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**The Role of Magical Realism in Re-creating History in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude***

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature at Faculty of Letters & Humanities, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

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In the Name of God,  
the Compassionate,  
the Merciful

**To my parents: for believing in me**

**And**

**my husband: for his endless love and support**

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## Abstract

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<p>Because of the double nature of magical realism, it has most commonly been thought of as a genre that brings together two differing paradigms, the real and the magic. The default approach has been to focus on the coexistence of these paradigms on seemingly equal terms. However, definitions of magical realism remain vague and unsatisfactory if the critical studies concern themselves only with contexts without giving their specific function in the text, whether these are anthropological postcolonial contexts or ontological postmodern characteristics. The purpose of the present study was to begin approaching the magical realist text purely on a formal, textual basis by looking at the real and magical elements in the text as separate from any extra-textual context. This allowed us to consider the nature of the real and the magic, and how they are related to each other. Gilles Deleuze's ontological model in which Being is univocal and yet nonetheless has two sides, the actual and the virtual, provides a framework for</p>	

reconsidering this double nature of magical realism. Therefore, the present study aims to provide a path for understanding the nature of magical realism by using Gilles Deleuze's ontological ideas and to come up with a new definition for magical realism in which the real and the magic are seen as two sides of reality and to apply such ideas to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. A reading of magical realism using Deleuze's concept of series reveals that the structure of the real and the magical corresponds to Deleuze's fundamental distinction between two sides of Being (the actual and the virtual). Indeed, the realism appears as real precisely because it reflects the convergent, ordered structure of all actual things. The magic appears as different because of its divergence from such a structure. However, magic is not bound by order or laws of nature, and thus appears as deterritorialized, able to move across the boundaries of the segments of the real as embodied by the convergent series of realism. However, because of having no territory it can be removed from the structure of society, history and identity. In Deleuze's ontology, the absolute deterritorialization that characterizes the virtual is revolutionary, to the extent that allows thought escape the limits of the rigid structure of the actual. The creative act of Being that the virtual embodies in the sign of art can become a revolutionary act as the invention of a new people. This is a people that is not yet actual, and thus not yet determined or limited by any real historical situation. This people are necessarily missing. The order of realism is the expression of the territorial field of history and politics, and reveals this realm's inherent structural rigidity as its limit. It defines the magic as that which escapes this limit, and becomes a supplement to realism, not by negating it, by adding fanciful elements, or supplying an alternative world-view, but as an element which allows for the imagining of a new people unfettered by the existing politics, society and culture; unfettered, by the real.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **Statement of the problem**

Definitions of magical realism remain vague and unsatisfactory if the critical studies concern themselves only with contexts or list characteristics without giving their specific function in the text, whether these are anthropological postcolonial contexts or ontological postmodern characteristics. Most critics believe that magical realism implies a resolution of the antinomy between the magic and the real, allowing the two levels in the text to coexist in an equal way.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, many readings imply that, the real and the magical are representatives of pre-capitalist and capitalist, native and colonial, or non-Western and Western world-views. Such readings also suggest that the resolution of antinomy in the magical realist text implies a subversion of the Western world-view, or a decolonizing movement, expressed as a cultural and generic ‘hybridity’.<sup>2</sup> But there is surely an implicit contradiction here. If there is to be any kind of hybridity in the magical realist text, the two worldviews, cultures or levels of reality also have to be perceived as distinct and separate. In fact, in order to define magical realism, fantasy has to be differentiated from realism. Furthermore, the particular relationship between the real and the magical has to be defined technically or textually; the mere contextual presence of two world-views is not enough to distinguish magical realism from any type of writing that deals with different cultures.<sup>3</sup>

The problem with postcolonial approaches to magical realism mainly lies in the lack of a proper formal definition of the genre. Indeed, the double bind between realist political discourse, on the one hand, and authorial invention, or magic, on the other, is at the heart of the possibilities and problems of magical realism in a

postcolonial context. In order to approach magical realism most effectively, the study needs a theoretical framework that provides an adequate ontology which allows the nature of the text to be considered separately from contextual reality, as well as giving the concept of difference a central place. This framework needs to be able to articulate the conditions of both the real and the magic in the text, without privileging one over the other, at the same time as articulating the difference between the two as primary.<sup>4</sup>

### **Literature Review**

The incipient critics who have first used the term magical realism did not really try to formulate a theory of the concept. It was mainly due to the fact that the term was not considered as an ontologically autonomous concept. However, contemporary literary critics have tried to re-examine the term via current theories such as postcolonialism and postmodernism. But the controversy over the term has not been resolved yet. In fact, the main issue concerning difficulty in formulating a perfect theory for magical realism is the resolution of antinomy between realism and the magical. Critics who have tried to find a solution for this issue can be divided into four divisions: a group of postcolonial critics like Stephen Slemon who consider magical realism as a combat between two oppositional systems and believe that the antinomy between realism and the magical remains unresolved. A second group of postcolonial critics like Jean Piere Durix link the resolution of antinomy in the magical realist text to a postcolonial cultural hybridity. The third group of postcolonial critics follows Fredrick Jameson's idea on magical realism that is contrary to the former group. They argue that there is no such a resolution but rather

a sharp cultural clash. The last group includes Wendy Faris and Amaryll Chanady who try to consider magical realism ontologically and relate it to postmodernism.

Stephen Slemon explicitly links the narrative structure of magical realism to counter-colonial writing in his article “Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse”. Although he does not speak of a resolution of an antinomy in magical realism, he offers a familiar concept of it as a “battle between two oppositional systems”, or narrative modes, which he believes remains unresolved or “suspended”, so that neither mode takes primacy over the other.<sup>5</sup> Slemon thus concludes that magic realism can be seen to “comprise a positive and liberating engagement with the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity”.<sup>6</sup>

Jean-Pierre Durix’s postcolonial reading of magical realism places it within the context of postcolonial literature produced in countries that have undergone a process of colonization which he calls “New Literatures”. He articulates hybrid aesthetics to describe these new literatures. He believes novelists experiencing a “multiple and contradictory” reality “feel the need to approach it from several – sometimes widely differing – angles” creating “mixed” or “hybrid” genres.<sup>7</sup> Durix proclaims magical realism as “one of the best-known forms of this generic hybridity”<sup>8</sup>, and he tries to define the hybridity specific to magical realism in more precise literary terms. He differentiates between the use of the fantastic in European literature and “New Literatures”. He claims that in the former the fantastic “serves to protest against the tyranny of fact”, in the latter it serves “to incorporate the old values and beliefs into the modern man’s perception”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the European fantastic, the real and the unreal are set against each other, but in magical realism

there is not only “an interweaving of the realistic and fantastic modes but also an implicit questioning of the polarity on which such terms are based”, and thus “versions of reality are presented in a less conflicting way”.<sup>10</sup> Durix, then, explicitly links the resolution of antinomy in the magical realist text to a postcolonial cultural hybridity, implying that the magical realist text provides a resolution of the “widely different angles” on reality encountered in the postcolonial world.<sup>11</sup> However, while postcolonial critics such as Durix find some typically postmodern devices in magical realism, (such as self-reflexivity and metatextuality, playfulness and irreverence towards established cultural forms or categories), they have not been able fully to integrate these in a definition of the genre. They have made the common mistake of confusing literary and ethnographic components.<sup>12</sup>

On the other side, Fredric Jameson has been immensely influential on postcolonial readings of magical realism, though he never offered a coherent definition of the genre in literature. His main thesis, based mainly on a reading of magical realism on films, although occasionally referring to Latin American literature, concludes: “Magical realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of pre-capitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features”.<sup>13</sup> He proposes that the genre relies on a “narrative raw material derived essentially from peasant society, drawing in sophisticated ways on the world of village or even tribal myth”.<sup>14</sup> Seemingly, Jameson shares Carpentier’s view of existing reality as a base for magical realism, “a reality which is already in and of itself magical or fantastic”.<sup>15</sup> Jameson’s definition thus coincides with other critic’s anthropological magical realism, where the encounter of the magical and the real in

the text mirrors a meeting of old and new cultures. To Jameson, magical realism is an inherently historical and political genre, and explicitly opposed to postmodern literature. In fact, while to other critics the contradictions implied by the dual cultural context of magical realism are resolved in the magical realist text, to Jameson there is no such resolution, but rather a distinct clash of cultures.<sup>16</sup>

Contrary to such postcolonial readings of magical realism there are some other critics who attempt to propose a view of the literary aspect of the concept, a narrative with its own kind of rationale, separate from the extra-textual world. That is, contrary to those readings focusing on cultural hybridity, these studies look at magical realism as dealing with exclusively textual versions of reality and also suggests a definition of magical realism that depends on the resolution of the antinomy between the real and the magical, but claims that it is the postmodern features such as intertextuality and metatextuality of magical realism that brings about this resolution and it does not extend to the differences between cultural versions of reality.<sup>17</sup> One of these critics, Hutcheon, however, explicitly labels postmodernism “ex-centric”, as the distinguished feature which situates magical realism within the framework of postmodernism.<sup>18</sup> Some critics indicate the fact that marginality and subversion may be seen as the site where postmodernism, postcolonialism and magical realism intersect.<sup>19</sup>

Still, there are few fully developed and convincing definitions of the genre at hand. Amaryll Chanady’s seminal *Magical Realism and the Fantastic* is a good example. In fact, her definition of magical realism is grounded in its opposition to the fantastic in terms of narrative treatment of the natural and the supernatural.<sup>20</sup>

Chanady starts her point by opposing Tzvetan Todorov's famous definition of the fantastic. Todorov offers a symmetrical analysis of literary genres which places the fantastic at the center between the uncanny and the marvelous.<sup>21</sup> Keys to Todorov's classification of the text are the thematic and narrative treatment of this event, and the way this treatment determines the reader's reaction. It means that if the supernatural event is explained in such a way that it is subject to the laws of reality, Todorov marks the text as uncanny and if the event is accepted as supernatural the text is marvelous. Only if the narrative treatment of the event causes the reader to hesitate between a rational and supernatural explanation is the text fantastic.<sup>22</sup> Chanady emphasizes that the fantastic is essentially different from what Todorov terms the uncanny and marvelous, because two distinct levels of reality are represented in the same text.<sup>23</sup> If the supernatural is explained or accepted, the text includes only one level of reality. Chanady's definition of magical realism combines elements of anthropological and ontological magical realism. She insists that the manner in which the presence of a particular world-view works to resolve the antinomy between the real and the magical is exactly through the use of a matter-of-fact narration. Chanady's essential definition of magical realism is the coexistence of the natural and the supernatural without antinomy, an idea that has dominated contemporary theories of magical realism in literature. However, what immediately comes to the mind is the fact that a textual resolution of antinomy does not necessarily equal a resolution of the antinomy between cultural world-views. We are finally faced with the fundamental question: what is perceived as real and as magic in magical realism, and how we differentiate between them? Most critics



who read magical realism in a postcolonial context have simply equated the real with a Western point of view and the magic with a non-Western, ethnic or indigenous point of view. While perhaps adequate for their purposes, this cultural division is ultimately unsatisfactory.<sup>24</sup> But Chanady finds the solution to this question in realism of the genre. Not only is realism the key narrative device for resolving the antinomy between the magical and the real; it is also what defines the magic by establishing the ground of the real against which the magic appears as different.

Therefore, we can trace the conflicting movements in readings of magical realism to the fact that both Bhabha and Jameson place magical realism in the postcolonial context, but from opposing theoretical positions. Jameson's Marxist impulse has remained in the form of an insistence on defining magical realism as an encounter of the pre-capitalist and the capitalist, articulated as the pre-colonial and the colonial, and thus representing liberatory politics, even though theoretical approaches to the genre have shifted towards postcolonial theories.<sup>25</sup> This is the theoretical double bind or theoretical vacuum of magical realism similar to that which existed in postcolonial theory. In fact, two articles of Jameson's have been widely applied to magical realism; but Jameson never offers a definition of the magical, neither does he consider the magical realist text and its elements. The Jamesonian Marxist approach will identify the material conditions of the text, and indeed elucidate the politics of the realist part of magical realism, but, it will not tell us how the magic works in the text. On the other hand, postcolonial theory appears misguided in its wish to articulate both the indeterminate conditions of cultural

issues and political and historical specifics.<sup>26</sup> Bhabha's hybrid signifier can be used to describe the magical element very effectively, but it cannot, however, at the same time be seen as related to "a subversive strategy of subaltern agency".<sup>27</sup>

While Bhabha's concept of the hybrid signifier is useful in order to place the magical element within a postcolonial context, Deleuze allows us to think the magic as revolutionary without having to re-incorporate it into a specific Marxist materialist politics. In fact, a Deleuzian reading of magical realism describes those elements of the text that cannot be defined in Marxist terms. While Jameson admits that history is only accessible to us through texts, he insists that it exists as a non-textual reality. This reality relates to any text as its subtext, and the aim of literary criticism, to Jameson, is: "[the] rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or the restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*".<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, in *The Political Unconscious* Jameson again seems to situate the magical on the side of the oppressed, considering how an oppositional voice pitted against the discourse of ruling classes is constructed "most notably, from the fragments of essentially peasant cultures: folk songs, fairy tales, popular festivals, occult or oppositional systems of belief such as magic and witchcraft".<sup>29</sup> It is here that the limit of Jameson's materialist method lies: it cannot articulate what the magic of magic realism does, as opposed to what it cannot do.<sup>30</sup>

### **Objectives and the significance of the study**

By reviewing different readings of magical realism it might come to the mind that the antinomy between versions of reality could not be satisfactorily resolved by

cultural hybridity alone. The antinomy between textual versions of reality can be resolved without a parallel cultural resolution. This suggests that definitions of magical realism must be concerned with the way the text presents reality. Thus, a mere representation of cultural hybridity, the inclusion of, or encounter between, different cultural views, is not enough to distinguish the genre.

According to many critical studies which attempt to make a clear theory or definition for magical realism, the term's theoretical vacuum as a shortcoming should be overcome by delineating a brief history of the term. This seems a suitable strategy, for the term has been applied to so divergent works both in art and in literature that any attempt to extract a theory out of magical realism's essential features leads to such generalization as to make a clear definition impossible. However, relying only on the historical approach does more to confuse than to illuminate the issue. By tracing back the term's history, origin and usage one cannot reach a perfect definition of it. The problem begins with the fact that the term is generally considered to have been imported from another domains, namely from art criticism, and while magical realism has become established as a literary genre, its definition has remained vague. The fact that it has been applied widely to quite different works testifies to both its allure and its possibilities. At the same time it indicates the need for a reconsideration of the genre. Although key works have had a distinct impact, magical realism seems constantly to overlap and merge with other types of literature and critical currents.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the study's consideration of the term's origin is in fact a basic attempt to arrive at a definition via the term's history. But, the significant point still remains. What is needed to establish a determined

definition for magical realism? Taking a genealogical approach seems good only for understanding the term, what is more needed for establishing a definition is an ontological framework based on which the study can establish a theory for magical realism.

The common weakness of postcolonial approaches to magical realism is that they begin with a socio-cultural or geo-political contextual approach to the genre or rely on contextual definitions of it.<sup>32</sup> Not only does this raise immediate problems for political readings of the genre, but, as the study will elucidate, it also fails to provide a satisfactory definition of magical realism. Rather, a formal approach is necessary in order to provide a definition which can then be applied to any context. Therefore, the study is to begin approaching the magical realist text purely on a formal, textual basis by looking at the real and the magical elements in the text as separate from any extra-textual context. This would allow us to consider the nature of the real and the magical, and how they are related to each other. In fact, in order to define magical realism the study would look at the ontological properties of the real and the magical, rather than their anthropological connections. Once this definition is established, however, the study can move on to reconsider magical realism in the context that it most prominently features in, that is, the postcolonial. The study considers the difference between the magical and the real to be absolutely central to the ontological character of the magical realist text. In fact, magical realism is defined not by the resolution of antinomy between two distinct codes of reality (realism and fantasy), but by the distinction between these two levels, in the face of a dominant image of reality presented by the matter-of-fact realist narrative.