropriation. "The town had been named after a little Cree trapper who could sweep eight quarters off a beer table with one swing of his hammer" (119), though the indigenous people have been so marginalized that they seem to rate little more than a casual mention.[74] Liebhaber's paper publishes under the moniker *Big Indian Signal. What the Crow Said* only mentions in passing that Liebhaber writes an article citing Walking Eagle's prediction for a mild winter (45) or that "a handful of Indians, solemn and quiet, filed into church and sat together in two back pews" at the marriage of Joe Lightning and Cathy Lang (103). The biggest insult to the increasingly argumentative schmier players is that "every white male over the age of twenty in the Municipal District of Bigknife" is "put on the Indian list: not one of them could, legally, be served an alcoholic beverage" (115), an act with which Kroetsch illustrates the degree to which the racism of a town built around the "idea" of the Indian has remained a constrictive factor. This list is a remnant of a code that is no longer able to enforce its order on the First Nation world, for after the decree against the white males only "Indian males over twenty were . . . allowed to purchase alcoholic beverages" (119). When Liebhaber serves as ref for the hockey team—the Big Indian Braves—he realizes "he was some kind of arbitrator, the civilizing man. He liked that. The civilizing man: at the center, and yet uninvolved" (62). The irony here, of courses, is that he is a Jewish man arbitrating between two white teams during a white man's game, illuminating the "civilizing" influence of the white settlers as little more than a farce. Yet the only First Nation character to hold any position of importance in the text is the Cree Joe Lightning (with whom Cathy is in love and whose flight with the eagle will end in tragedy). The white settlers in Big Indian, in clinging to the First Nation *origins* of the land they inhabit, seem to demonstrate their own uncertainty about ownership, despite buying into the notion that they are the civilizing force for the frontier. The white inhabitance of the space has always had a shallow, impermanent feel: "The homesteaders who build the wooden [Church of the Final Virgin] had simply dug a hole in the bald prairie" for its basement (Kroetsch 90), as if leaving as few permanent marks on the land as possible. The white settlers seem only to inhabit the very surface of the land.

While Indians are largely marginalized, Joe Lightning, who appears nearly one-third of the way into the text, fully inhabits the text. The Cree lives in Big Indian Hotel, we discover, in the midst of the whites and thanks to his shuffleboard career. Joe even crosses the Canadian-American border into Montana and North Dakota for shuffleboard competitions. And Joe serves as a pioneer in other ways: before his marriage to Cathy Lang, "no person in the municipality, ever . . . had married for love" (88). Their relationship sparks debate among the marathon schmier players not because of his Indian heritage but rather because, as Liebhaber contends, "lust and sloth alone were the reasons for matrimony" and

no "man in the room [could] name a single person, in the whole history of the Municipal District of Bigknife, who married" for love (88). The wedding leads to the removal of the schmier game to the basement of the church when they attend the wedding looking for evidence. While "Cathy was the normal one" (195), as the narration claims at the novel's end, she may also represent—with her husband Joe—the failed attempt at normalizing. She embodies the possibility and the failure of an amalgamated future. Canadian laws well into the twentieth century still dictated that a "white woman who marries an Indian becomes an Indian. Thus, anyone with an Indian male progenitor, no matter how far back in the paternal line, is an Indian, so that many persons, particularly in the older provinces, have Indian status but very little Indian blood."[75] Their love match represents the hope of reconciliation between the formerly hostile, still racially divided and racially defined white settlers and the Cree, though Joe's death before they can produce an heir impotizes that promising possibility.

When Joe grabs hold of the low-flying eagle—whether their actual flight is at the mercy of the predator or despite its attempts to shed itself of Joe, not even Joe can say—his is a spy mission, an attempt to understand the sky's onslaught against the land. His fall leads him to as thunderous an epiphany for Joe as Vera Lang's earlier cry of sexual awakening, both of which are heard throughout the town but not placed by the residents: "His fall was as new to him as his rise; the vertical world was all a mystery . . . The laughter of his falling was heard over most of the district. It was more a laugh than anything like a cry of terror . . . Joe, in his mile-high fall, with his arms spread like wings, his torn hands bleeding—perhaps, after all, he did learn something of the eagle's secret" (141). He survives the fall, landing in a waste pile from a moved outhouse behind the Church of the Final Virgin, spattering "a ton of shit and piss and catalogue paper over thirty-four parked cars. Joe Lightning might still have been alive, after his abrupt return to the earth. There was, a doctor from the General Hospital determined later, not a bone in his body broken. But the churchgoers, at the time of the fall, had on their Sunday clothes" (142–43). The Cree, and any future union of the settlers and Indians, literally drown in the "shit" left behind by white settlers.

Although white women share with the First Nation an existence on the fringes of Big Indian, this is not true of the narrative, since the story itself revolves around a houseful of white women, mothers and daughters. Tiddy Lang's decision to go into the Big Indian Hotel bar shocks the men, since "it was against the laws of the municipality for a woman to enter the beer parlor" (18). The men subsequently attempt to keep her quiet in an effort to regain the top hand, to marginalize her through silence if not through physical ostracism: "Tiddy, again, tried to speak; the men, not letting her be there. Nothing was so important as her not being allowed to violate their secrecy. [They] . . . excluded her from the misery of their loss and their terror and their loneliness" (20). As Stephen Slemon notes, "*What the Crow Said* . . . thematize[s] a *kind* of postcolonial discourse: one involving the recuperation of silenced voices as axial to a 'positive imagined reconstruction of reality'" (420). Stepping from the border into the center of the text, Tiddy refuses not to be seen or heard by the men of the town, and she redirects what might

have been a male-centered text into a female realm that can hold its own against and, arguably, eventually overcome the masculine narrative.

Female sexuality is the one of the strongest magical realist elements in Kroetsch's novel and is, without fail, connected to the Lang household. The novel begins with Vera's apparent rape and subsequent pregnancy at the mercy of the bees. In *What the Crow Said*, Robert Kroetsch refigures Vera Lang's womanhood as simultaneously a place of desire and conception or "nesting":

> Scouting for a nest, a new place to hive, the first bees had found the scent of her sun-warmed body. What her terror must have been at the soft caress of those touching bees, at the trickle of gold along her bare thighs; what ultimate desperation caught in her throat at the ferocious and innocent need of those homeless bees, at the feverish high hum, she never told . . . Vera, alone at the edge of the valley, lifted her body against the pressing bees. Her not daring to resist became the excuse, the cause of her slow yielding . . . Her moving crushed the blue-purple petals of the crocus bed, broke the hairy stalks, the blossoms, into the dizzying sweetness of her own desire . . . The bees found the swollen lips between her thighs; she felt their intrusive weight and spread farther her legs.
>
> Then she gave her cry. (8–11)

While Kroetsch makes what is Vera's first experience—he describes "her world-old virgin body" (12)—highly pleasurable, it is equally significant that she has no choice. "Her not daring to resist" equates her impregnation with rape, even if the cry she gives convinces the listeners, without "knowing her name, or where she was, or what had touched her into that fierce and passionate and desperate undulation," that "no man would satisfy her. Not one. No mortal man would satisfy her" (12–13). Vera's first sexual encounter is contextualized both as a violence against her and as an act empowering nature over men, albeit in an extremely sexual manner.

In the borderland of *What the Crow Said*, Kroetsch imagines his female characters fulfilling one of the three traditional roles Anzaldúa describes—in the home as mothers—yet Lang women are not required to be wives in the process. The text is replete with dying husbands and other men who absent themselves, literally and figuratively. Martin Lang, a Rip Van Winkle character "who was always in town when he was needed, always in the beer parlor in the Big Indian Hotel, doing anything but farming" (9), is as absent alive as he is dead.[76] After his death, though, even his dead body goes missing when he slips from the back of John Skandl's sleigh on their ride into the undertaker's, until he is found thawing in the church basement. Skandl, who becomes Tiddy's second husband, also deserts her, this time for politics, and then dies in a plane crash. Equally absent is the father of Gladys's child, conceived the night of a fight at the skating rink. When Liebhaber asks who the father is, Tiddy Lang tells him, "Everybody" (75). In this communal fathering, no one is required to take the "blame" of fathering Gladys's child, and as with the bees in Vera's pregnancy and Theresa's claim that a ghost fathered her child, the community provides an explanation—no matter how unsatisfying those answers may be—but no husband or father. The assignation

of fatherhood is continually left up to the creative force of Tiddy Lang, who after each pregnancy proclaims, "Someone must take a wife." In contrast to Tiddy's agency, interestingly, is the unwillingness of men to accept incomplete answers. The schmier game is a reaction to "the inadequacy of truth" (76) to determine the father of Gladys's baby.

Not all men prove inadequate for the challenges of the frontier. The Hutterite men step in willingly during the schmier game, ensuring that the land continues to yield to the humans on it. Mick O'Holleran, a hired hand for the Langs and future son-in-law, is missing in a figurative sense, in that he does not possess private parts or a right leg. But when the second daughter, Rose, reveals that she is pregnant, "without the slightest argument, [he] admitted that at times he not only felt the presence of his missing leg and private parts, but could actually use them" (66–67). Mick's ability to compensate for potentially emasculating circumstances may be connected to the very freedoms that a frontier space allows. By ignoring the risks associated with the landscape, he seems to have learned, too, to ignore his own shortcomings and to achieve the Anglo superiority promised by the frontier; unlike Joe Lightning, the white men in the text procreate. A final, ironic example among the Lang women is Jerry Lapanne, the escaped convict who is "an emblem of incarcerated desire" and who "repeatedly tries to escape *into* the site of the text toward Rita Lang . . . But the police are always there on the borders of the municipality to stop him; and his one breakthrough results in his death."[77] The one man who tries hardest *not* to be missing is the one incapable of entering the text.

The most extreme removal of the men in the novel is through their systematic, accidental deaths, one by one, throughout the novel. Thus the sexually charged atmosphere at the end of the novel is almost completely inhabited by women who seem no longer to need men at all. Only a dying Liebhaber has earned his place in this sexual space through attempting to fertilize the sky with Vera's bees, since female sexual discovery begins with Vera. Men become a nuisance in the text and, ultimately, more like the drones that serve a queen bee. Any man who marries a Lang woman proves susceptible to death—Tiddy loses two husbands, and five of her six daughters lose either a husband or, in Rita's case, the man who escapes from jail in a handmade airplane attempting to claim her hand. Vera's three husbands seem to leap gratefully into the arms of death. It is no accident that each time Liebhaber remembers the future, he recalls an event that both brings him closer to Tiddy Lang's household of women, since the home itself continually represents weather-related death or the threat of destruction for men. The most important magical realist aspect Liebhaber's *Big Indian Signal* brings to the novel, beyond inspiring Liebhaber's temporary loss of the alphabet or its meaning (69), is that it journalistically renders supernatural events of the municipality that all seem to center around the Lang household: equally "factual" are the accounts of the year the snow does not melt, Liebhaber's drafting of Martin Lang's obituary before the event occurs, and Vera's dispassionate contributions—"*Mr. and Mrs. Bert Brausen are pleased to announce the engagement of their eldest daughter. The horses aren't shedding. Men are a bunch of useless bastards*" (19). The novel ends in

this female-dominated space; only Liebhaber (as Tiddy's newly taken lover) may intrude, with the women able to pleasure themselves—and even he seems to be on the brink of death. Besides Tiddy, Cathy, "the normal one" (195), is the only one with a use for men, actively wishing for the return of her husband: "Sometimes she looks up at the sky, at the slant of rain, hoping that Joe Lightning will fall into her arms" (195).

Cathy's search of the heavens also relocates what has become, for whites, the final frontier and the site where the settlers may test themselves against nature. Claiming their rights to the frontier, the settlers have already taken care of the sky themselves, as illustrated by the rain falling on the Canadian army as it rolls into the Big Indian Valley. While all the Big Indian men declare war on the sky during the drought and wind storms, only Liebhaber's actions apparently have any effect. The settlers believe themselves winners of the battle by dint of sheer brute, *masculine* strength (represented by the buckshot), and their manipulation of nature (the cannon-shot of bees). Their shots into the air only result in their own wounds as the winds return their ammo. And the Canadian government arrives *after* it begins to pour, its tanks and F-104s too late to aid the settlement in its war against the sky, though it still opens fire on the clouds. According to George F. G. Stanley's "Canadian counter-narrative to Turner's frontier," in the Canadian West and "in accordance with British tradition, the Canadian government laid great emphasis on law and order" in the late nineteenth century;[78] to Stanley, the border served as a clear separation between "American violence, lawlessness, and greed [and] Canadian civility, order, and managed development."[79] Yet this municipality is uncertain whether it belongs to one province or the other, much less under the purview of the Canadian government. The martial might of the government is only as available to Big Indian as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's "nearest detachment," 50 miles away (100)—their intrusive presence in the valley becomes mere spectacle for the townspeople who watch the "column of tanks clanked and crawled away from a row of neatly ordered olive-green [army] tents" that "had sprung up in the darkness of the night" (170). Conveniently, because the "clouds were closing, coming down onto the earth as if wounded" and "bled rain" (170), this second (unnecessary) response serves as reassurance to the oblivious army that *its* actions bring about the returned fertility of the land for its owners.

Humans in *What the Crow Said* challenge the elements—not with technology like the impotent planes that cannot land or that cannot return John Skandl except in death—but with firepower like Liebhaber's, whose use of Heck's cannon to fertilize the sky by shooting Vera's bees into the unyielding clouds, turns nature back on itself as a weapon: "Liebhaber, that night, was set on gaining a victory over death itself, there in the manure in Heck's yard . . . in the sweat of his need, stooping and rising, stooping and rising, would fertilize the barren sky" (163). Though even the late-summer freeze had its benefits, at least for John Skandl's ice business, the drought most seriously harms both the land and the humans, in an environment already less fertile and yielding than the prairie just to the south in the United States. Inclement weather of any kind reenacts the risks of a closing

frontier. According to White, a "closing frontier also raised issues of manhood," since the frontier was always posited in gendered terms.[80] The men's war against the sky and Liebhaber's successful pollination of that higher plane opens another frontier of sorts, this time *above* Big Indian, on the heels of such meteorological threats as the June freeze and the ceaseless drought and wind storm. The rain itself, as if to provide evidence of the efficacy of Liebhaber's efforts, is punctuated with the wet carcasses of bees: "They fell from the sky; they appeared, now and then, a bee on a Saskatoon bush, on a strand of barbed wire, on the dry side of a willow fencepost" (170–71). The bees returning to the earth—whether in the frozen hail or with the rain—do not represent the failure of Liebhaber's attempt but rather illustrate how humans may enforce their own "remembered future" (a droughtless one) on the hard land their forefathers settled.

Magical realism itself shares with the frontier and the border a threat of being pronounced closed: Raymond Williams attempted to sound the death toll for magical realism when, in his 1995 work *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America: Politics, Culture, and the Crisis of Truth*, he dubbed it "the now defunct magic realist enterprise" (5).[81] Yet the works of Ana Castillo, Thomas King, and Robert Kroetsch illustrate the degree to which these literary and literal spaces remain alive and fertile. Because the myth of frontier already connotes the use of words to manipulate the formative capacity of language, in reappropriating that myth, King simply turns that linguistic lens on the peripheral characters of the historical frontier. Along with Castillo and Kroetsch, he formulates a North American space where the supernatural reveals both the actions of and *upon* the margins throwing off the stranglehold of Old World sensibilities. Turner's metaphor for the wave-like movement across the West further demonstrates the commonalities between borderlands and the frontier. What Turner figures as a near-endless land of possibility, Castillo transfigures into shoreline—the physical location where the boundless frontier must, in fact, be *bound*, limited, defined, and drawn. Yet *So Far from God* evokes a border people who bleed on and across that border. Caridad's very movement across the landscape and cultures, passing seamlessly through the several borders of the text, may best exemplify Castillo's notion that the boundaries are fleeting. And Kroetsch's novel, at first seemingly more Turnerian, proves to be bordered by the sky, whose power to "make or break" the pioneer descendants has a neocolonizing effect. This ungoverned land finds itself, and its people, ruled by a force much larger than itself.

Through the magical realist mode, these three authors simultaneously bridge and widen the written landscape. Their novels actively intervene in a destiny that might otherwise seem completely out if their characters' abilities to control. In choosing the novel, Castillo, King, and Kroetsch provide themselves and their supernatural the same sort of endurance as the frontier myth itself. These novels appear as bridges, the means by which a marginalized, hyphenated, North American population can repeople and reuse the frontier myth by appropriating its figurate value as a place for firsts. The borders of that frontier—whether northern or southern—ultimately rely on similar codifications of the land. Were the supernatural in *Green Grass, Running Water*, *What the Crow Said*, or *So Far from*

God dismissible, so, too, would this disruption of the (white) manifest destiny be capable of dismissal: John Wayne would still be welcoming the cavalry in to purge the Indians, the sky would still be holding out on the Canadian prairie, and the borderlands would be an ever-diminishing demarcation across the complex *mestizo* culture. Robert Kroetsch, Ana Castillo, and Thomas King integrate the supernatural into the very myths and origins of their characters' movement into and across the land. No longer can the people in Turner's periphery be ignored, dismissed, or devalued. Instead, the supernatural in these novels is so closely aligned with the marginalized, and the effort *not* to privilege the real is sustained so consistently, that the margins must be equally noticeable, noted, and valued.

Notes

1. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997 [1920]), 34.
2. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999 [1987]), 25.
3. Jeanne Delbaere, "Magic Realism: The Energy of the Margins," in *Postmodern Fiction in Canada*, ed. Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 97–98.
4. Ibid., 98.
5. Thomas King, *Green Grass, Running Water* (New York: Bantam, 1993); Ana Castillo, *So Far From God* (New York: Plume, 1994); Robert Kroetsch, *What the Crow Said* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1998 [1978]).
6. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 3–4.
7. Ibid., 22.
8. Ibid., 34.
9. Ibid., 32–33n49.
10. Ibid., 33n49.
11. Ironically, on the same day that Turner presented his thesis in public for the first time, Buffalo Bill was one mile away entertaining thousands of spectators with a performance that emphasized the very vices Turner disparaged. "Cody's Wild West told of violent conquest, of wresting the continent from the American Indian peoples who occupied the land" (Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994], 9). According to Richard White, "Turner and Buffalo Bill . . . divided the existing narratives of American frontier mythology . . . [e]ach eras[ing] part of the larger, and more confusing and tangled, cultural story to deliver up a clean, dramatic, and compelling narrative" (11).
12. Ibid., 33n49.
13. Ibid., 37–38.
14. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1.
15. Ibid., 94.
16. Ibid., 302.
17. Ibid., 300.
18. Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 255n1.
19. Ibid., 255.

20. Ibid., 199.
21. Ibid., 303.
22. Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 93.
23. When discussing specific characters from the novels, this chapter follows the precedence set by King and Kroetsch in referring to the Native American characters as "Indians."
24. The irony is, of course, that Coyote—the predominant storyteller and creative figure in much of Native American culture—would need to be taught the story he generally tells.
25.

Character	Biblical story	Biblical male	Male appropriation from canonical text
First Woman	Garden of Eden	Ahdamn	Lone Ranger from *Lone Ranger*
Changing Woman	The Flood	Noah	Ishmael from *Moby Dick*
Thought Woman	Immaculate Conception	Archangel Gabriel	Robinson Crusoe from *Robinson Crusoe*
Old Woman	Christ walking on water	Christ	Hawkeye from *Last of the Mohicans*

26. Delbaere, "Magic Realism: The Energy of the Margins," 100.
27. Karla J. Sanders, "Healing Narratives: Negotiating Cultural Subjectivities in Louise Erdrich's Magical Realism" (PhD diss., Penn State University, 1996), 280.
28. Quoted in Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing the West*: *Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890–1930* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002), 11.
29. Oddly enough, Bursum's claim that he is a friend to Indians is given in the context of his fight with Eli, the Indian who stands in the way of Bursum's development of Parliament Lake. When Eli Stands Alone decides to live in his family's cabin, which lies under the dam that creates the lake and holds up the building on lakefront property on a "legal technicality" (209), Bursum argues that Eli "[c]an't stay there forever." But Eli says he will stay "as long as the grass is green and the waters run" (295).
30. King quotes from John Keats's "The Second Coming" here.
31. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza*, 25.
32. Ibid., 26.
33. Sonia Saldívar-Hall, "Introduction to the Second Edition," in Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3.
34. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza*, 27.
35. Ibid., 53.
36. Ibid., 52.
37. Ibid., 43.
38. Ibid., 39.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 38–39.
41. 1 Cor. 13:13.
42. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza*, 39.
43. Ibid.
44. Castillo attributes "So Far from God—So near the United States" to Porfiriò Diaz, dictator of Mexico during the Mexican Civil War, in her epigraph to the novel.

45. Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, "Telling Differences: The Forty-Ninth Parallel and Historiographies of the West and Nation," *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (May 2006): 183–230, 185.
46. Ibid., 184.
47. Ibid., 184n2. Emphasis added.
48. Ibid., 187.
49. Ibid., 183–84.
50. Ibid., 199.
51. Ibid., 189–90.
52. Ibid., 191.
53. Ibid., 193.
54. Ibid., 189.
55. Ibid., 199.
56. Ibid., 200.
57. Ibid., 186.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 188–89.
60. Ibid., 230.
61. Ibid., 208.
62. In fact, critic Robert R. Wilson claims, "The indeterminacy of boundaries pervades [all of] his novels." Wilson, introduction to *What the Crow Said*, by Robert Kroetsch (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1998 [1978]), viii.
63. Ibid., ix.
64. Jameson and Mouat, "Telling Differences," 187.
65. Luca Biagiotti, "Bees, Bodies, and Magical Miscegenations," in *Coterminous Worlds*: *Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-colonial Literature in English*, ed. Elsa Linguanti, Francesco Casotti, and Carmen Concilio, Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English 39 (Atlanta: Amsterdam, 1999), 105.
66. Wilson, introduction to *What the Crow Said*, ix.
67. Quoted in Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, New Critical Idiom Series (London: Routledge, 2004), 49.
68. Wilson, introduction to *What the Crow Said*, xiii.
69. Jameson and Mouat, "Telling Differences," 186.
70. Ibid., 197.
71. Ibid., 201.
72. Ibid., 205.
73. Ibid., 205–6.
74. First Nation women, who are not even mentioned in the text or the town, are pushed so far into the margins as to have become invisible.
75. T. R. L. MacInnes, "History of Indian Administration in Canada," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue Canadienne d'Economique et de Science Politique* 12, no. 3 (August 1946): 387–94, 389.
76. Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in *Magical Realism*: *Theory*, *History*, *Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 407–26, 420. Slemon says, "The dead Martin Lang . . . represents absence to Liebhaber but presence to Tiddy, throwing up an uncrossable barrier between them," but Tiddy's periods of mourning seem more a matter of her balking at being tied to another potentially useless man than out of consideration for Martin's memory.
77. Ibid., 418.

78. Jameson and Mouat, "Telling Differences," 199.
79. Ibid., 200.
80. Wilson, introduction to *What the Crow Said*, 49.
81. Raymond Williams, *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America*: *Politics, Culture, and the Crisis of Truth* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 5. Raymond Williams makes this pronouncement in relation to García Márquez and the author's own sense that he has been falsely categorized as a magical realist. "Gabriel García Márquez makes numerous statements about being a 'realist' who attempts to describe the reality of Colombia as truthfully as possible, despite the insistence of many foreign readers on classifying him as a fantasy writer or an imaginative fabricator of the chimeras associated with the now defunct magic realist enterprise" (5).

CHAPTER 11

Mama Day

Where Gothicism and Magical Realism Meet

Donald J. Reilly

In "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," Rawdon Wilson appropriates a scene from Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and revises the trope of the alien visit to reimagine a close encounter of a different kind. His purpose in doing this is to explain the handling of space in magical realist fiction. The particular kind of space that Wilson examines is what Roland Barthes refers to as "stereographic space," the intertextual space "in which one text, or sliver of a text . . . pulls into its own textual space, some other text or shard."[1] Wilson goes on to add that in literature "one space can contain other spaces."[2] He asks his readers to imagine an alien world named QueAng-QueAng in which inhabitants use metal straws to drink the eyeballs of living creatures by piercing the center and sucking out the soft gel within. In this imaginary world, the people of QueAng-QueAng also "execute blasphemers in a similar manner."[3] Wilson then extends his example to London where he imagines that the aliens have landed to "practice their distinctive mode of punishment":[4] "Once they land, they will be like an alien world superimposed upon English space, their doctrines and practices folded into the world they have entered. That ordinary space will now contain them, encysted but highly active, and will inevitably make a little room for their cultural practices."[5]

Rawdon Wilson's ideas about space in magical realist texts can be easily applied to Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*,[6] a novel in which there are two major spaces: New York City and Willow Springs. Willow Springs is a mysterious place, a barrier island that exists off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina and because it is right smack in the middle of the two states, it is claimed by neither. The inhabitants of Willow Springs pay no state taxes, do not vote in state elections, but do vote in national ones. When George Andrews, one of the novel's main characters, tries to locate Willow Springs on a map, he cannot; there is empty space on the

map where the island should be. It is an island that is connected to the mainland by the most tenuous of bridges, one that has to be rebuilt after severe storms. Because of it nebulous existence, Willow Springs is an example of Wilson's alien world, a world that is eventually superimposed onto another space, in this case New York, through the actions of Cocoa, another important character in the novel and a native of Willow Springs.

Early in the book, George and Cocoa meet for dinner in a New York restaurant where Cocoa carves out a little space for her "cultural practices."[7] In Wilson's interpretative framework, she is an "alien" who tries to superimpose her "doctrines and practices" on New York; she is an outsider who tries to fold her customs "into the world" she has entered.[8] Rawdon Wilson calls such an alien presence dangerous because space is malleable and expands to accommodate the new presence, which will ultimately exert some kind of influence in the host society. I would argue that Cocoa is a dangerous presence in New York before George educates her about the real nature of the city. Before her education, Cocoa, who is frustrated by her inability to find a job, calls New York a place that lacks clarity, a place where black is not always black and white is not always white. She recalls stories that her grandmother, Abigail, told her about "want ads and housing listings in the newspapers [back home] . . . that were clearly marked colored or white" and believes it "must have been wonderfully easy to go job hunting then" (19). George is shocked and believes Cocoa is arguing for the return of segregation. She evades answering his accusation by asking, "Where had it gone?" (19). Although she has lived in New York for seven years, she knows very little about the city beyond her own neighborhood. She calls it an "awful place for a single woman" and needs George to act as a tour guide to introduce her to its nuances (17). Because of the cultural baggage that she carries from Willow Springs and because of the cultural practices she superimposes onto New York, she assumes the role of a bigot[9] by referring to people from various ethnic groups as food: she calls Jews bagels and African Americans spareribs. George is repulsed when she calls Herman Badillo a taco.

Because of the dramatically different culture and landscape, New York is as alien to the residents of Willow Springs as the barrier island is to George, so when George visits, he is an alien presence. However, the interaction between George and this space is different from Cocoa's in New York. In *Mama Day*, Willow Springs exists on the margin of the United States and has its own unique culture, which will be discussed later in this essay. When George visits, he becomes a representative of the "privileged center of culture"[10] and when he attempts to do what Cocoa did in New York—that is to superimpose his cultural practices onto Willow Springs—he is rebuffed and rendered comical. By depicting George in this way, Naylor is writing "ex-centrically . . . or from the margin": she displaces the discourse of the center, in this case George's cultural practice.[11] When George visits Willow Springs he acknowledges it as "another world," a world of conjurers, hoodoo practitioners, and ghosts (175). In this space, George tries to superimpose his northeastern cultural practices of rationality, logic, and authority but with little effect. Even though he is a 33-year-old engineer in New York and

has a significant stake in a successful architectural firm, he is referred to as "boy" throughout his stay. His child-like status is emphasized during his night out with Dr. Buzzard and the boys after which George returns home like a drunken teenager. When the people of Willow Springs learn that he is an engineer, they assume that he works on a train and engage in a comical discussion about the difference between a conductor and an engineer. This conversation undermines George status as a professional. Toward the end of the novel, when he tries to use his architectural knowledge to rebuild the fallen bridge, he is ignored as the islanders rebuild the bridge using their own archaic practices. This dismissal of his knowledge and training diminishes George's authority as a learned and experienced representative of the center and elevates the knowledge system and practices of Willow Springs. According to Theo L. D'haen, this kind of writing back against the center is "an essential feature of that strain of postmodernism we call magic realism."[12]

The fact that alien characters attempt to superimpose their worlds on other worlds in Naylor's *Mama Day* is one aspect of the novel that qualifies it as a magical realist text. But by returning to Rawdon Wilson's imaginary world of QueAng-QueAng, another interesting layer is revealed. He argues that in magical realism "one world lies present, though hidden within the other, just as one text lies latent within another text."[13] In this essay, I intend to argue that within the magical realistic text I have begun to explicate here, there lies another latent text, a gothic one. So not only do two worlds meet, two modes collide and thus this novel becomes a site "in which a battle [of discourses] takes place," to use Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation,[14] and this battle creates a space in which Naylor is able to write back against American hegemony.

In "Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," Stephen Slemon explains that "most worlds of fiction are generically mixed in modes" and *Mama Day* is no exception.[15] Much of the text can be classified as narrative realism, especially the parts that are set in New York. Naylor spends a great deal of time and energy establishing the realism of New York by depicting George as Cocoa's tour guide. Because she misunderstands the city so deeply, he feels obligated to educate her about "his city" so that she will no longer feel like a stranger there.[16] He travels around New York with Cocoa and educates her about the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens; about the train system out to these boroughs of New York City; and about the people who live there. She stops calling people food names and begins to understand the differences between the various racial and ethnic groups in New York City. She begins to appreciate the cityscape of Manhattan the "low sweeping coastline from the south, creeping up into the rocky Palisades in the north . . . with the Hudson glimmering along the side—the sailboats, the rowers, the gulls" (98). George is able to help her change and this transformation makes New York more tolerable and enjoyable for her.

This New York tour establishes the realistic basis of the novel. The way in which the city is described is very believable as is the description of the island of Willow Springs. Even though Willow Springs is the site of most of the magic in this text, the island is very convincing as a southern barrier island. From the

concrete description we get of the composition of the soil in Miranda's (also known as Mama Day) garden, to the forest through which she travels in search of plants and herbs that she needs as a natural healer, from the cypress swamp in which a policeman from the mainland gets lost, to the existence of Dr. Buzzard's backwoods distillery, all these elements contribute to the depiction of the island as a real place. And when Mama Day's magic begins to emanate from this seemingly real southern place and leaks into the very real world of New York, the reader is not surprised.

For instance, Cocoa's first meeting with George happens during an interview for his architectural company. He does not offer her the job because he needs to hire someone immediately and Cocoa already has plans to visit Willow Springs. When she tells Mama Day, her great aunt, that she did not get the job, the older woman suggests that Cocoa write a letter to George thanking him for the interview and expressing her continued availability for, and interest in, future positions. Mama Day's one condition is that Cocoa give her the letter so she can mail it. When George receives the letter, he notices a "film of yellow powder" on his hands. He describes this powder as having the "consistency of talc and [being] very sparse" and says it is almost as if he had touched a "goldenrod." Shortly after he touches this powder, he recommends Cocoa for a job in another firm where she is eventually hired (54). They remain in touch, begin dating, and eventually marry. This is an example of Mama Day's magic at work; it is also another example of how magical realism is at play in this text because Naylor "combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that the magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed."[17]

Thus far, I have begun to establish two of the modes at play in *Mama Day*: magical realism and narrative realism. The next mode used by Naylor, and the one which begins to help her write back against the privileged center of the United States, the land beyond the bridge, is gothicism. One of the most elemental features of a gothic text is the haunted house, the gothic castle, or the decaying abbey. We see this kind of structure in early examples of European gothicism, like "Christabel" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and *Carmilla* by Sheridan LeFanu; we see this element in a classic example of American gothicism, *The House of Seven Gables*; and we see this element in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, another postmodern, hybrid text that deploys magical realism and gothicism at once. In *Mama Day*, the haunted structure is referred to as the "other place" (68). It is clearly the source of Mama Day's powers and this is one of the spaces in which gothicism and magical realism meet directly. For example, when Bernice, one of the minor characters in the novel, is unable to get pregnant, she appeals to Mama Day for help. Mama Day advises Bernice to be patient and to give natural, herbal cures a chance (96). She is reluctant to tap into the power of the other place even though Bernice repeatedly asks her to do so. When Mama Day's natural remedies fail to help, Bernice resorts to stealing and consuming fertility pills from the pharmacist who employs her and gets very sick as a result (72). At this point, Mama Day decides to use the power of the other place and Bernice is soon pregnant. Folded within[18] this gothic moment is, of course, a magical realistic one: Mama Day's

powers emanate logically and seamlessly out of the context of the scene, with no smoke, no mirrors, no pomp and circumstance. Her magic is just a fact of life in Willow Springs. Four years later when Bernice's son, Little Caesar, dies in a severe storm that destroys the only bridge that connects Willow Springs to the "mainside," Bernice is confident that Mama Day can once again tap into the power of the other place to resurrect her child (258). In the end of the scene, the full extent of Mama Day's magic is left ambiguous. Readers are not sure whether or not she actually has the ability to raise the dead. Bernice clearly believes she does, but this may be driven by her desperate situation. Mama Day does not tell Bernice that she cannot resurrect Little Caesar; instead she tells her to return home and bury her child (259).

The other place is a source of fear for many on the island, like a haunted house, and in this sense it is a gothic space. After it is damaged in the storm, Mama Day is anxious about repairing it. She knows she will have to wait until the bridge is fixed so she can hire a contractor from the mainside because no repairman from Willow Springs will go near it. In a comical scene in which Mama Day and Dr. Buzzard discuss Bernice's inability to become pregnant, Buzzard's fear of the other place is highlighted. Dr. Buzzard is a con man who purports to have magical powers that rival Mama Day's, but in reality all he has is his backwoods moonshine, which he claims has medicinal value. Before Mama Day taps into the power of the other place and works her magic on Bernice, she is worried that the young woman will go to Dr. Buzzard for help, and she warns him to steer clear of the situation. At first, he refuses Mama Day's request and tells her it is none of her business. When Dr. Buzzard dismisses her, she issues an innocuous threat, in her very matter-of-fact way, and when he accuses her of threatening him, Mama Day raises the level of her threat and sarcastically replies, "Now why would I do something like that? What would a tired old woman like me do to a powerful hoodoo doctor? Why, that little mess I got out at the other place wouldn't hold a candle to . . ." (51). At this point, Dr. Buzzard changes his tune and retreats: "Ain't nobody talking about the other place" (52).

Mama Day begins with the voice of the collective narrator[19] who introduces the (gothic) other place and the (magical) legend of Sapphira Wade, Mama Day's great grandmother, a slave and a "conjure woman . . . who could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of the lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot" (4). Through this introductory exposition, we see that magic has been present on this island since its early existence. In this construction, Naylor made a conscious choice to place these magical elements in the foreground of *Mama Day*, which in turn establishes its magical realism from the onset. The magical ability to control lightning is one that Sapphira Wade passed on to Mama Day, as I will discuss later in this essay. Mama Day also inherited something else from her great grandmother: a resistant and subversive personality. Sapphira Wade had the reputation of being a troublesome slave who had resisted field work and domestic labor, but in spite of this, Bascomb Wade pursued and purchased her in 1819. He built a house on the island and lived there with her. The recapitulation of this

legend raises the expectation that Naylor intends to deploy the gothic trope of the pursued and imprisoned heroine, a motif that is common in nineteenth-century slave narratives, two of the most popular of which are *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.[20] In *Incidents*, Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs imprisons herself in an attic space to escape the male, sexual predators that make her life miserable. Although the depiction of women is less frequent in Douglass's narrative, there is one graphic scene in which a female slave is pursued, chained, and whipped by her white master.[21] The trope of the pursuit and imprisonment of slave women also appears in *The History of Mary Prince* and in *Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Coloured Woman* to name just two others.[22] A number of critics have acknowledged the relationship between slavery, slave narratives, and gothicism. In 1960, Leslie Fielder observed that "the proper subject" of the "American Gothic" is "slavery."[23] H. L. Malchow described the process of the "gothicization of race and the racialization of the gothic" in his 1996 book, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.[24] In 1999, Teresa Goddu identified two givens in gothic literature: that the "gothic novel issued from slavery" and that slavery was rooted in gothic tropes.[25] And in his 2005 essay "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments': Reading the African American Gothic into Wright's 'Big Boy Leaves Home,' Morrison's *Beloved* and Gomez's *Gilda*," Cedric Gael Bryant identified the existence of an "African American gothic tradition . . . [which] extends back to early 19th-century slave narratives."[26]

Initially, I interpreted the legend of Sapphira Wade as a device that would help Naylor introduce the motif of the pursued and imprisoned women common in the African American gothic tradition. But Naylor does not resort to what can be considered cliché, especially in a work of fiction. Instead she deploys gothic elements in a magical realist text to write back not only against the gothic literary tradition, but also against the historical center of power.

According to Cedric Bryant, the texts that can be placed in the African American gothic tradition often remake the mythology of conventional gothic literature. In other words, these texts "revise monstrosity" and in so doing write back against this literary discourse.[27] I would argue that remaking or revising gothic literature is exactly the kind of subversive act that Theo L. D'haen discusses in his essay "Magical Realism and Postmodernism." He argues that writing from the margin displaces the social, cultural, political, and literary discourses of the center. "Magical realist writing," he says, "achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the 'centr'-al line and then using these . . . to create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality . . . to right the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon."[28] *Mama Day* fits well into D'haen's theoretical framework. There is no doubt that in the 1980s (*Mama Day* was published in 1989), African American writers were still writing from the margin. They were certainly not as marginalized as they were during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s or the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, but there was a marginal sense to their perspective, even in the 1980s. An example of how an African American novelist writes from the margin to revise a gothic trope is Jewelle Gomez in her novel, *The Gilda Stories*, in which the mythology of the vampire is repeated, revised, and

racialized.[29] In this novel, Gilda is a "black, lesbian, fugitive slave . . . [who] survives . . . slavery, attempted rape, and the death of two *blood* mothers—her biological mother and an older vampire also named Gilda, who 'makes' [the younger Gilda] through" the ritual of sharing blood.[30] According to Cedric Gael Bryant, another novel that appropriates a gothic trope is *Beloved* by Toni Morrison.

In *Beloved*, when Sethe faces the prospect of seeing her children returned to slavery, she decides that death is a far better option, especially for her daughter who will almost certainly suffer the horrors of rape as a mature, enslaved woman.[31] Indeed, Sethe is afraid that her daughter's life will become as gothic as hers has been. Thus she slices her unnamed daughter's throat and is discovered by her master, Schoolteacher. According to Bryant, this is the point at which Morrison appropriates an important vampire motif, for Sethe crosses a threshold that "cannot be crossed."[32] In crossing this threshold, Sethe is now depicted as part human, part animal by Schoolteacher and she herself hears the beating of "wings . . . little hummingbirds [that] stuck their needle beaks right through her head-cloth into her hair."[33] It is hard not to associate the beating of wings with Dracula, nor to forget the needle-like fangs of the vampire recalled in this excerpt from *Beloved*. Sethe destabilizes and blurs that "boundary between animal and human," as Dracula does, and becomes a "monstrous mother."[34] Like Dracula, Sethe "occupies a liminal space that challenges 'normalcy,' 'lawfulness,' and 'marriageability'" and embraces "the power at the margins unapologetically [and] defiantly."[35]

By crossing this boundary between human and animal, by killing her child, a commodity in the slave economy, Sethe engages in an act of consumption also associated with vampirism. Judith Halberstam has argued that "Dracula 'consumes' the middle class, becoming . . . an image of anti-capitalism. [Dracula's] vampirism somehow interferes with the natural ebb and flow of currency just as it literally intervenes in the ebbing and flowing of blood."[36] Halberstam also calls Dracula "an image of monstrous anticapitalism" because he "hoards gold refusing to allow it to circulate freely."[37] In *Beloved*, Sethe engages in a similar anticapitalism.

The slave economy was sustained by the edict that any child born to an enslaved woman would follow the condition, the enslavement, of the mother and thus when a slave master raped and impregnated one of his female slaves, he was producing a product and increasing his wealth by adding an additional slave (or slaves) to his plantation. In other words, slavery was a matrilineal system ironically and savagely controlled by patriarchal forces that exercised total control over the bodies of black women in order to expand this economic system. By killing her daughter, Sethe consumed the product of slavery, her own child, and disrupted the patriarchal economic system.

In *Mama Day*, Naylor appropriates the elements of vampirism previously described and applies them to Sapphira Wade who, like Sethe, crosses a boundary that was rarely crossed. Shortly after she was purchased in 1819, Sapphira convinces her master, Bascomb Wade, to not only build her a house in Willow Springs, but to marry her. Why would Wade do this? Why would he go to

such extraordinary lengths for a slave he knew to be troublesome and subversive? Given that there is no evidence in the text about his romantic feelings for her and given that she is clearly described as a conjure woman with obvious magical powers, I would argue that Wade was under her spell. Thus Naylor takes the familiar trope of the heroine and the house (castle or abbey) in gothic literature and turns it completely on its head. Sapphira literally crosses the threshold, of the "other place" as the wife of her slave master. This was extremely rare during the era of slavery. Like Sethe and Dracula, Sapphira "occupies a liminal space that challenges 'normalcy,' 'lawfulness,' and 'marriageability' and embraces 'the power at the margins unapologetically [and] defiantly.'"[38] She has seven children with Wade in just a thousand days[39] and uses her power to convince him to "deed all his slaves [including her children] and every inch of land" to her (3). In deeding his slaves to her, Sapphira now becomes the consumer of the slave-product (one could say she hoards her children as Dracula hoards gold) and once she frees them she has completely disrupted the economic system of slavery in the community of Willow Springs. Like Dracula, Sapphira becomes an image of anticapitalism and disrupts the normal ebb and flow of the slave trade in Willow Springs, for in her community this trade will end with her. Once she has sucked the life blood out of Wade's slave economy, she kills him, a vampiric act if there ever was one. She later throws off her slave name, Wade, changes her surname to Day, and arranges for that surname to be passed on from generation to generation in true matrilineal fashion. Sapphira's reversal of the edict that sustained slavery is brilliantly ironic. Sapphira Day passes on freedom and independence in exactly the same way enslavement was passed on from mother to child under the old system. She literally remakes her children into something new. This is one of the reasons a vampire exists: to prey on a host and then to multiply. Sapphira preys on the hosts of Wade and slavery, destroys them, and gives birth to a unique community: an island of African American culture that is completely free and independent of, the United States of America.

In this part of *Mama Day*, Naylor deploys the gothic trope of vampirism to "haunt back"[40] against the historical center of power, turning her novel into a resistant, magical realist text. First she disrupts the historical master slave narrative that depicts the slave master as one who possesses his female slave for sexual and economic benefits. Naylor turns this narrative on its head and portrays Sapphira as the one who exploits a man: She uses Wade to build her a house and to help her bear children. Then she kills him, magically escaping legal prosecution for her crime, and takes possession of her children and the land, preserving it for generations to come. But Naylor also subverts gothicism and writes back against literary tradition as well. Sapphira Wade is not the traditional gothic vampire. Naylor does not depict her as white, wealthy, or as an example of the walking dead who comes out only at night to suck the lifeblood out of her victims. Instead, she depicts Sapphira Wade as an African American slave whose magical powers have rendered her vampiric.

The trope of doubling is a central one to gothic literature and examples of it abound. In "Christabel" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge,[41] Geraldine can be

seen as Christabel's double or opposite: where Christabel is good, Geraldine is bad; where Christabel is shorter, Geraldine is taller; where Christabel is sexually repressed, Geraldine is sexually liberated; and where Christabel is human, Geraldine is half animal. This last split between human and animal, prefigures Dracula and, as Bryant would have it, Sethe in *Beloved*. The trope of doubling can also be found in Sheridan LeFanu's "Carmilla," in which Laura and Carmilla can be seen as doubles.[42] In *Mama Day*, this gothic trope continues in the depiction of Abigail, Cocoa's grandmother, and Mama Day who are sisters and clearly doubles. Abigail is depicted as the generous, caring, and giving grandmother. Mama Day often accuses her of spoiling Cocoa and of being too accepting of her childish tantrums. When Cocoa makes her yearly pilgrimage to Willow Springs at the end of each summer, Abigail spends hours cooking Cocoa's favorite meals while Cocoa would be lucky if Mama Day found the time and desire to bake a single pie for her. On the other hand, Mama Day refuses to "baby" her niece to whom both of the older women often refer to as "Baby Girl," one of Cocoa's nicknames. In fact, it is Mama Day who tells Abigail that since Cocoa is a grown woman, they should stop calling her Baby Girl. Mama Day is tough on her niece and Cocoa seems appreciative of it. She says this about her great aunt: "Unlike Grandma, she'd [Mama Day] take a peach switch to me. Mama Day just didn't believe in cuddling. But if Grandma had raised me alone, I would have been ruined for any fit company. It seemed as if I could do no wrong with her, while with Mama Day I could do no right. I guess in a funny way, together they were the perfect mother" (58).

Later in the text, Mama Day echoes (doubles) Cocoa's observation when she says that she and Abigail are like "two peas in a pod" (153). The trope of doubling in this text is reinforced and extended by the names and nicknames of two major characters: Miranda and Cocoa. Miranda is alternately referred to as Mama Day, her magical self, while Cocoa's real name is Ophelia. The Cocoa/Ophelia juxtaposition reveals another example of doubling at play in this text, one that is far more troubling and profound than having two nicknames. This one involves Cocoa's fractured sense of self, her racial identity.

Before examining Cocoa's racial identity, I have to return to the work of Cedric Gael Bryant who applies Jacques Lacan's formulation of the "mirror stage," to African American gothic literature. As Bryant explains it, the mirror stage "marks the crucial period when the individual's nascent sense of self is 'mirrored' or oriented in the intimidating presence of another who, in turn, elicits aggressive reactions of self-preservation in the self. Consequently, this period is one of intense anxiety in which the individual develops against the potential dominating influence, or gaze, of powerful 'others.'"[43] To take this framework one step further, Bryant juxtaposes Lacan's mirror stage with the following quote from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*: "When you go out looking for monsters, take care you do not become one. And when you look into the abyss, remember the abyss looks back at you."[44] This concept can be easily applied to *Mama Day*.

In *Mama Day*, the gothic trope of doubling is repeated, revised, and racialized in the combative scene between Cocoa and George, which occurs before

the party that is organized to recognize and celebrate their marriage (230–35). In this scene, the trope of doubling functions as an example of Lacan's mirror stage. Even though Cocoa is in her mid to late twenties, she is not yet comfortable with herself and her body, not yet confident in her own skin. Two-thirds of the way through the novel, as George and Cocoa are dressing for the party that will introduce George to Willow Springs, George acts as Lacan's mirror and reflects back to his wife an aspect of herself she is not yet ready to confront. He becomes that "intimidating presence . . . who elicits aggressive reactions of self-preservation" from Cocoa.[45] He questions her use of dark makeup on her face, makeup that, in his opinion, is clearly too dark for her skin tone. She reads this question as criticism and becomes insulted. Their discussion turns into a bona fide argument when he says she looks like a "Tootsie Pop" because she applies such a dark foundation to her face while leaving her shoulders and arms her natural, lighter color (231). This scene, like many others in *Mama Day*, is presented from two perspectives,[46] George's and Cocoa's, and both of them call this their "worst fight ever" (230, 232). Why is a fight over makeup their worst fight ever? One reason is that Cocoa is very nervous about the evening. She wants to show off George to the people of Willow Springs and wants everything to be perfect. In the Lacanian sense, this evening is a "period . . . of intense anxiety" for Cocoa, and when George assumes the role of the critical and judgmental superego, his gaze becomes the dominating influence of the powerful other.[47] Another reason this fight is so pivotal in the novel is because this is the beginning of a path that will lead Cocoa to the Nietzschean abyss of her racial identity and when she gazes into it, she will be deeply disturbed by the monster that looks back.

A little later in the book, after Ruby casts her spell on Cocoa by rubbing a magical potion (read this as more magical realism) into her scalp while braiding her hair, Cocoa begins to hallucinate: She sees gross distortions of herself in the mirrors in her grandmother's house. When she applies makeup to her face, perhaps the same foundation she and George argued about, large patches of skin become dislodged and as she explores these areas, gouges are opened up by her probing fingers. These images drive Cocoa mad, so mad that her grandmother has to cover all the mirrors in the house (276). What is she seeing? Why these particular distortions? It would seem that Ruby's spell has forced Cocoa to look into the abyss of her racial identity; the monstrous version of herself that is reflected back embodies the deep insecurities she feels about her color and her body. The gothic trope[48] of experiencing hallucinations of horrible and distorted versions of oneself, one that has become cliché since the publication of *Mama Day*, is also used to comment on Cocoa's racial confusion and insecurities. During her account of her "worst fight ever" with George, she begins to reveal the damaged sense of self she harbors. Because she is light-skinned and does not have the features of the "burnished ebony girls with their flashing teeth against that deep satin skin," Cocoa considers herself a leper, a monster, primarily because this is what some of her crueler peers have called her (232). This name calling did not last long because Mama Day threatened to turn anyone who insulted her niece into real lepers, but the damage had been done. When Cocoa reflects on her

fight with George, she reveals how deeply different and monstrous she feels on an island where the standards of beauty are dark and buxom, the exact opposite of what she is. She has always been envious of those girls "who could summon the beauty of midnight by standing, arms akimbo, in the full sun." She confesses that it was "torture competing with girls like that" (233). Because she is not beautiful according to the standards of Willow Springs, the islanders had doubted the report of her marriage to George. This doubt was fueled by George's reluctance to visit the island for the first four years of his married life. But now that he is in Willow Springs, Cocoa hopes for some revenge. Cocoa's lack of self-esteem does not seem entirely grounded in reality, although one must remember that versions of reality are relative. Throughout the novel, George should be taken at his word when he calls Cocoa attractive, but his standards of beauty are clearly white. Cocoa's own words about the way in which she is treated outside of Willow Springs support her husband's evaluation of her white beauty. She says, "I was treated very differently beyond the bridge [in the white world]—my physical features were an asset at times," but not where it counted the most (233). It is no accident that Cocoa sees the monstrous version of herself in mirrors after Ruby has braided her hair. The contrast between the African braids and her white features opens up a gateway into the Nietzschean abyss and it is the monster of her conflicted (double) racial identity that stares back.

Thus far, my argument has focused primarily on establishing *Mama Day* as a hybrid, postmodern text that deploys multiple modes in the way that Slemon discusses in "Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Discourse."[49] In my discussion of Naylor's appropriation of vampirism to render Sapphira Wade subversive, I touched briefly on the last part of my argument: how *Mama Day* is a resistant text, one that is used to write back against American hegemony. In the last part of my essay, I will focus on how Naylor displaces legal, political, religious, and medical hegemonic systems "to create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality . . . to right the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon."[50] Sometimes magical realism and/or gothicism are directly at play in this subversive activity and sometimes they are quietly working in the background. The point here is that these two modes have created the space and context in which this resistance can take place.

Relatively early in the text, Naylor examines the relationship between Willow Springs and the legal system of the mainland Unites States. In this section, the island is described as a place that is outside the reaches of the North American jurisprudence, a place where there is no sheriff, no judge, no court, and no jail. The nearest courthouse is in South Carolina, some 50 miles away. In spite of this absence, the legal system of Willow Springs is portrayed as efficient and consistent: "The folks [in Willow Springs] take care of their own, if there is a rare crime, there's a speedy judgment. And it ain't like the law beyond the bridge that's dished out according to likes and dislikes, and can change with the times" (79). If this subversive comparison is not enough, Naylor takes it one resistant step further when she inserts into Willow Springs a young and inexperienced[51] South Carolina deputy who discovers evidence of Dr. Buzzard's moonshine during his

unauthorized visit to the island's general store where a character named Parris works. He interrogates Parris and when he does not reveal the source of the moonshine, the deputy turns belligerent and asks, "Nigger, did you hear me?" (80). Mama Day, who happened to be in the general store at the time, intervenes and says, "You'll address him proper before the night is over," but the deputy dismisses her by calling her an old woman (80). Although it is not stated in the text, the assumption readers are forced to make is that the deputy is sent (presumably by Mama Day) to the cypress swamps in search of the still. He gets hopelessly lost during a rainless and windless lightning storm that traps him on the island because even the young deputy is smart enough to know that he cannot cross a metal bridge during an electrical storm. The magical realism in this part of the text is subtle. The reader assumes that Mama Day has conjured up this storm, but is not quite sure. Later in the novel, when Mama Day calls up the storm that destroys Ruby's house, her powers are confirmed. This magical moment is another example of how Mama Day's powers emanate logically and seamlessly from the context of the novel. Sometime during the initial lightning storm, the tires of the deputy's car are slashed and he is ironically rescued by Parris, the very man he insulted earlier (81). As if this resistance is not enough, the respect that outsiders who are familiar with Willow Springs have for the island is revealed when the deputy returns to South Carolina where he receives a "tongue-lashing" from Sheriff Hart for trying to impose mainland law on the island of Willow Springs (81).

In the same section of the novel, the political autonomy of Willow Springs is expressed. The collective narrator discusses the failure of a mainland voter registration campaign in the 1960s and the reasons why this campaign did not succeed: "Them that was inclined had been registered to vote in Willow Springs since 1870, after they passed that Fifteenth Amendment. None never went over for local elections, 'cause there was no place to go, us being neither in Georgia or South Carolina. And them local politicians couldn't do nothing for Willow Springs that it wasn't doing for itself" (80). While magic is not directly in play here, it was the initial magic of Sapphira Wade that enabled Willow Springs to secede from the United States and develop its own political and legal system.

Since Willow Springs is represented as a culture that descends from a self-emancipated slave and since Christianity was the religion that was imposed on African and African American slaves, one would expect Christianity to be influential on the island. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Christian religion is undermined, and at times rejected, in Willow Springs. The inhabitants of the island do not celebrate Christmas. Instead they observe a tradition called the "Candle Walk" during which residents walk along the streets of the island, greet one another, and exchange homemade gifts and foods with their neighbors and loved ones (231). There are no Christmas trees and no holiday commercialism, just a group of people giving of themselves in truly selfless and loving ways. Over the years, preachers from the mainland Unites States had tried to convert the island residents, but their attempts were always resisted and rebuffed. Reverend Hooper is the latest cleric to try to encourage the islanders to celebrate Christmas

and his attempts, like his precursors, have failed. The collective narrator explains, "That's what happens when you get them outside preachers who think they know more than they do . . . Any fool knows Christmas is December twenty-fifth—that ain't never caught on too much here. And Candle Walk is always the night of the twenty-second. Been that way since before Reverend Hooper and it'll be that way after him" (108).

Christian funerals have never "caught on" in Willow Springs either. When Little Caesar, Bernice's son, dies, the island residents do not attend a Christian funeral; instead they participate in a service called "the standing forth" at Reverend Hooper's church, presumably because its location is convenient; but there is nothing Christian about it. As a matter of fact, George, who is present for this standing forth, concludes that the service was not meant to take place in a building at all. He says, the "church, the presence of the minister, were concessions, and obviously the only ones they [the residents of Willow Springs] were going to make to a Christian ritual that should have called for a sermon, music, tears—the belief in an earthly finality for the child's life" (269). These Christian elements are replaced by the practice of sharing memories of the child with the congregation. Each participant stands and makes a statement like the following: "When I last saw you . . . you were wearing a green bunting, being carried in your mama's arms. You had a little fuzzy patch of hair on your head and your mouth was open to let out a squall. I guess you were hungry. And when I see you again . . . you'll be sitting at my dining room table, having been invited to dinner with the rest of my brood" (268). All the statements are in this vein: a memory followed by a promise about when the speaker will see the deceased again. George observes that some spoke as if they expected an answer from the dead boy.

A final example of how Gloria Naylor uses this text to resist and write back against American hegemonic practices, is the climactic section during which George, tries, in vain, to reach the mainland and find a doctor who can help cure Cocoa of the mysterious illness that has overtaken her body. The source of this illness is Ruby who is under the mistaken impression that Cocoa is trying to steal her husband, so she infects Cocoa as revenge. Ruby is the other conjurer on the island, but she is no match for Mama Day. This is why it is so strange that Ruby would use her magic to harm Mama Day's niece, but Ruby is blinded by jealous passion. She uses a potion that causes the hallucinations referred to earlier in this essay and also infects Cocoa with maggots that begin to consume her body from within. Mama Day takes her revenge on Ruby by conjuring a severe lightning storm that destroys Ruby's house and the only bridge to the mainland. As Cocoa deteriorates, George is bent on repairing the bridge so he can travel to South Carolina where he believes he will find a "real" American doctor who can help. He follows this path in spite of what Dr. Buzzard tells him about Cocoa's illness and the nature of Mama Day's powers. George refuses to believe in Mama Day and his lack of faith actually endangers Cocoa's life because Mama Day needs George to help her cure Cocoa. Blinded by his own ignorance, George tries to exert his influence and engineering knowledge, knowledge that represents the mainland, on the men of Willow Springs as they repair the bridge. When his attempts are

repeatedly foiled by the slow and methodical process the men insist on following, George finally goes to Mama Day to learn how he can help. She tells him, "I can do more with these hands than most folks dream of—no less believe—but this time they ain't no good alone . . . I got all that [power] in this hand but it ain't gonna be complete unless I can reach out with the other and take yours" (294). She needs George to enter her chicken coop carrying a book and a cane, symbols of her power and magic, to search the nest of an old red hen and bring back whatever he finds. According to Mama Day, this is how he can help her cure Cocoa. George is furious with this plan and calls it "mumbo jumbo" (295). He refuses to believe in her power and instead maintains a steadfast loyalty to the medicine of the world beyond the bridge.

When he returns to Cocoa, he sees that she has deteriorated so far that she is near death. He also sees, for the first time, the maggots that are devouring her body. He decides to return to Mama Day who insists that he visit the hen and return to her with whatever he finds. His belief in Western medical practices limits his ability to do all that Mama Day asked of him. He enters the coop, does battle with the demonic red hen, and all that he has for his trouble are his bloody hands, which is exactly what Mama Day wanted. His Western belief system prevents him from following through, but his actions are not in vain. By entering the coop, and by following *most* of Mama Day's instructions, he has enacted only half the cure. Cocoa is saved, but ironically, the life he fails to save is his own. Because of the intense nature of this experience, George, who has a congenital heart disease, suffers a massive heart attack and dies. The reader is left with the impression that if George had followed through completely, if he had returned to Mama Day with what he found (his bloody hands), he would have saved his own life as well.

In the end, George's death is both brutally symbolic and the ultimate example of resistance to American hegemony in this text. As I discussed earlier, George is representative of the privileged center of culture. By using the work of Susan Meisenhelder, George becomes so much more: she posits him as a representative of the *white* privileged center of the mainland United States. In her essay, "'The Whole Picture' in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*," Meisenhelder argues that George is alienated from his black roots because he is a "product of a white world," having been raised in an orphanage run by whites on Staten Island.[52] When Cocoa first meets him, she calls him a "bonbon . . . dark on the outside and white on the inside" and wonders about the influences in his life that have led him to treat black women in the way he does (63). To ask her out for their first date, he sent Cocoa 11 yellow roses and a note that said she can retrieve the twelfth by having dinner with him. This leads Cocoa's to think, "What kind of fudge stick asked a woman out like this—who does this guy think he's dating, Mary Tyler Moore?" (58). George is a Republican and a reader of Shakespeare to boot. Throughout the text, he refuses to use the nickname Cocoa, a name that was given to her to put some color on her, and insists on using Ophelia, her given name, and coincidentally the name of the famous white character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.[53] With all this in mind, it is easy to see George as a representative of the white world and to understand what spawns the racist comment he makes about Cocoa.

During his argument with Cocoa about her dark makeup, George calls her a "Tootsie Pop," black on top and white on bottom, which seems like a particularly racist thing to say. Furthermore, Meisenhelder argues convincingly that George acts like the white developers, who have been after the land owned by the Day family for years, when he "fantasized about schemes for developing the land," a comment that indicates how he completely misses the deep African American cultural and spiritual significance of the island. He seems downright dangerous to Cocoa and the island (which recalls Wilson's discussion of how *aliens* are a danger to the world on which they try to superimpose their beliefs and culture) when he imagines himself as a plantation owner on Day estate: In his fantasy of "jasmine-scented nights, warm biscuits and honey being brought to [him] on flowered colored china plates," he implicitly casts himself as a plantation owner and Cocoa as an adoring (and decidedly subordinate) wife, "s[itting] at [his] feet . . . rub[ing her] cheek against his knee."[54] In this scene, George and Cocoa are refigured as Bascomb Wade and Sapphira Day in an act that seems to repeat history. Naylor emphasizes the connection between the slave master and George shortly after the argument during which George calls Cocoa a Tootsie Pop. At this point they are not talking and although George wants to reconcile with her, his pride gets in the way. Standing alone near the island graveyard, he becomes nostalgic for another time in the past when women were not part of his life: a "wonderful" time in the orphanage when there were just "dozens of boys. Clean fights. Straight talk. Order. You did what you were supposed to do and left it at that . . . And your hard work was appreciated" (247). Using Meisenhelder' framework, George is yearning for the white world of his past. This desire turns dangerous when he actually expresses empathy for Bascomb Wade while standing near his tombstone: "Just look at that poor slob [Wade] buried there—he gave her a whole island, and still she cut him out" (247). A few sentences later he imagines that at some time during his relationship with Sapphira, Wade must have done exactly what George is doing now: standing and waiting for the woman in his life. As a result of his identification with Bascomb Wade, his fantasy about jasmine-scented nights, his racist behavior, and his desire to acquire, possess, and develop the Day land, George is recast as a white slave master. And can there be anything more dangerous than the reincarnation of slave master in an African American text? Thus George's death in the end is a complete and repeated repudiation of slavery and of the white world George has come to represent. His death, Cocoa's survival, her eventual marriage to a black southern man, and her ability to finally have children who will inherit the Day estate, utterly undermines George. Although she keeps his memory alive by naming one of her sons after him, the fact remains that it took an African American man with real ties to the American South to do what George could not: help Cocoa start a family that would enable the Day legacy to carry on.

Notes

1. Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 226.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 227.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1989). All subsequent citations appear in the text.
7. Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 227.
8. Ibid.
9. The novel is set in the New York of the mid-1980s, the world of Bernie Goetz and Howard Beach; another bigot was the last thing New York needed. Thus Cocoa can be seen as a dangerous alien presence.
10. Theo L. D'haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*. In this essay, D'haen discusses how the work of Carlos Fuentes was influenced and inspired by the work of Octavio Paz in this respect. D'haen calls the act of writing from the margin "ex-centric" and explains that "ex-centricity can . . . be described as a voluntary act of breaking away from the discourse perceived as central to the line of technical experimentation starting with realism and running via naturalism and modernism" to certain kinds of postmodernism.
11. Ibid., 194.
12. Ibid.
13. Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space," 227.
14. See Stephen Slemon, "Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Discourse," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 410. Slemon's discussion of language is interesting here. He refers to Bakhtin's use of the phrase "diversity of social speech types" and concludes that when such battles of discourses take place, the result is the "language of truth." One aspect of *Mama Day* that is interesting, but one I do not intend to discuss in this essay, is the linguistic battle that may occur in this text, a battle between the Northern speech patterns of the educated, urban Black professional and that of African Americans "back home." Susan Meisenhelder argues that George is a product of the white world, and it is interesting to note that in the end of the novel, Southern black dialect is the carrier of truth that is revealed in this novel.
15. Ibid.
16. This is far more than Cocoa does for George when they are in Willow Springs together. She leaves it to others to show him around the island, and when they do, she is angry because he either does not spend time with her or comes home drunk or with wild fantasies. One of these fantasies is that he could actually move to Willow Springs and live there forever. When Cocoa hears this, she says he would never survive. She is concerned that he will discover the magical layer of her island, and that prospect horrifies her. She does not confess to this fear, of course, and thus George sees her as unsupportive of his dreams and desires. The reader is left to wonder, if Cocoa had taken the time to help George enter into the magical world that intersects with Willow Springs, would he have been able to see the truth about the island and thus save himself in the end? For a discussion of intersecting worlds in magic realist texts, see Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*.
17. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 164.

18. Rawdon's discussion of how physical spaces in magical realist texts can be superimposed upon one another or folded and refolded like quicksilver can be applied to Naylor's use of several literary modes. She folds and refolds gothicism and magical realism into one text.
19. Magical realist critics like Zamora have commented on the existence of a collective unconsciousness or a collective voice in magical realism. The collective narrator in this gothic part of *Mama Day* is another example of how one mode is folded into the other (3–10).
20. Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Mentor-Penguin, 1987), 243–331; Linda Brent, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," in Gates, *Classic Slave Narratives*, 333–515.
21. Douglass, "Narrative of the Life," 259.
22. Mary Prince, "*History of Mary Prince*," in Gates, *Classic Slave Narratives*, 183–242; William L. Andrews, "Memoir of Old Elizabeth, a Colored Woman," in *Six Women's Slave Narratives,* ed. Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
23. Quoted in Leslie Ginsberg, "Slavery and Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat,'" in *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*, ed. Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), 99.
24. Leslie A. Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion, 1960), quoted in Teresa Goddu, "Vampire Gothic," *American Literary History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 136.
25. Ibid., 137.
26. Cedric Gael Bryant, "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments': Reading the African American Gothic in Wright's *Big Boy Leaves Home*, Morrison's *Beloved*, and Gomez's *Gilda*," *African American Review* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 541–53.
27. Ibid., 550.
28. D'haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism," 195.
29. Jewelle Gomez, *The Gilda Stories* (Ann Arbor, MI: Firebrand, 2005).
30. Gael Bryant, "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments,'" 550.
31. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume-Penguin, 1988).
32. Ibid., 546.
33. Ibid., 163, quoted in Cedric Gael Bryant, "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments,'" 547.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 548.
36. Quoted in Cedric Gael Bryant, "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments,'" 549.
37. Quoted in ibid.
38. Ibid., 548.
39. This is mathematically impossible. Sapphira is reported to have had six pregnancies while Wade was alive because her first one resulted in twins. Carrying a child to full term would require about 280 days. Multiply that by 6 and one is left with 1680 days, far more than the 1,000 days represented in the text. Did Sapphira achieve these 6 pregnancies through magic, or is this an example of the "limits of the knowable" that Lois Parkinson Zamora discusses in her essay "Magical Romance/Magical Realism"? In this sense, the legend of Sapphira Wade, which is not discussed in Willow Springs, is knowable to a certain extent because there are many holes in her story. For example, in addition to using the highly suspect number of 1,000 days, the collective narrator says Sapphira killed Bascomb Wade by poisoning him, smothering him, and stabbing him. She might have done all three or only one; the point is that this is one example of how parts of this text are unknowable.

40. Goddu argues that African American writers "use the gothic to haunt back, reworking the gothic's conventions to intervene in discourses that would demonize them" (138). In her appropriation of vampiric tropes, Gloria Naylor is clearly haunting back. Goddu, "Vampire Gothic," 138.
41. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Christabel," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (London: Penguin, 1997).
42. Sheridan LeFanu, "Carmilla" in *In a Glass Darkly*, ed. Robert Tracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
43. Gael Bryant, "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments,'" 542.
44. Quoted in ibid., 541.
45. Ibid., 542.
46. Faris argues that the "doubling of characters and stories . . . constitute a mirror principle of the narrative structure [that] is reinforced by reflecting surfaces within" some magical realistic texts. She examines *The White Hotel* by D. M. Thomas, in which the reflected narratives are "told and retold through reflected personalities." In this gothic scene between George and Cocoa, Naylor employs a similar narrative structure of reflecting narratives, once again folding two modes together into one text. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children," 178.
47. Gael Bryant, "'The Soul Has Bandaged Moments,'" 542.
48. See the discussion of the use of hallucinatory scenes in magical realist texts in "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 6.
49. Stephen Slemon, "Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Discourse," 407–26.
50. D'haen, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism," 195.
51. Inexperience should be read here to mean that the deputy is ignorant of the culture of Willow Springs. He imposes himself and his sense of the law on an island where he has no place. His own boss, Russ Hart, a sheriff in a nearby South Carolina town, looks the other way when it comes to Willow Springs.
52. Susan Meisenhelder, "'The Whole Picture' in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day," *African American Review* 27, no. 3 (1993): 405–19, 405.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., 411.

CHAPTER 12

Latinos and Magic Realism

Promised Land or Convoluted History

Román de la Campa

It is dangerous to cultivate binaries, but we all do it, at least as prelude to undoing them. Let's then entertain the notion that for many literary scholars magical realism constitutes a triumph, a genre for the times with an expanding worldwide audience, while for many others it is tantamount to a compensatory aesthetic, or even a dead-end ideology aiming to mask its racialist tendencies. Is it possible to tease out the core elements of this glaring split in order to unearth an entangling web of imbuing contradictions relevant to all sides? Moreover, where do Latinos and Latinas fit in this convoluted history? I will try to engage this terrain through Latino literature and criticism with the aim to show that it provides a telling window through which to view magical realist debates as well as the lurking questions regarding the role of literature in the age of neoliberalism. I will not deal with the history of magical and marvelous realism in European art or Latin American literature or its evolution throughout the twentieth century. These stages are, by now, well documented and often referenced, particularly through foundational anthologies such as *Magical Realism: History, Theory, and Community* assembled by Louis Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris in 1995.[1] I will, however, begin by broaching the general sense one gathers from that volume's contemporary essays—that is, the notion that magical realism had not only arrived but could be largely welcomed by comparative literature for reasons that can be roughly charted as follows:

a. Magical realism convokes a rich array of related literary forms, opening up new links to earlier periods and different narrative modes.
b. It is a literary phenomenon applicable to "emergent" as well as established literatures, a transnational quality just as readily found in Europe, Africa, Asia, the United States, or Canada, as it was in Latin America, its primary locus of realization if not enunciation.

c. It proffers a gateway to grasp, if not master, the literary lineaments of postmodernism as well as postcolonialism due to the ways it transgresses discursive codes that sustain not only literature but also history.

One can't help but surmise a general optimism here, perhaps even a certain literary utopianism that casts magical realism as a synchronizing agent of new aesthetic values, epistemological indeterminacy, and liberationist longings—indeed, a cogent aesthetic for the late eighties and early nineties.[2] But one could also read this constellation of foundational and contemporary essays as a way of explaining the longevity if not pliability of magical realism as well as its capacity to remain at the heart of literary practices for over a half a century, through surrealism, the Latin American boom, postmodernism, postcolonialism, ethnic literatures, and perhaps beyond. That is indeed a long literary history caught in the middle of a period somewhere between late modernity and its aftermath. In that light, Stephen Slemon's essay in that volume, written some 15 years ago, still seems particularly worthy of attention for its emphasis on the genre's capacity to cathect a social template, a complex poetics that brings literature and the lifeworld into creative proximity through three closely related moves:

a. "Transformational regionalism, so that the site of the text, though described in familiar and local terms, is metonymic of the postcolonial culture as a whole";
b. "Foreshortening of history, so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long probes of colonization and its aftermath";
c. "Thematic foregrounding of those gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter and reflected in the text's disjunctive language of narration."[3]

It is unclear whether Slemon's nuanced framing derived from his Canadian site of enunciation, often an uncharted third space when it comes to grafting the Americas, or from closer attention to the ways in which literature always refracts history. I tend to think the two inform each other.

Postliterary Angst

Questions regarding magic realism were already hovering about when that foundational anthology was published, but their full force had perhaps not yet set in. Some came from Latin American writers, a new generation of novelists and short story writers who asked whether such a mode of narration was Latin America's natural or preferred medium of literary expression. Most notable among them was the Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet and his manifesto *McOndo* (1996),[4] an event that will be discussed later in light of its lesser-known Latino lineaments. Another critique came into play through Latin American *testimonio* by critics who questioned magical realist aesthetics on various fronts, opting instead to focus on the political possibilities of subaltern writing.[5] The latter's unintended

influence on Latino ethnic studies must also be noted, for it was extraordinary and perhaps greater than its impact on Latin America, as it led to curricular debates over multiculturalism anchored in the American reception of Rigoberta Menchú. Beyond that, a third and perhaps even deeper challenge came from deconstructive theorists such as Gayatri Spivak who doubted magical realism's decolonizing potential, suspecting instead that it had turned into a Western code for judging which forms of Third World writing and learning should be welcomed to world literature.[6]

The deconstructive critique of magical realism would not reach full force until the late nineties and subsequent years, as articulated by scholars such as Alberto Moreiras and Idelber Avelar, among others.[7] The same timing comes into play with the inherent critique of modern Latin American literature held by the "coloniality of power" paradigm defined by Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, among others, with the advent of a new century.[8] As we will see, each of these Latin Americanist critiques will also begin to engage Latino writing, by omission or commission, often in contradictory ways given the latter's differential relationship to language, literature, and nationalism.

One must, of course, delve deeper into the historical grounds inherent to these paradigms at the turn of the new century. Why did Latin American literary theory suddenly feel such as strong need to free itself from the poetics of magical realism? At first, the genre invoked a stance that spoke to the possibilities of national emancipation through literary experimentation. Later, after a sequence of deadly military dictatorships and the overall waning of socialist alternatives, magical realism became a more ambiguous, if not suspicious terrain from which to construct newness in the area. As a literary style or artistic phenomenon it had to contend with a cultural epoch deeply embedded in repressive regimes of all sorts that led to "transitions" ultimately caught in the subsuming forces of economic globalization and political neoliberalism. Even the postmodern celebration of the undecidable gave way at this moment to a more careful calibration of what the social might dare to mean in the absence of universals, while the absorption of state by the market blurred political maps, a condition that obviously pertains to art forms as well.

Many understood this unexpected sequence of events as a site for cultural and political mourning that spelled the end of liberal nationalism. What was left was the distant memory of Latin American revolutionary promise and its corresponding compensatory aesthetics, a link that featured magical realism. The entire project, an era representing nearly two centuries of independence, state formation, and modernist poetics, was suddenly seen as flawed from the start. Literary scholars began to look elsewhere, away from literature, at first through the realist lineaments of *testimonio* but in time by way of a deeper overarching logic capable of explaining or even conceiving Latin America, such as the pervasive realm of "coloniality," a historicist reappraisal of Western modernity dating to the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, or the newly conceptualized "state of exception," inspired by the work of philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben and Antonio Negri, a disenchantment with Latin American nation states

that explores the possibility of radical politics under neoliberal order in terms of multitudes, ungovernability, and posthegemonic irruptions.

It could be said that this turn informs a general frustration within the left, a sense of loss in which a "postliterary" mapping came into play, particularly after 1989. It is still a question, however, whether a literary corpus can be held accountable for the political travails of an entire continent, or if the postliterary realm of Latin Americanism finds itself unguardedly caught in an approach to literature that succumbs once again to the old tradition of looking at culture as ideology. One is also led to ask if it is impossible to decouple modern Latin American literature from the cultural utopia of its Creole, lettered upper classes or if the latter must necessarily be seen as an omniscient source whose intention exhausts literature by definition or necessity. If so, one wonders if failed modernity, defined by the absence of bourgeois democratic republics, can only be sustained or accompanied by a failed literary corpus. Might that equation not seem like another way of enclosing literature within a prescribed destiny? Moreover, if one thinks of epistemic error, failure, or perennial political crisis, it seems opportune to ask if this is not now the condition of globalization, rather than just what is found in Latin America. If so, could the same critique of literature be applied to sites where political state formation yielded greater levels of development, such as Europe or the United States? If we say yes, then all of modern literature has failed, even where politics seems to have found a modicum of realization. If we say no, then literature only fails when politics fails and we are once again, even in the age of deconstruction, equating literary failure to failures of modernization and development.

Culture and politics, however, tend to read each other differently where modernity claims greater depth. This is, perhaps, where Latinos, among others, come into the equation, given their pluralized bonds to the literatures and histories of both Latin America and the United States. Their coeval pursuit of self-affirmation and colonial or imperial critique on one hand and their creative position between identity construction and the critique of its essentialist shadow on the other conjure double inscriptions that must be teased out with caution. More important literature often provides special grounds for engaging such plurality, in time and space. New markets of texts and readers, as well as new forms of exile, diaspora, and multitudes claim novel roles, in the politics, arts, and media of both the North and the South. This is also a moment in which translation acquired a new interhemispheric domain. Viewed in this larger context, one must therefore ask whether magical realism speaks to a broader American or inter-American aesthetic, without also failing to ask if the suspension of disbelief summoned by magical realism, or other forms of the nonreal, affords complicity or resistance at this point in time.

Literature and Markets

It may or may not surprise readers to find that the array of critiques described thus far did not deter magical realist production in the new century, creative as well as critical writing, though the genre's ground has shifted from Latin America

to ethnic, transatlantic, transamerican, Global South, and world literature contexts, often with the inclusion of Latinos and other "minority" writers. A list of recent monographs and anthologies would include *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* by Wendy Faris (2004), *Magic(al) Realism (The New Critical Idiom)* by Maggie Ann Bowers (2004), *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* by Shannin Schroeder (2004), *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*, cowritten by Jesús Benito, Ana María Matanzas, and Begoña Simal (2009), and *Companion to Magical Realism*, edited by Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (2010). Three of these texts are either written or edited by contributors to the present anthology.[9] They all share a tendency to broaden the field of magical realism as a worldwide phenomenon with an established market that sporadically includes Latino writers such as Ana Castillo, Rudolfo Anaya, Cristina García, Oscar Hijuelos, and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others. In some of these new studies, notably Faris's *Ordinary Enchantments*, as well as her essay in this anthology, it is argued that the growing field portends a "shamanistic performance" capable of replenishing narrative literature, perhaps beckoning a realm of spirituality increasingly evident in film and other media as well.[10] In *Uncertain Mirrors*, on the other hand, one finds a text solely about US ethnic literatures by three scholars from Spain who live and work there, perhaps a sample of that nation's new transatlantic investments, one that is no doubt interested in the links between Latinos and the Spanish language.

To these, one could add two books that belong in the conversation even though they do not carry magical realism in their title: *Misplaced Objects* by Silvia Spitta (2010) and *Trans-Americanity* by José David Saldívar (2012). The former stands out for its attempt to deploy the "materiality of culture" paradigm to historicize the always-contentious terrain of *mestizaje* and transculturation, key elements always in contention in the magical realist theoretical armature.[11] The author's gallery of photographs brings the reader closer to *mestizaje* through a world of objects, gathered through the centuries, that permeate the Americas, a monumental body of evidence carrying an undeniable weight of affect that calls for new ways of conjuring its corresponding subjectivity, given the lingering questions, if not disapprovals, about *mestizaje* as a discourse of hybridity. In terms of *Trans-Americanity*, authored by a renowned Latino literary critic, it would seem that the magical realism bet of the seventies has been unconditionally extended, for Saldívar casts Gabriel García Márquez as "the most important of the Global South's imaginative writers"[12] and Alejo Carpentier's mode of writing as "emblematic of the kind of narrative we now take for granted in (transmodernist) trans-American fiction."[13]

One could ask, however, if these sources, this new iteration of creative and critical work pertaining to Latinos and world literature, convene less of a blanket affirmation of magical realism than a sign of its shifting grounds, if not its lines of flight. The nineties marked the moment in which the center of gravity began to move toward a broader inclusion of border and US Latino issues, a framework imbued by different national, racial, linguistic, and gender ideologies, a multifarious context in which Gloria Anzaldúa's mode of writing, for instance,

became widely cited. The embodiment of the Latin other in Anglo-America thus became more plural itself, but so did literature. Yet it was not just or mainly magical realism but also the realm of nonrealist fiction, a moving and even more expansive terrain that has only proliferated through fantastic, gothic, or spectral imbrications—whether as acts of resistance or forms of escape—in the face of violent histories or in the context of growing uncertainty. Indeed, all of literature, not just magical realism, now begets itself in the world of imaging, Internet, advertisements, performative arts, and other media constructions of consumer citizenship. *Hyperpulp*, an online literary magazine, provides a telling example. It aims "at a broad spectrum of genres from fantastic literature" that "mixes science fiction, horror, mystery, war and western, including its various subgenres and schools, from magical realism to slipstream, from cyberpunk to new weird."[14] It sounds far removed from serious literature at first, but upon closer inspection one realizes just how close it comes to the array of discourses present in Junot Díaz's award-winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.[15]

It is widely acknowledged that markets and techno-mediatic cultural production dominate the affairs of state but less is said about the changing status of literature and the growing place of nonrealist fiction. A return to the story of *McOndo* might be instructive at this point, given the notoriety it has received as a redefining moment for Latin American literature that just happened to have taken place in the United States, with Latino writing as its main referent. It is often retold as "The Route from Macondo to McOndo," the latter term coined by the Chilean writer Alberto Fuguet as title for an anthology of new Latin American literature.[16] Told in the 1990s, it captures Fuguet's struggle to establish himself as a Latin American writer unwilling to identify with the magical realist label, a modality that, in his view, seemed to have turned obligatory by the 1980s, particularly in the United States. The need to distance himself from Macondo, that quintessential town in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, brought Fuguet closer to McDonald's symbolic power; but perhaps there was more to it that pertains to literature in general and Latinos in particular.

There is first the sense of deflation felt by Fuguet, a participant at the University of Iowa International Writing program, after learning that a translated story he submitted for publication had been rejected. The reason, he states, was that it lacked magical realism, but he also recalls having followed a well-thought-out plan to tap into what he viewed as a new literary market: "I was Latino and everything Latino was hot," he states in his manifesto against magical realism, and he proceeds to offer proof with a list of "names" he found in "colorful dust jackets," a new boom of sorts apparently recognizable without the need of first names: "Santiago, Alvarez, Cisneros, Anaya, Esquivel, Castillo, Allende, Rodríguez, Viramontes."[17] This was, however, a Spanish-surnamed list of Latino and Latina writers with two Latin Americans, but only the latter, Laura Esquivel and Isabel Allende, had indeed gained commercial success in the United States with magical realist novels and films.

In his rush to account for rejection by a market he later viewed as too magical realist Fuguet conflated the two groups. But it was also two different markets,

at least. His list of Latino writers corresponded to an ethnic label that includes many different strands of realist and nonrealist literature, some of which contrast significantly with the magical realism of Latin Americans on the list. Sandra Cisneros's widely read *House on Mango Street*, for instance, depicts inner-city life in Chicago through realistic but yet highly poetic vignettes, and Richard Rodriguez actually performs a queer spoofing of magical realism and other forms of boom writing in *Days of Obligation*, his most important book of fiction.[18] If there was a hot Latino ethnic market it was certainly different from that of Esquivel and Allende, whose magical realist works had crossed from literature to film into what was viewed as a Hollywood formula, with all the success that implies.

But perhaps there is a deeper, more convoluted story to be fleshed out if one reads *McOndo* in tandem with Fuguet's earlier life in the United States.[19] As it turns out, he had lived here as a child and adolescent before returning to Chile during the transition following Augusto Pinochet's early rule. Fuguet recalls feeling distant and ambiguous with language, culture, and nation. Upon return, it was a struggle for him to regain native sensibilities such as accent and ease with prose in Spanish. He now feels at home in that language, though deep down he remains highly bilingual. This reflection about language and nation, however, is absent from the manifesto, which casts him as a Latin American foreigner visiting the United States caught between translation and Latino labeling, a self-presentation that bears no mention of his earlier formative relationship with English and American culture, an experience that brought him much closer to US Latino—or Latin American diasporic—themes than he lets on. *McOndo*, in that sense, is as much a Latino story as anything else, though it is also a clearly conflicted one, on many fronts. Fuguet's turning on magical realism, as it turns out, could have been a ruse to flesh out a dialectics of cultural ambiguity, indeed an unexpected extension of the genre's own conflicted reach.

Latinos and the Non-Real

It is not necessary to wonder if zombies and superheroes will conquer highbrow fiction to see that the writing of Junot Díaz and Roberto Bolaño, among others, beg for new thinking about literature.[20] They also present new modalities of unsuspected Latino imbrications in which the nonreal comes fully into play. Both writers conjure uncharted flows of people, cultures, and languages across the Americas during the last quarter century, a realm that disturbs the stable link between language and national literature. I will close these pages with a look at each. In the case of Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* features a counterpoint between Latin America and the United States, a juxtaposition of Santo Domingo and Paterson, New Jersey, filled with ludic footnotes of referential matter embodying colonial times, the nineteenth century, the Trujillo dictatorship, as well as a pervasive misogynist culture. The dictator figure, in its full magical realist grandeur, sketched around the motif of *fukú*, marks every facet of Dominican life. There are, however, important distinctions with earlier magical realist representations of said figure, for the dictator here serves as the ludic archive of

a national memory that must now persist in counterpoint with flows outside the nation-state equation, an event in the making beyond ready-made interpretive enclosures. The intricate interplay of science fiction, sexual discourses and comics gets in the way. It is carried by the contrast between Yunior and Oscar, two characters who arguably bring together the dispositions of a pimp and a nerd, one stereotypically hypersexual, the other atypically asexual, an ironic perversion of Dominican lore. The reader of English is thus left with an unsettling choice: decode all of that refracted history told with sporadic Spanish alongside some highly specialized references to comics, video games, sex, science fiction, and intertextual references to magical realist literature, or acknowledge that your existence must cope with the flow of the unintelligible.

As for Bolaño, who fiercely disavowed any magical realist leanings, his most ambitious novels, *Savage Detectives* and *2666*,[21] are centered in Sonora desert towns such as Santa Teresa, in the border between the United States and Mexico, a Latino stage for Sudaca characters, South Americans who return to America's most uncertain border zone after working in Europe as exiles. There they discover a world of forgotten subjects from wars and political conflicts, including hundreds of murdered women. We also witness a form of writing in which the expression of loss does not yield a sense of mourning but rather a condition for uncharted adventures beyond the claim of historical precedent or ethical prescription. All the protagonists disappear, not as allegories of national loss but rather as adventures of displacement that find meaning precisely in the terrain of the nonreal opened by magical realism, caught up, as it inevitably is, in delicate matters pertaining to racial theory.

The case of Amalfitano, one of the main characters in *2666*, provides a most intricate example. He migrates from Chile after the coup to Barcelona and then moves to Santa Teresa for reasons that belie any clear line of causality. His wife left him and his job as philosophy professor has seen a downgrade in his move from the University of Barcelona to that of Santa Teresa, where his department chair thinks philosophy is obsolete. In this context, adrift of nation, personal life, and professional allure, he becomes the key figure for an unusual exploration in which the expressions of madness and the avant-garde provide a ludic prism for examining an exiled life in the US-Mexico border. First, he comes across the text *El testamento geométrico*, written by a Galician poet named Rafael Dieste, an intriguing treatise on geometry made even more intriguing by the fact that he never owned a copy. It just surfaced one day amid his books, also without a clear line of causation. This brush with happenstance, a clear wink at surrealist imbrication, highlights the infinite possibilities of poetry and mathematics, which inspire Amalfitano to hang Dieste's book by a clothesline in his backyard, a move itself stirred by the desire to combine game theory with a Marcel Duchamp ready-made installation.

Amalfitano's life is thus transposed to the ongoing curation of Dieste's book by the elements, a fantastic logic of narration that somehow allows the philosophy professor to hear voices from the past, especially from Chile. A second turn arrives at this point when Amalfitano begins to associate these voices with a form

of telepathy, a link that leads him to recollect another book that had fortuitously come into his hands. At this point art, nationalism, racial theory, and madness all come into play. The book's title is *O'Higgins Is an Araucanian: 17 Proofs, from the Secret History of Araucania*, authored by Lonko Kilapan, an official figure in Chile in 1978 whose inflated titles included "President of the Chilean Indigenous Confederacy," "Secretary of the Araucanian Academy of the Language," and "Official Historian of the Race."[22]At first hand, Kilapan's book might seem to imply a veiled critique of Creole whiteness in Chile, of its denial of indigenous peoples, informed by a philological tracing of indigenous lineage in the racial background of none other than a founding father of the nation. Yet there is also a certain pride in this pursuit, even a bit of anti-Spanish colonial sentiment in the description of secret languages and modes of knowledge that the Spanish could never translate, including telepathy and a related indigenous term called *adkintuwe*. Moreover, the text also finds reason to trace the earlier history of the Araucanian people in other continents, one whose magnitude lead to the conclusion that Chile's indigenous past may have been linked after all to Greece and may therefore be politically equal to it.

It is therefore unclear if this story makes fun of traditional Creole ideology, or of its critique, or if it suggests that such a potential critique only embeds a deeper racialist fantasy held by a surrogate of Pinochet's dictatorial mind, a diabolical fusion that Amalfitano discovers in his surrealist experiment in a Mexican border town, a place where evil, globalization, and the nonreal seem to have found new terrain for literature. After all, the character-author Lonko Kilapán cultivates an aggrandizing ambition equal to neoliberal times: He looks for an intellectual model that would allow him to add rather than subtract Chile's brand of nationalism with its indigenous past. To do so, there's no tool more propitious than philology, the etymological pursuit of names, especially those of the founding fathers. From there one can play with the morphological makeup of hybridity: mixed languages as well as families. In short, it all becomes a heroically complex story of great magnitude, a magical realist story turned upside down, from which Kilapán, and perhaps others, may conclude that Chile's indigenous past can be classically Western after all, the ultimate geometry of nationalist ideology, all of it mapped from the maddening Latino border.

Notes

1. Wendy Faris and Lois Parkinson Zamora, eds., *Magical Realism: History, Theory, and Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
2. For a full analysis of this volume, see Román de la Campa, "Magical Realism and World Literature: A Genre for the Times," *Canadian Review of Hispanic Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1999).
3. Stephen Slemon, "Magical Realism and Postcolonial Discourse," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 411.
4. Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, eds., *McOndo* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 1996); see also Alberto Fuguet, "Magical Neoliberalism," *Foreign Policy* 125 (2001): 66–73, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2001/07/01/magical_neoliberalism.

5. The earliest source could be found in the manifesto issued by the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, "Founding Statement," *Boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 110–25.
6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 291.
7. Each of these critics build their Latin American deconstructive style of theorization largely around a detailed condemnation of magical realism. Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference* (Durham, NC: Duke Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America University Press, 2001); Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
8. See, for instance, Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options (Latin America Otherwise)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
9. Jesús Benito, Ana Maria Manzanas, and Begoña Simal, *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009); Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang, eds., *A Companion to Magical Realism* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2010); Shannin Shroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Praeger, 2004).
10. Wendy Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004).
11. Silvia Spitta, *Misplaced Objects* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).
12. José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 108.
13. Ibid., 106.
14. "Submission Guidelines & FAQ," Hyperpulp, http://www.hyperpulp.com/submission-guidelines/.
15. Junot Dìaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead, 2007).
16. Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, eds., *McOndo* (Barcelona: Gijalbo-Mondadori, 1996).
17. Ibid., 1–2.
18. Rodriguez incorporates a most intricate queering of La Malinche in the story "India" in his *Days of Obligation, An Argument with my Mexican Father* (New York: Penguin, 1993).
19. Fuguet, "The Writing Life . . . Gringo/Latino," *Alberto Fuguet: Escritor/Lector* (blog), May 13, 2007, http://albertofuguet.blogspot.com/2007/05/writing-life-gringolatino.html.
20. See Joe Fassler, "How Zombies and Superheroes Conquered Highbrow Fiction," *The Atlantic*, October 18, 2011, http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/10/how-zombies-and-superheroes-conquered-highbrow-fiction/246847.
21. Roberto Bolaño, *The Savage Detectives* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007); Bolaño, *2666, A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008).
22. Bolaño, *2666*, 282–87.

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Index