

OILING THE DOORS AND  
WIDENING THE BRIDGE TO "CLUB CANON":  
PLACING MAGICAL REALISM, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION  
IN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT

THESIS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Realist literature has enjoyed a long tradition of acclaim and has produced many valuable works. However, many feel that realism, representation, and all of the conventions associated with them have become exhausted. This feeling of exhaustion has led to a new tradition of experimental literature, Postmodernism, which is marked by its playful tone and its distortion of traditional narrative techniques. Postmodernism's extreme recursiveness and temporal paradoxes, unique use of irony, increased emphasis on form/antiform, and aversion to representation all lead to a refreshingly open narrative which is what initially appealed to most readers. However, even though readers enjoy the refreshing openness of postmodern work, many claim that Postmodernism has itself become a literary mode that is also becoming exhausted in that it is actually *limited* by its singular devotion to experimentation which leads, essentially, to a *lack* of accessibility, prompting the question: what is next? The emergence of Magical Realism as a critical force of its own, a mode of writing also marked by experimentation, provides a link to a new consideration of literature that is commonly neglected by criticism and rarely given serious attention. By using the traditional form of realist narratives and incorporating fantastic elements, Magical

Realism “serves as an essential binding function in the larger context of postmodernist writing, a binding that links the dailiness of realism and the risk of experimentation” (Chamberlain 18), leading the literary community toward a new critical tradition, one that embraces the neglected genres of texts considered to be non-rational or irrational (using the supernatural, uncanny, marvelous, and fantastic) such as Science Fiction and Fantasy, finally bringing this literature to the forefront of literary criticism.

The postmodern literature to date has sought to defy the restraints of chronological time by incorporating temporal paradoxes and a level of recursiveness designed to lose the reader. It has adopted a parodic and playful tone and has treated the use of the “irreducible individual psyche” as a restricting device (Chamberlain 5). By doing so, Postmodernism not only attempts to “abandon the ‘literature of exhaustion’” but also to “bridge the gap between high and mass culture and undo the elitist ‘autonomy’ of Modernism” (Waugh 2). The emphasis for Postmodernism is on the form/antiform of literature, as opposed to its content, which leads to intriguing yet puzzling and, at times, unsatisfying results. What was once refreshingly cutting edge, for many, has become a “disruptive fictional form” (McCaffery xxvi), prompting readers to feel, as Habermas does, that it is an “extravagant program which [has] tried to negate modernity” (167). With any construction whose primary objective is to attain supreme experimentation in form, there is a point when the characteristic novelty is no longer as novel as it once was, and the construct can no longer outdo itself. The once-stimulating anarchy distances readers more than invigorates them,

thus defeating its primary function to bridge the gap. This is what leads us to explore new literary avenues.

Magical Realism is a mode fostered by Postmodernism, but, despite what many postmodern critics have determined, is quite separate from Postmodernism. Magical Realism, in its use of magic, defies representation, but in its use of realism, embraces it. Its balance of magic and realism sets it apart from both Postmodernism and realism. Unlike traditional realist literature whose aim is to replicate reality, therefore enforcing the external non-fiction world's codes and rules within the fictive world, Magical Realism maintains a realist style but slightly alters the external codes to incorporate fantastic elements. Magical Realism differs from Postmodernism in its emphasis. Even though Magical Realism does enjoy experimenting with form and representation, its emphasis remains primarily on experimenting in content whereas Postmodernism's emphasis remains on experimenting in form. For Postmodernism, the emphasis on form is so extreme, that one exchanges the term "antiform" for form in this case. Often, magical realist fiction will maintain a coherent narrative and "an unobtrusive, third-person narrator" (Chamberlain 6), but will incorporate fantastic elements, such as ghosts, psychic activity, and illogical occurrences, and present them as "real," sometimes turning metaphor into reality or defamiliarizing "real" objects into fantastic ones. Magical Realism acts as a bridge between Postmodernism and realism, blending the two most attractive elements of each to create a more satisfying literary mode.

The acceptance of Magical Realism not only indicates the onset of a new mode that appreciates content, but also indicates a new awareness of fantastic fiction. Postmodernism's ready reception of popular culture and its tendency to exalt bizarre and experimental conventions has helped to pave the way for the serious acceptance of a new type of literature. The critical acceptance of Magical Realism is just the first step of a literary journey that is heading toward a new tradition. We are on our way toward a literary movement in which genres, such as Cyberpunk, Science Fiction, Fantasy, the supernatural, and other non-realist/irrational fiction, that have previously only been minimally explored, are more readily accepted. Postmodernism's rejection of realism has pushed the literary community down a path of experiment, playfulness, paradox, and magic that will extend to its logical conclusion. The "turning away from realism has resulted in a new commitment to the multiplex forms of the fantastic" (Hollinger, "Playing" 185). We are now, grudgingly, making a turn toward the fantastic.

## CHAPTER II

### PLACING MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM, AND MAGICAL REALISM

In an effort to judge what tradition future literatures may pursue, we must first examine our literary past. In this case, the origins of Postmodernism and Modernism seem pertinent. The movements are distinctly linked, not only temporally and nominally, but formally, both being a reaction to tradition and resulting in a distinctive new tradition of experimentation. In order to distinguish how this tendency toward experimentation and interpretation of reality will translate into future criticism, we must not only examine how these concepts have previously been treated, but also determine the guiding concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism. The topic is so debated that few have come to a definitive conclusion, and, for those who have, fewer have come to a united consensus on exactly what Modernism and Postmodernism actually *are*.

#### Postmodernism and Modernism

Postmodernism has been discussed as a reaction to Modernism. Responding to modernist values, such as the belief in grand truths and a constitutive core to art and humanity where truth lies, Postmodernism views Modernism as a tradition that clings to unbending and universal foundations and



these unwavering principles are what Postmodernism opposes. The idea that a purportedly essential and transcendent core resides in art and man is throwback to the Enlightenment and haunts Modernism, but Postmodernism disrupts the tendency of rationalist literature to take itself and its devices so seriously. It seizes the hallmark structures and methodologies of modernist literature, violently contorts and reconfigures them, replacing the totality and hierarchy of Modernism with the fragmentation and anarchy of Postmodernism. Chronological narratives, static characterization, and an unwavering dedication to mimetic representation, give way to an exceptional appropriation of recursiveness and temporal paradoxes, a unique use of irony, an increased emphasis on form/antiform, and an aversion to representation. Postmodernism is a form of discourse designed to corrupt unity and diverge harmony into dissidence, “to welcome a world seen as random and multiple even, at times, absurd” (Wilde 44). Whereas the modernist is “a devotee of organization and order” (45), the postmodernist is dedicated to a decentered disorder.

There is a certain degree of danger in modernist thought in that it runs the risk of exceedingly assuming truths and unnecessarily excluding works and conventions. One of the major criticisms of Modernism lies in its assumptions concerning its grand theories of identity and reality. By using the structures of the supposedly enlightened metanarratives, the modernist is in danger of taking on a false sense of prophetic power by feigning the ability to infer insight into mankind, thus invoking a privileged knowledge of such lofty fundamentals as truth, self-knowledge, and reality. By maintaining this practice, Modernism promotes an

“insidious exclusion of everything [. . .] identifie[d] as non-rational” (Waugh 88). It is good to note that putting such faith into these structures is dangerously deceiving in that doing so assumes an ultimate and unshakable sense of reality, self, universe, and truth, positing that, in literature and humanity, there is some “stable depth/surface relation such that a hidden core of truth may be archaeologically uncovered” (6).

The biggest impediment of Modernism lies in its limited vision of reality. In Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulations*, he proposes that, for Modernism, “the very definition of real becomes *that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*” (186). Reality is representable and rational and reasonable. Anything that does not follow these guidelines, is not real, and thus, need not be represented. The natural and rational is serious and “real,” thus is worthy of inclusion. The supernatural and irrational is extraneous to reality and, thus, is trivial and worthy of exclusion. Generally, only that which is representable, explainable, and “real” can qualify as a deserving subject in modernist literature. For modernists, the “tourniquet of representation tightens madly” (186). This exclusionary tactic is somewhat manipulative in that it is a deliberate *choosing* of what is real and what is not, which conflicts with the guiding principle of the indisputably concrete nature of reality. To extract elements from a pool of experiences and realities, and label one as rational/real/worthy and others as irrational/unreal/unworthy, only further demonstrates the fragile and insubstantial quality of reality. The real is not really real, not actually real, not existing as a fact, but a selected real, a choice, existing as one fact of many facts. This is

unfortunate because it has produced a literary tradition, Modernism, that rejects entire genres of literature as invalid based on this absolutist perception of what is “real,” which is disheartening. Thus, genres that include elements of the fantastic and/or supernatural suffer as an art form because of this tenet, enjoying very little critical success.

Unlike Modernism’s excluding view of reality and literature, Postmodernism has opened its borders to welcome a more diverse vision of what is “real” and valid. Whereas Modernism maintains a limited perception of a single reality and one’s place in that reality, Postmodernism opens this consideration of reality to include the possibility of multiple realities and an examination of the plurality of reality and identity. For Modernism, the possibility that one’s *perception* of an experience may be reality, even if this same experience is perceived and interpreted in a multitude of different ways by a multitude of different people, is not a viable one, or at least, not as valid as examining a single “known” reality. Conceding that *several* realities may exist rather than only one correct reflection existing of some solitary concrete and unchangeably “real” reality is more a postmodern practice. Modernism sticks strictly to the representable and, although many insightful and challenging texts have emerged from this practice, it does not account for any level of reality that is unrepresentable, that is variable, that is changing, that is so elusive it cannot be properly perceived or pressed upon the pages of fiction. Postmodernism, however, embraces the unrepresentable and excludes nothing. It is not reserved for the works deemed by many as “too arty and serious” (Fiedler 467), but more

concerned with scouring previously untouched literary territory. It seeks to push the borders until they touch and, eventually, disappear. By excluding these possibilities, and neglecting the irrational and unrepresentable, Modernism inadvertently assumes that all things are concrete, mappable, and representable if the individual discussing them is appropriately enlightened. Modernism delights in the arty and serious and builds distinct boundaries, thus dividing existence into two neat categories: real (rational) and unreal (irrational).

Postmodernism's extreme experimentation and open view of reality allows it to sidestep some of the problems with which Modernism has had to contend. For Modernism, the danger lies in accepting the idea of a solitary reality without sufficiently questioning and experimenting with it. Though Modernism also esteemed experimentation, it is Postmodernism's strides in and extreme level of heightened reverence for experimentation that sets it apart from other literary movements. By so exceptionally venerating experimentation, Postmodernism highlights the dangers of accepting the assumption that reality is a graspable/representable concept because to do so would be to run the risk of maintaining a culture of delusion. Simultaneously over-esteeming the ability of humanity to interpret the full spectrum of "reality" and under-esteeming each individual's perception, the culture that Postmodernism rejects is one that prefers to trust the individual's sense of self and reality as a universal one, taking one artist's perception as reality. Rationalist narratives have thrived on the assertion that "reality functions in this [definable] way; thus, the fictional depiction of reality ought to reflect our conception of the world" (Green 44). Although much good has

come from Modernism, its limited view of art, as necessarily representing something, limits it. By so tremendously subverting and demoralizing this idea through *nonfigurative* experimentation Postmodernism is exonerated from repeating this mistake. Because of the postmodern belief that there is no definable reality and the elimination of the necessity to produce a coherent thematic text, this extreme experimentation in form and use of antiform is essential to Postmodernism. Steering away from the abundant self-awareness of Modernism, Postmodernism employs a more playful freedom, where there are no strings tied tenuously to meaning and no bodies of meaning await excavation. If one subscribes to the postmodern point of view concerning the nature of truth, “there is nothing to be reflected [in art], no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum” (Eagleton 152).

The benefit of Postmodernism lies in its efforts to expand literature, allowing room for artistic diversity. Postmodern critics, in addition to viewing Modernism’s philosophy concerning realism and rationalist representation as limited and even deluded, often denounce this period’s narrative techniques as overly conventional to the point of being exhausted and “*dead*, i.e., belong[ing] to history not actuality” (Fiedler 461), therefore limiting aesthetic growth. Modernism itself began as a movement to expand and experiment. Postmodernism picked up where Modernism left off and has pushed the boundaries even further. Literature and art symbolize growth. Spiritually and aesthetically artists must extend their artistic development so that they may maintain art as “incantatory, magical” (Sontag 3). It must grow in order to preserve its role as something

“useful [. . .] in that it arouses and purges dangerous emotions” (4). In order to arouse and purge emotion, it must, of course, reach people emotionally—touch them surprisingly, tenderly, or roughly. It must break the desensitized barrier that forms a calloused shell around so many of us and *touch* people. Not only has Postmodernism worked to extend these borders, but Magical Realism also continues this effort, as do all irrational texts. Embracing various forms of experimentation springs not only from a recognition of the complexity of “reality” but also from an aesthetic necessity to escape mimesis, which some feel is overpoweringly excluding and limited, and, in its rigidity, is reinforcing the calloused barrier.

### The Representational Crisis: Modernism and Postmodernism

Though the stress was placed on mimetic representation in Modernism, form was indeed emphasized. In fact, the greatest source of vexation for critics in determining a distinct difference between Modernism and Postmodernism lies in judging the degree to which the two movements overlap, especially when Modernism delves into experimentation in form. Modernism was reacting to traditional literature itself and thus experimenting with “the multiplication and juxtaposition of perspectives, [. . .] virtuoso variants on interior monologue, [. . .] dislocated chronology, withheld or indirectly presented information” (McHale *Postmodernist*, 9), and so on. The identifiable break in ideology comes in examining the purpose, extent, and use of the form.

For modernist writers, remaining true to their dedication to meaning and reality, even experimental form is always linked to mimesis and the reader. When using a highly formalized and defamiliarized language, Modernism, in order “to remain relevant to human concerns, [. . .] retain[s] its mimetic or referential tendency” (Riccomini 109). Its main priority is its anxiety of relevance. For Modernism, the way to stay relevant is to maintain referentiality, to stay connected to meaning and content. When delving into experimentation, the modernist text aims to harmonize “narrative referentiality with lyric self-referentiality [. . . to] balance the familiar and defamiliarized aspects of language” (109). Modernism makes its language strange, taking it to a length that offers a new perspective on language, but is still trying “to remain relevant to human concerns” and so ties the strangeness to mimesis and a referential quality (109). It must maintain a balance between its content and its form. There cannot be too much pointlessness or excessive confusion in a modernist work or else it feels unresolved and open; this lack of resolution would feel awkward to the reader and thus wrong to the writer. With Modernism, there is a concern for the reader understanding meaning that is not as present in Postmodernism. Its emphasis is on the epistemological interpretation of humanity. In an effort to answer such socially centered “big questions” as how to “interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?” (McHale, *Postmodernist* 9), the purpose is to explore knowledge through interpretation. Modernism uses an emphasis on form to assist this exploration, but it is forever tied to meaning and mimesis.

Postmodernism rejects the concept of representation and interpretation altogether. Often, postmodern works are metafictional and recursive to the point that the reader is purposefully and repeatedly cast aside and left behind while the narrative continues on its winding way. The postmodern author oftentimes attempts to “produce attenuated texts in gesture after gesture of authorial anxiety and representational crisis” (Radhakrishnan 229). Far from the structured reality of Modernism, constructed to hide some sort of secret meaning to be later revealed, Postmodernism shuns such a concept, objecting to the claim that “art by definition says something[. . . ]It is the habit of approaching works of art in order to interpret them that sustains the fancy that there really is such a thing as the content of a work of art” (Sontag 5). Instead of pulling out the thick archeologist’s brush, sweeping/discarding layers of external matter (form) to reach the heart of the story (content), and seeking what it “really means,” Postmodernism revels in the freedom of the text to mean what it says. It is not a text which requires excessive extrapolation; the reader must “not deduce from the form of what [the writers] are. [. . . Postmodernism] is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics. [. . . ]It is seeking to give new impetus [. . . ] to the undefined work of freedom” (Foucault 105). It is not a transcendental or universalizing criticism that “knows” there is a representable “reality.” It is more, to borrow Foucault’s terms, “archeological” and “genealogical” than metaphysical (105).

“[M]odernist art [. . . ] assumed it was communicating something, that in personal and collective terms it had a function” (Russell 186), while, for



Postmodernism, there is less of an urgency to convey. The focus shifts from an exploration of “how can I interpret” this world to “[w]hich world is this? What is to be done with it?” (McHale *Postmodernist*, 10), relating to the celebration of the plurality of reality. Postmodernism’s purpose, according to Brian McHale, shifts towards an ontological ideology. There is no more a tethering of meaning in the form, but more a creating of new worlds. Experimentation in form is no longer used in an effort to be attentive to the reader in order to represent something that is meant to be interpreted, but more of a birthing of worlds in order to explore our own. For Postmodernism, “specific messages are secondary to the process of creating those messages” (Russell 183).

This is how the distinction is made between form and antiform. Antiform is disjunctive, divisive, and open. It divides, rather than unites, gashes, instead of heals, and creates uncertainty as opposed to resolution. This tendency lies in the aforementioned aversion to representation. Modernism’s use of form held a direct purpose and motive for doing so. It sought to create meaning, resolution, unity, and healing, whereas Postmodernism’s use of form is more open and playful, emphasizing division, sickness, and uncertainty. It does not have a direct purpose or motive. Whereas “[M]odernis[ts] attempt to achieve formal order;” through their use of form, “[P]ostmodernists mock such order or deliberately shatter it” with their use of antiform (Martin 145). In Faulkner’s *Absalom!* *Absalom!*, the impeded form “simulates for the reader the very same problems [. . .] that plague Quentin and Shreve” (McHale *Postmodernist*, 10). Faulkner’s techniques simulate the experiences of the characters. Similarly, in

*The Sound and The Fury*, the form of Benjy's chapter is dislocated to reflect his state of mind. The technique is highly experimental and cleverly done, but the motivation is representational and used to aid the reader in understanding Benjy's character as opposed to simply appreciating the form. Aberrations in form exist to help the reader interpret and explain the plot and characters. The form acts as a clue from the author; it is a knot to be untangled. The form is highly stylized but also highly intentional and purposeful, helping the reader to understand the nature of the problems of characters. It serves a definite and identifiable purpose within the text. Although Faulkner's stream of consciousness and disjointed chronology seem erratic, they are structured. Even though Joyce's use of "sudden dislocation[s], [. . .] shifting [. . .] point of view," and "roughened language" in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* at times seems purely formalist (Riccomini 111), these devices are tied to the text so that they make sense, becoming "familiar and comprehensible" (111). Therefore, these experiments in form revolve solely around a motive to convey (the purpose of modernist form) more than around a motive to experiment (the purpose of postmodern antiformalism). Joyce's form provides explanations for the reader, catering to its readers' desire to understand. Although the "masters of modern literature once seemed formless, [. . .] we have now discovered their form; they once seemed enigmatic, but now we know their meaning" (Martin 147), because there is always meaning in Modernism. In its use of form, there is a "respect for the idiosyncrasies of the reader" that does not exist in Postmodernism's use of antiformalism (McHale *Postmodernist*, 8).

In *This Is Not a Novel*, for instance, David Markson splices together various facts, book titles, quotations, and so on, so that one section reads:

Play the man, Master Ridley.

*Hank Cinq.*

Cavafy died of cancer of the larynx.

Pechorin. (Markson 22)

It seems void of any real narrative or distinct patterns and evades any sense of purpose or intention at all. Markson creates a knot, not to be untangled, but to be admired for its tangled-ness. Any meaning that is absorbed from this work is constructed purely by the reader. It is absolutely not a result of the author's designs. This is a result of the *lack* of attention towards the reader that comes with employing an antiform that promotes a reverence for uncertainty.

Postmodern fiction does not cater to its reader's notions of "sense" or intent in the way that modernist works tend to do.

For Postmodernism, the (anti)form is open and unresolved. The reader may feel compelled to pull at dangling threads to straighten the postmodern narrative, but, in a work that applies a strong sense of antiform, there is not a hidden meaning to be excavated. Markson's catalog of phrases and facts does not occur in a pattern or any sense of order. There is no beginning or middle or end. If a reader studied the work extensively and finally pulled forth an erratic and highly complex order, this would be a result of the reader's efforts, not the writer's intent. Any meaning that is found is purely an invention. It may still be interesting to pursue and analyze but it is a different creature from the implanted meaning of

a modernist work. Postmodern meanings found in antiformal works are immaculate conceptions. They are parent-less. We must be careful not to demean modernist writing or oversimplify it as a literature that is severely linear and elementary in its meaning. After all, in conventional writing, there is usually no *one* meaning in a work. However, the author is usually leading the reader in a direction, suggesting interpretations, or pointing at something. It is a contained work with boundaries. In Postmodernism, the author uses antiformal structures that lead the reader in all directions, suggest no interpretations, and point at everything. The antiform creates a literature that is, in all senses, open.

A valuable illustration of the differences in form and antiform can be seen by specifically comparing the treatment of time in modernist and postmodern texts. As previously stated, dislocation and non-linear chronology exist in both modernist literature and postmodern literature. Again, the difference lies in referentiality or the lack thereof. Metafiction is present in both Modernism and Postmodernism, and both use the technique in an experimental effort to highlight the artificiality of literature and writing. However, they differ in that while the “postmodernists’ texts fall into the general category of metafiction, [they] do not achieve the balance between mimesis and self-reflexivity exhibited by [modernist] work” (Riccomini 110). In Modernism’s experiments with time, once more we see ties to referentiality reinforced in the midst of its experimentation. The two periods use the technique for distinctly different purposes in distinctly different ways. Modernist work, while using metafiction, can not let go of the reader. It “accomodate[s] the referentiality of language and the interplay between

story and plot that derives from it [. . .] contain[ing] enough referentiality to enable the construction of a narrative unit" (109). The story, plot, and narrative unit play a much larger part in the workings of Modernism. For Postmodernism, these issues are less important, acting less as tools to aid the reader and more as grand structures to challenge. Metafiction and other non-linear, or recursive, structures "serve[s] as a tool for exploring issues of narrative authority and unreliability, the circulation of knowledge, and so forth" (McHale *Postmodernist*, 113). These structures are more devices that force questions to be asked than something that provides any answers. Postmodernism uses the tools of Modernism to experiment and challenge reality and narrative.

A postmodern metafiction resembles antiform in that it "court[s] the confusion of levels [. . .] deliberately misleading the reader into regarding an embedded [. . .] world as the primary [. . .] world" instead of leading the reader towards answers to life questions (115). The differing techniques may be viewed as two grassy, rocky, and winding paths that twist through the same forest of chronological experimentation. The modernist trail, as with all of its experimental forms, is dotted with small arrows and partially obstructed signs, and curves through a portion of the forest that is illuminated by bright filtered light where flora and fauna are easily seen. Yet the postmodern path is unmarked and barren, snaking its way into the shadowy and darkened portion of this forest, where every step presents an obstacle for the traveler to navigate. They are using the same devices, but using them differently and it is this degree of difference that sets them apart. In postmodern literature, "paradoxes proliferate [. . .] to the point

where the projected world is completely destabilized. Here there is no identifiable center of consciousness [. . .] to recuperate [. . .] paradoxical changes of level and other inconsistencies” (14). This difficult and shadowy path promotes caution, awareness, and a heightened consideration of one’s existence or being. By using one’s steady sense of time and skewing it so that it becomes a pointed and angular destabilization of the projected fictional world without reason, in which a reader is lost and thinking it is the primary diegetic world, one is forced to question the stability of one’s own world. It is not a guided path to considering specific themes or questions that the author has in mind, but it is more a generally forced re-evaluation of our perception of the world and “reality.”

### Magical Realism

This brings us to Magical Realism and the fantastic. In his groundbreaking discussion of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov divides supernatural or irrational fiction into three genres: the uncanny, the marvelous, and the purely fantastic. The uncanny is defined as a text whose supernatural tones can be explained away or resolved by a natural phenomenon. The marvelous is a genre whose text is purely supernatural, setting up a separate world where the supernatural phenomena are explained away as natural for the fictional supernatural world in which the events are occurring. The pure fantastic is the genre in which supernatural events cannot be explained away at all. There is a certain hesitation that occurs when, “[i]n a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot

be explained by the laws of this same familiar world” (Todorov 25). The hesitation is a result of a character who “wonders (and the reader with him) whether what is happening to him is real. If what surrounds him is indeed reality (in which case sylphides exist), or whether it is no more than an illusion” (24), resolving and rationalizing the occurrences. The fantastic incorporates elements of both the marvelous and the uncanny. It is a hesitation between reality and the supernatural. This connecting quality is present in both Todorov’s definition of the fantastic and Magical Realism, but Magical Realism produces a more internalized hesitation, or destabilization, and a more intimate connection to the unreal.

For Todorov, the supernatural creates a jarring effect. It “disturbs, alarms, or simply keeps the reader in suspense” (162), and the fantastic text maintains a hesitation throughout the text as a result of the text’s ambiguity. The author and narrator never reveal whether or not the supernatural is definitely supposed to be considered as a part of the text’s reality. It is implied, but it is not verified. This definition of the fantastic requires the reader to constantly question the magic and supernatural. The reader is not allowed to accept the irrational, nor reject it, and hesitates between *explanations* of the supernatural/irrational. Magical Realism, does not imply magic. It confirms magic, and, thus, there is not a hesitation in explaining magical events in Magical Realism. Instead, the hesitation is internalized and the reader is destabilized. The reader never doubts that the magic is real within the text, but hesitates in his/her understanding of the magic. A representational hesitation occurs as a result of embedding blatantly

irrational events in an equally rational setting. The balance between rational/irrational and magic/real creates a destabilization in the reader who is forced to confront conflicting codes. Amaryl Chanady recognizes this difference between the fantastic and Magical realism in her book, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, when she states that, for the fantastic, “not only is the supernatural perceived as belonging to a different dimension, but the fact that it exists at all is rejected on logical grounds, and the inexplicable events become profoundly disturbing” (8), whereas, for Magical realism, “the acceptance of the supernatural [is] part of everyday life” (21). Chanady discusses the difference in terms of problematize. The fantastic problematizes the supernatural, and Magical Realism present the magic as inherent, and, thus, characters do not object to it. However, the reader, who approaches the work with inherent preconceived notions concerning the nature of reality, is destabilized by the presence of the unreal, and by the acceptance of the characters of these unreal events.

Critics and scholars have invested much effort into divining what makes a text realist/uncanny, marvelous, fantastic, or magical realist. There are two elements that are repeatedly acknowledged as fundamental and must be present for a text to be considered Magical Realism. First, a magical realist text blends two worlds, the mimetic and the marvelous, into one fantastic world, and, second, creates a necessary level of destabilization because of this enfolding. These two factors are quite original to Magical Realism and set it apart from other irrational texts, such as Science Fiction and Fantasy. Where Science Fiction and Fantasy may achieve a level of destabilization through the subversion of “reality” and



mimesis, the effect is dissimilar from Magical Realism because those genres each lack the enfolding of worlds that occurs in Magical Realism.

Firstly, Magical Realism creates a fluid world where “two distinct kinds of fictional worlds have been enfolded together” to create a separate distinct world (Wilson 222). It is not a work in which strictly realist representation occurs, nor is it a text where strictly supernatural “other-worldly” phenomena occur, as is the case with Science Fiction and what is commonly referred to as “Fantasy” (works by Tolkien and others like him). Instead, Magical Realism smoothly folds one world into another so that there is no resolution to the unexplained incidents/qualities that occur in the text.

In Patrick Süskind's *Perfume*, the enfolding of worlds occurs when the main character's obsession with scent as magical is finally confirmed. Grenouille is presented as a man with an acute and heightened sense of smell. It is so acute that one could easily argue his sensual ability as a magical endowment, but for the majority of the novel, Grenouille is a “normal” character. He is a murderer, a devout perfumer, and a solitary man, but, besides his extraordinary sense of smell, there is little that is remarkable about him or what he does. The book is heavily steeped in realism until, during his climactic execution, Grenouille, after dousing himself in the virginal perfume, is surrounded by a covetous mob who then “tore away his clothes, his hair, his skin from his body. [. . . T]hey attacked him like hyenas. [. . .] In very short order, the angel was divided into thirty pieces, and every animal [. . .] dropped back to devour it” (Süskind 309). Up until this point, Grenouille's “magic” had been unconfirmed

and his sensory abilities easily dismissed as a psychological delusion. However, when the carnivorous cannibalistic mob devours Grenouille, the magic is confirmed by these other characters in the book and thus the magic/supernatural has indeed become irreducible and unexplainable, successfully enfolded the supernatural into a realist representation.

In Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the stories of the gypsies and their magic can be written off as rumor or myth, something that the silly people of Macondo may believe in but is not necessarily true. However, when Aureliano and José Arcadio observe a "flying carpet that went swiftly by the laboratory at window level carrying the gypsy who was driving it and several children from the village" (34), the magic is confirmed. Because the two children cannot both be having the same hallucination, the magic is thus confirmed since we see through the eyes of two characters. When this happens, the two worlds are successfully merged into one complex world where the reader recognizes both the external codes of the familiar "reality" and the newly introduced aberrant codes of magic and the supernatural.

The second element that is necessary for a work to be considered Magical Realism is closely connected to the first and concerns the level of destabilization that occurs with a work of Magical Realism. If a text successfully accomplishes the enfolding of worlds, it is able to surprise the reader by providing a level of destabilization. This destabilization is the signature effect of Magical Realism and closely resembles the disorientation that occurs in Postmodernism's use of antiform. Just as paradoxes dominate postmodern literature, carefree of what will

happen to the reader once the projected worlds are destabilized, Magical Realism also maintains a carelessness toward its audience. Often, the readers of Magical Realism are fooled into thinking the realist portion of the narrative is the primary diegetic world, thus resulting in a lost and hesitant reader. If the magic is never clearly established as irreducible, then the text does not challenge the reader's sense of reality, never causes the reader to hesitate, and fails as Magical Realism. Magical Realism meticulously sets up boundaries for the reader to achieve the desired destabilization. It is this boundary breaking that makes García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, at times, so shocking. When reading about the "wonders" of the "real" world (the amazing "discovery" of ice, trains, magnifying glasses, the world as round, and so forth), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* implies it is a realist work with realist rules of time (set in a time and region unaware of scientific discoveries). Yet, when we then read of such things as magic carpets, ascending women, and plagues of amnesia, the text betrays these boundaries and implied rules by using the supernatural and never resolving this use. Because of this unexpected betrayal, "the occurrence of the supernatural is often seen as a breach of the normal order of things" (Chanady 5), and this breach of order shocks the reader into a reconsideration of the text and reality, creating the resultant effect of destabilization that is unique to Magical Realism.

Not only does the text break mimetic boundaries and betray the reader by refusing to resolve the use of the supernatural, but it is sure to also establish that the magic is not a natural occurrence of insanity or delusion, but is a fixed

“reality” within the text. Other characters in the book confirm the supernatural elements in order to maintain the delicate balance that is necessary to create the required destabilization. When Aureliano and José Arcadio watch the flying carpet sail by the window, the magic of this event is further confirmed by their father José Arcadio Buendía when he not only notices the flying carpet, but is dismissive of it. He does “not even look at it” and refers to it as “a miserable bedspread” in comparison with the glories of science (García Márquez 34-35). The magic is not only confirmed as present, being observed by three characters, but is also confirmed as a natural occurrence by the trivializing attitude of José Arcadio Buendía. This is not some once-in-a-lifetime happening, but something that is established as an event that occurs on a recurrent basis. This revelation is surprising, especially since this passage is juxtaposed with other more familiar discoveries such as their first encounters with ice, astronomy, magnets, telescopes, and so on.

In *Perfume*, it is not until the *other* characters are affected by Grenouille’s magical scent that the magic becomes real to the reader as something to take seriously. When we witness the consumption of Grenouille, it is indeed a “rupture of the coherent universe, [. . .] an expression of fear at seeing our world of reason destroyed” (Chanady 5). The magic is confirmed, and this fear, thus, destabilizes. We, the readers, have experienced genuine magic which is so irreducible that “our world of reason [is] destroyed” (5), as is “the laws of the universe as we know them” (Faris 167). Grenouille’s sense of smell and José Arcadio Buendía’s experience with the flying carpet are not dismissed as

psychological problems, drug-induced hallucinations, or dream sequences. The events are not even portrayed ambiguously so as to even allow these possibilities. Süskind and García Márquez go to great pains to establish the magical events in these stories as not only valid, but just as valid as the realist portions. These authors set up a reasonably believable set of boundaries and then betray the reader, by confirming this magic, so completely in the conclusion that we are left, mouth gaping, eyes wide, and mind frantic, rereading in breathless shock wondering “WHAT just *happened*?” Such revelations confirm the magic within the text and cause the destabilization that is characteristic of magical realist literature, throwing “a grain of sand in the oyster of that realism” (Faris 168).

It may sound fairly normal to include supernatural elements in a work, but what makes Magical Realism so remarkable is its fundamental insistence that these elements are not only left unexplained, but the authors are unfailingly sure to explicitly confirm the magic as actually existing within the reality of the text. The confirmation of both real and unreal with no attempt to resolve the two valid codes results in an enjoyably unstable and open narrative. The world of telescopes and ice that we are familiar with is enfolded into a world of flying carpets. The ordinary world with its ordinary sense of scent is exacerbated into a motive to kill. There is no overt meaning for this magic, and the openness of its narrative is invigorating. There is no obvious moral and no leading insinuation for why this happens. These “irreducible element[s] of magic, something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them” are introduced

and confirmed in the texts (Faris 167). Any fantastic events that occur are not allowed to be rationalized as “the result of a hallucination or dream” (Chanady 4). To qualify as Magical Realism, they must not be allowed to be explained away with “dream motifs; [. . .] nor [to] emphasize [the] psychological analysis of characters, since [the text] doesn’t try to find reasons for [characters’] actions or their inability to express themselves” (Simpkins 147). Like Postmodernism’s use of subversive techniques, Magical Realism does not use magic in an effort to aid the reader in understanding the characters. The reader may choose to use the magic or metafiction to interpret the characters, but interpretation is not the sole purpose for their inclusion. The magic is included for its own sake, to aid in creating a narrative that is open in form. Because the magic is so crucial to Magical Realism’s open narrative, it is, therefore, very importantly, made clear that José Arcadio Buendía is not dreaming or insane. To have him be so would transform the text into one that is uncanny, having a supernatural feel, which in fact is actually resolved as natural and closed. Observing flying carpets is *real* for the family. We, the readers, believe it happens because of these confirmations.

By going to such pains to explicitly validate the magic and by not offering a rational explanation for the magical events that occur in an otherwise realist text, Magical Realism celebrates an “ineluctable *lack* of communication, a condition which prevents the merger of signifier and signified” (Simpkins 148). It is this lack of communication that is responsible for the destabilization that occurs in the reader because it is the quality that defies representation, creating the destabilization by breaking boundaries and enfolding worlds. The lack of

communication concerning magic and the promotion of communication concerning realism creates a mode that is both closed and open. Scott Simpkins discusses Magical Realism as a supplement to reality in that it takes its representation to a new level of misrepresentation. By misleading its audience and suggesting that their readers are being led through a world where things maintain their appropriate relationship to each other, magical realist authors indicate that the reader's experience will be a walk through simulacra. Instead, the experience is disconnected from that which has already been produced and reproduced and offers an antirepresentational journey instead. It represents that "transgressive exploration of the representational limits of the real" (Noya 151), twisting convention to transform the normally coherent mimetic path into one of misdirection, playfulness, and openness. By so intuitively enfolding "realities," disconnecting representation, and transgressing convention to create this destabilization in the reader, authors of Magical Realism adeptly use these slippery tools of deception to slide out from beneath the pressure of representationalism. There is plenty of representation to be had in the realist portions of the texts. Magical Realism, unlike Postmodernism, is not a mode that lacks all representation and consciously attempts to lose its reader. However, it is a mode that plays with representation, setting up realist expectations and using magic in its texts to break these expectations, misdirecting (not losing) the reader which causes the realism to misdirect (not abandon) the reader. These broken expectations are integral to the representational crisis which occurs in a magical realist text and that happens nowhere else. By reassuring a stable relationship

between objects and events and repeatedly defying these relationships, Magical Realism more clearly highlights the disruption of proportion in its texts. Thus worlds are enfolded and destabilization harbored in the hearts of the reader, forcing the reader to challenge his/her preconceived perceptions of reality and narrative technique, allowing for the freedom of form that Postmodernism enjoys.

Because of this freedom, Magical Realism also manages to avoid the distinctive divisions that limited Modernism. With Modernism, the “insidious exclusion” of the non-rational flawed the movement as overly rational. It became a mode of exclusion, but Magical Realism draws in the excluded elements of the fantastic, all of the non-rational qualities it can muster, and incorporates them into its narrative. Being that Magical Realism is a mode that depends on the destabilization and confusion of the reader, the non-rational is what absolutely *defines* Magical Realism. We no longer see the differentiation between what is real/concrete and unreal/irrational as one limited to these two small excluding groups. Instead, we observe a fluid literature that defies boundaries and challenges notions of reality just as in Postmodernism.

### Magical Realism and Postmodernism

Magical Realism and Postmodernism share many common qualities. Most importantly, both share a dedication to questioning reality. Lance Olsen goes so far as to claim, and is not alone in this belief, that the affinity between Magical Realism and Postmodernism is so closely aligned that one can discuss a new mode of “Postmodern fantasy” (“Deconstructing” 47). Because of Magical



Realism's active dedication and use of fairly traditional narrative techniques, I contend that the two are indeed separate and thus apply Olsen's discussion of Postmodern fantasy to Postmodernism and Magical Realism separately. It is easy to see why Olsen might merge the two, their functions and practices so closely resemble each other. Both share an aversion to representation, Magical Realism in its use of magic, Postmodernism in its use of antiform. Magical Realism's use of magic, as is the case with Postmodernism's emphasis on form/antiform, is an exercise that violates reproduction and knocks down the boundaries and "limits of the real" and "must use, misuse, and abuse the very conventions which set those limits" (Noya 151). Both ideologies use "reality" and distort it, skew it, and create paradoxes within it to illuminate the unreality of reality. For the postmodern era, the "fantastic [has] become the realism contemporary culture understands" (Olsen, "Deconstructing" 46). Magical Realism is "that stutter between two modes of discourse" that results in the same "textual instability" that is present in the postmodern text (47). Magical Realism's essential contribution to its reader is that stutter between worlds. It is uncertainty and chaos. It is play. It is a reinforcement of the unreality which is our reality, deconstructing assumptions of mimesis and the "world mirror[ing] world" (49), foregrounding the only reality that one can accept, that we can not reflect reality. One can only play with one's perception of reality and realize that there is no concrete reality to represent. Both modes "believe only in the impossibility of total intelligibility, in the endless displacement of meaning, in the production of a universe without truth, in a bottomless relativity of significance" (47).

Because Magical Realism does not offer a psychological or natural explanation for its strange phenomena, it is able to partially circumvent Modernism's obsession with meaning by creating a rift in representation with its use of magic. When dealing with the supernatural elements, there is no gesture of rational explanation open to the readers. It is another genre of writing that emphasizes taking things at face value and meaning what it says. In the literal sense, the reader is absolutely supposed to believe what is said. When Remedios the Beauty is lifted by a strange wind in García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and rises to heaven, "lost forever [. . .] in the upper atmosphere" amongst "flapping sheets" (255), this is not a metaphor describing an experience of spiritual uplifting or emotional uplifting. The magical event of Remedios' levitation is to be interpreted literally. She in fact rises into the air and is never seen again. Nothing prefaces the event to warn the reader of its onset and no explanations are given after the event to elucidate why it happens. The reader, reluctantly, must surrender his or her notions of continuity and reason and believe what the text, unbelievable and non-rational as it is, says and swallow the story, accepting that Remedios' ascension into heaven is just that. We must believe that García Márquez means what he says.

Endlessly displaced and stuttering, Magical Realism achieves an interesting result in its readers. The audience, "as a defense against [. . .] irritation and bewilderment," attempts to understand the works, and, in doing so, negates the true purpose of the text which actually "seek[s] to subvert explanation" (Olsen, "Beckett" 116). In their effort to sidestep representation,

Postmodernism and Magical Realism achieve a corollary “intent [which] is to surprise, to question, to put into doubt, to create anxiety, to repel, to rebel, to subvert, to make ambiguous, and, hence, [. . .] to deconstruct” (Olsen, “Deconstructing” 47). Therefore, the reader, in his/her modernist desire to “understand” and “believe” the text, is involved in a persistent internal opposition to the text. There is “some *resistance* of normality against the paranormal [. . .] by the reader” (McHale *Postmodernist*, 77).

But for Magical Realism, I contend that this resistance lies mainly with the supernatural. In its experimental magic, Magical Realism allies with Postmodernism. In its traditional realism, it combats Postmodernism. The unique enfolding of worlds offers an interesting interpretive dilemma/approach. The reader is invited to interpret the realist portion of a magical realist text, rife with symbolism and meaning, and even the magic can contain blatant messages for the reader.

In *Perfume*, Grenouille lives a solitary existence in a small cave for a portion of the book. In addition to this, he is also extraordinarily deformed and unattractive, so much so that the fellow orphans he boards with try to kill him because he “disgusted them the way a fat spider that you can’t bring yourself to crush in your own hand disgusts you” (Süskind 26). Because of this, it is safe to interpret Grenouille’s choice to live in a cave as indicative of the alienation he feels. He has extracted himself, like the smells he categorizes and extracts, from the world. This alienation seems a likely motivation for the obsession with perfecting smells. In perfecting his art, he chooses and becomes proficient in a

trade, allowing him to create scents for himself and ingratiate himself into society. Interpreting the realist portion of Magical Realism seems a natural process and fulfills many needs for the reader that Postmodernism neglects, while maintaining the experimentation and challenging posture that is so important in Postmodernism as well.

In addressing a text that portrays characters that are able to create scents which have “a power stronger than the power of money or the power of terror or the power of death: the invincible power to command the love of mankind” (306), the reader has no context in which to judge such a power, and it is this deficiency of context that throws a kink into the traditional methods of interpretation. How can we interpret Remedios’ ascension or José Arcadio Buendía’s flying carpets if we are to accept them as “really” happening within the text? Can we judge a character’s nature based on a small portion of the text in which something out of the character’s control and out of our realm of experience occurs? It is an incidence that the character does not choose. It is just “reality” within the work. We must accept that and move from there with our altered senses of reality. That is the binary nature of Magical Realism.

This lack of context creates a playful text that literalizes metaphor and subverts reality, further destabilizing representation and interpretation. Often, the magic in a magical realist work does not necessarily *have to* mean something, but it certainly does not necessarily *not* mean something either. If the magic is something that should be interpreted, the work should still resemble Postmodernism in its aversion to mimetic representation. The metaphors of

Magical Realism are often literal metaphors, creating a kind of semiotic magic that is playful and is an attempt to represent the *unrepresentable*. We see this literalization of metaphor in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* when Ahmed's assets are frozen:

[. . .] although Amina lay every night with her husband to warm him, although she snuggled up tightly when she felt him shiver as the icy fingers of rage and powerlessness spread upwards from his loins, she could no longer bear to stretch out her hand and touch because his little cubes of ice had become too frigid to hold. (158)

Ahmed's frozen financial funds are mirrored in his immobile reproductive commodities, stressing the literal ambiguity of the phrase "frozen assets" and forcing it to extend to Ahmed's most valuable goods. For Ahmed, the government has literally "shoved [his] balls in an ice-bucket" (157). Also, the "rage" and especially the "powerlessness" that Ahmed feels are translated literally by his impotence. He is doubly emasculated by the freezing of his assets. Later, the "businessmen of India [. . .] turn [. . .] white" (212), which seems to insinuate a distinctive postcolonial message concerning the anglicizing of India. In either case, the magic is a subversion of reality, thus defying it, and is laid alongside perfectly realist depictions of dying business partners and frozen assets, helping to create the stutter and destabilization necessary for Magical Realism.

By incorporating the elements of realism and experimentation, Magical Realism achieves a hybrid quality that comes closer to emulating reality and avoids the simulacra that Postmodernism, similarly, laments and works to avoid.

It is a more honest and complex vision of what experiences exist. Baudrillard has determined that reality is “not only what can be produced, but *that which is already reproduced*. The hyperreal” (186). According to Baudrillard, nothing is real. Everything has already been produced and reproduced so that, when an artist attempts to reflect reality, he/she is only reproducing a reproduction that is based on a prior reproduction and so on. It is the “tourniquet of representation” (186), cutting off the blood supply with the eternally hyperreal. García Márquez suggests that “disproportion is part of our reality too [, and o]ur reality is in itself out of all proportion” (García Márquez, *Fragrance* 60). The argument is made that the magic aids in capturing the ineluctably erratic and disproportionate quality of an individual reality rather than a universal one, that “the magic text is, paradoxically, more realistic than a ‘realistic’ text” because of this (Simpkins 148). This ever-tightening noose of representation is sidestepped by Postmodernism due to its anti-representational tendencies. Magical Realism does, as discussed, venture a mimetic quality, but because of the unexplained elements of magic, is also able to circumvent the simulacral quality that Baudrillard mourns.

Both Postmodernism and Magical Realism share an aversion to representation partly because both movements are avoiding similar demons, but unlike Postmodernism, this demon-dodging is not Magical Realism’s primary motivation. One reason these two movements have been so intimately connected, in that Magical Realism is oftentimes designated as a strain of Postmodernism, is that they both seem to be struggling towards the same goals. The joy each movement takes in misleading and confusing its reader and the

similar practice of spinning in metafictional circles resemble each other because each is attempting to evade a similar adversary: their mimesis-driven precursors. For Postmodernism, the specter of Modernism looms overhead, with its grand narratives and its universal truths to combat. Therefore, Postmodernism has an adversary that it is challenging. It has a literary agenda and substantial structure to tear down. Magical Realism also, “[l]ike many postmodern texts, [. . .] ha[s] a powerful precursor to overcome, [. . .] European realism” (Faris 164), with its Eurocentric, Caucasian, and colonial perspectives on reality to defeat. The determining difference between the two movements’ reactions to their precursors is that, for Magical Realism, combating a literary precursor is not its *primary* focus. Whereas Postmodernism is a literary statement against content, meaning, and the universal (structures of Modernism), Magical Realism is more a celebration of the fantastic and experimentation as an agent to contest a unilaterally exclusive perspective of reality. It is a celebration of the “dismantling [of] the imported code of realism ‘proper’ [. . . to] enable a broader transculturation process to take place” (165). Modernism was a reaction against the conventional literature of its time and Postmodernism, initially, was a reaction against the conventional literature, Modernism, of its time. Though Magical Realism does indeed react against colonialization and the rejection of the supernatural and non-rational, it is not so much *primarily and singularly* motivated by this reaction. It is more concerned with acknowledging and venerating the magical quality of reality than on reacting against a prior movement. Interestingly,

it is Magical Realism's change in focus, that it does not primarily seek to overthrow the past, that distinguishes it from the past movements.

### The Turning Towards the Fantastic

In addition to overcoming the phantom of European realism, Magical Realism must also oppose the negative perceptions that attend the supernatural and irrational text. Magical Realism simultaneously opposes this resistance and validates the fantastic as part of reality. Traditionally, a work of fiction that stresses the supernatural is dismissed as a work that is primarily derived from "mass" or "popular" culture and is also, therefore, often dismissed as escapist and "low-brow," designating a low station of aesthetics to this work as one that is not serious or relevant. Carrying a stigma of irrelevance upon its shoulders, texts Science Fiction, Fantasy, and irrational fiction, have rarely been afforded the opportunity to stretch their limbs in a serious critical context. However, riding the wave of apocalyptic yet rejuvenating experimentation of Postmodernism, Magical Realism also attempts to "straddle the border[, . . and] close the gap between high culture and low, belles-lettres and pop art" (Fiedler 468). The fantastic, belonging for so long to comic books, B-movies, pulp fiction, and the "common" medium of television, succeeds in emerging from the pages of Magical Realism as an integral component of life, as a force to be dealt with rather than laughed at.

Postmodernism's dedication to experimentation and acceptance of pop culture has encouraged the emergence of the supernatural , fantastic, and



irrational in literature. The acceptance of Postmodernism has led to the acceptance of Magical Realism, and the acceptance of Magical Realism proves to lead to an interesting future for irrationalist literature. Because Magical Realism maintains a delicate balance between its realist and magical elements, the text is provocative and fluid, resisting definition, inciting “serious” attention, stressing the magic of reality, and the validity of the irrational. Magical Realism is experiencing its own birth pangs. No longer is magic and the supernatural “merely” an escapist avenue of entertainment, although “entertainment” is not the dirty word that some would like to believe it is. Instead, it has become a valuable and valid tool of interpretation and survival, a method of coping with the non-realist perceptions of the erratic and mysterious qualities of life left unattended in the realm of literature. Postmodernism’s love of play and aversion to representation have been passed onto Magical Realism, but Magical Realism takes the movement forward, altering it slightly. With Magical Realism, the stress moves beyond a rejection of one’s predecessors, and evolves into an emphasis on the magical quality of life. The literature is less a reaction to something and is more an extension of something, an organic and sprouting growth. It overlaps Postmodernism but extends beyond it and suggests a complex and serious future for other even more subversive texts that may abandon realism altogether. For now, Magical Realism picks up the dusty shreds of magic that lay scattered about us, wipes away the grime of neglect, and weaves these strands of gold, these gleaming bits, into its fiction, thus distinguishing Magical Realism from Postmodernism in its focus.

## CHAPTER III

### MAGICAL REALISM: A WAVE OF ITS OWN

Although Postmodernism and Magical Realism share a celebration of experimentation and aversion to representation, a quality that distinguishes Magical Realism from Postmodernism is its use of the carnivalesque. The supernatural is represented within magical realist texts in several different ways. A text can contain what Wendy Faris describes as a “tropical lush” strain of magic in which we immediately recognize elements of the fantastic, or a “northerly spare” (Faris 165), in which “we get there slowly” (172). Tropically lush magic may resemble the transparent magic of García Márquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. This type of magic seems to emphasize the magic inherent in the land and people of a region. In the northerly spare magic that Faris describes, the magic may not be as recognizable because it springs from a realist source, one we are familiar with and unaccustomed to viewing as supernatural, emphasizing the magical quality of life. The utilization of primal sensory perception in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Patrick Süskind’s *Perfume*, and Joanne Harris’ *Chocolat*, and its connection to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the material body, the grotesque, and the carnivalesque is a prime

example. The use of the carnival is inextricably tied to the theory of the grotesque in literature, and these themes are used repeatedly in Magical Realism.

The Carnavalesque and Grotesque: *Chocolate*, *Midnight's Children*, and *Perfume*

In Bakhtin's exploration of the carnival-grotesque, the establishment of the "material body principle" is a guiding tenet. Its use has numerous implications when applied to literature. Just as Postmodernism's disregard for traditional narration transgresses formerly imposed boundaries, here we see the idea of the carnivalesque acting much as magic functions in Magical Realism: it extends meaning and experience beyond any artificial limits that have been imposed upon life. The material body principle works to surpass the limits imposed upon life both literally by the physical boundaries of the body and also metaphorically by any hierarchical authority. The body principle accomplishes this effect by presenting visual images of the human body "in an extremely exaggerated form" (Bakhtin 18), especially in relation to the bodily functions/parts which ingest or take in and, conversely, those that expel. In works that take advantage of the body principal, the body represents "the encounter of man with the world" (281). It is a physical manifestation of how the world interacts with and is dominated by the individual. By emphasizing eating, devouring, and olfactory saturation, a work of literature portrays the protagonist destroying social structures by dominating the external world.

In Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Tai the boatman essentially quotes Bakhtin when he points out this connection. He taps his nose and

proclaims the essence of the grotesque: “You know what this is, nakoo? It’s the place where the outside world meets the world inside you” (Rushdie 13).

Similarly, in all three works, we can easily identify a Bakhtinian stress upon “the nose and mouth [which] play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body” because they “go out beyond the body’s confines” (Bakhtin 316). By exacerbating the role of the mouth and body and their ability to exceed the limits of the body, the functions are exaggerated and pushed into the realm of the grotesque, and, consequently, pushing these functions beyond the limits of reality and realism. The use of the grotesque and carnivalesque further establishes Magical Realism as a tradition that celebrates the breaking of boundaries. In the case of the grotesque and carnivalesque, Magical Realism breaks the natural rules of not only the fictionally external world, but, more intimately, of the body, therefore simultaneously exaggerating both bodily functions and Magical Realism’s rebellion.

Faris rightly claims that the carnivalesque is demonstrated when “language is used extravagantly, expending its resources beyond its referential needs [. . .] Either on a level of plot or of language — or both” (184). This linguistic extravagance is the characteristic exaggeration of the grotesque. It is constituted by a “generally extravagant, carnivalesque style [. . .] grand and extravagant passions [. . . and] overextension” (185), which of course overlaps the concept of the body as a mode of expansion. Correspondingly, we can see the intensity of the sense of smell in *Midnight’s Children* and *Perfume* in Saleem’s supernatural ability to sniff out “the secret aromas of the world” (368)

and in Grenouille's ability to smell "right through [people's] skin, into [their] innards" with his "greedy little nose" (Süskind 20). The augmentation of feasting/taste in the "Grand Festival du Chocolat" (Harris 268), images of "half-open mouth[s]" (248), and constant consumption in *Chocolat* are cited numerous times as exaggerations of bodily *functions*, relating to an intensity of consumption.

In the grotesque, "all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" (Bakhtin 19), thus adding to the metaphorical exceeding of limits and the link to the communal. In *Perfume*, the theme of the communal death and renewal is realized when "the powerfully charismatic perfume [. . .] is manufactured by Grenouille to enhance life; after doing that, it causes his death" (Faris 78). Even his death is one of renewal because he is cannibalized and reborn in those that eat him. This inhalation of perfume/smell and the act of eating and feasting, especially when associated with cannibalization, fuses termination and creation by commingling "the devouring and devoured body" (Bakhtin 279), so that it "suggest[s] the renewal that characterizes carnival" and the grotesque body (Guzlowski 168).

The carnivalesque acts as a living metaphor, using magic that is not as distinctly supernatural as other uses. It uses something we are familiar with and unaccustomed to viewing as supernatural. In *Midnight's Children*, *Perfume*, and *Chocolat*, the primal senses are accentuated as potently magical, as are recipes and food in *Like Water for Chocolate*. It is an extension of the defamiliarization we see in José Arcadio Buendía's discovery of ice, and another representation of

metaphor made real. Again, the use of the grotesque and carnivalesque, just as with defamiliarization and the literalization of metaphor, focuses on emphasizing the magical quality of life and the senses rather than a rejection of one's predecessors.

Similarly, defamiliarization plays a large role in Magical Realism. Linked to the idea of the carnivalesque, defamiliarization involves a "new way of seeing and rendering the everyday, thereby 'creating a new world view'" (Guenther 36). It takes something ordinary and twists and molds it until it is almost unrecognizable and it becomes a new creature of the same material. Ice becomes "the largest diamond in the world" (García Márquez 18), and wood is re-experienced as an "intense olfactory experience" (Süskind 29). Reading Süskind's account, we live vicariously through Grenouille as he "impregnat[es] himself through his innermost pores, until he [becomes] wood himself. [. . .] He vomit[s] the word up, as if he were filled with wood to his ears, as if buried in wood to his neck, as if his stomach, his gorge, his nose were spilling over with wood" (Süskind 28). These essentially basic experiences with basic objects are delivered as "descriptions of phenomena experienced for the first time and [we] participate in the fresh wonder of that experience" (Faris 177). Wood and ice are reconfigured and there is created "a new definition of the object, [. . . o]ver exposed, isolated, rendered from an uncusomary angle, the familiar [becomes] unusual, endowed with the *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) which elicit[s] fear and wonder" (Guenther 36).

Such is true of the grotesque, exaggeration is key to the experience of Magical Realism. Reality is not used simply as a base for experimentation, but a base for fabulation. Defamiliarization works well with Magical Realism because it too is a balance of the real and unreal. Used as it is, defamiliarization skews the representational link so that “objects [. . .] take on lives of their own and become magical in that way” (Faris 170). Rushdie’s pepperpots facilitate Saleem “overthrow[ing] a government [. . . and] consign[ing] a president to exile” (Rushdie 349). García Márquez writes of a “trickle of blood” that takes on a supernatural knowledge and mobility, delivering the news of José Arcadio’s death to Úrsula (144). When he is shot, the blood rolls from his body and follows a strange trip through town:

A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendia house, went in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta’s chair [. . .] and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Úrsula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread.” (García Márquez 144-145)

The blood “avoid[s] the dining-room table” and is careful “not to stain the rugs” (145), exhibiting a kind of intelligence. It is an ordinary object that indeed has taken on a life of its own and “become magical in that way” (Faris 170). The excessive detail of its trip is remarkable. The paragraph is one exorbitantly long sentence, strung together by *sixteen* commas, and describing the blood as making *seventeen* distinct course changes. Here is an excellent example of Faris’ discussion of grotesque language. Certainly here, the “language is used extravagantly, expending its resources beyond its referential needs” (Faris 184). The blood has not just been described as an autonomous object, but has *exaggeratedly* been described as such. Letting the text roll on and on as the blood does, the everyday object metamorphosizes into a thing of magic. It is this element of exaggeration, and the portrayal of the mundane subjects as enchanted ones, that consequently enchants the reader.

This exaggeration and grotesquerie is both playful and comedic in its extravagance, and this humor draws the reader of Magical Realism in. Invited to interpret and play, the reader of Magical Realism enjoys integration with the text and does not feel that the experimentation is alienating or distancing, but truly playful and alluring.

### The Crashing Waves of Experimentation

Postmodernism, normally acclaimed for its identification with the masses and its lack of contrivance (resulting from its lack of content), is here re-examined and found lacking in some areas, especially in its accessibility. The joy and



playfulness is not as present as it once was. The form is not so much appealing as it is alienating.

With the birth of Modernism, came a swell of experimentation that has bulged beneath literature as a building wave that has not yet crested. Modernism maintained a pioneering disregard for traditional narratives, time-lines and symbols which defied convention, but tacked onto this unruly desire for diversity came the elitist practice of exclusion, concreteness, and representation, which, of course, could not last forever. The postmodern writer could not simply ignore Modernism by “rush[ing] back into the arms of nineteenth-century middle-class realism as if the first half of the twentieth century hadn’t happened” (Barth 37). Instead, Postmodernism harvested the desire to explore and defy convention but also fought to eliminate the restricting quality of modernist writing. The postmodern era continued to ride that swelling wave of experimentation and intensified it by “simply carr[ying] to its logical and questionable extremes” the tricks of Modernism (34). But Postmodernism also succeeded in doing something essentially important. Whereas Modernism maintained a privileged academic club of readers, in essence hoarding the attention of its members and snubbing the uninitiated, Postmodernism ripped down the ivy from this members-only institution, returning literature to the public domain. Even still, this new movement is sometimes viewed as “a kind of pallid, last-ditch decadence” (35). Although Postmodernism succeeded in opening up literature and criticism and building a new wave of experimentation, this wave inevitably crashes down upon the general (and even literary) reader and their impulse to interpret, ultimately limiting

its accessibility. If Postmodernism takes four steps forward with its broad inclusion of formerly unused or “unworthy” subject matter and techniques, then it also, by creating an unbalanced antinomy for the reader who is more repelled from than attracted to a work, takes two steps back with its alienation of the reader.

Regarding the positive steps forward and the swell of the postmodern wave, Postmodernism has assuredly facilitated “the breakdown, or at least the weakening of the barriers previously separating the products of an elitist ‘high’ culture from those of ‘mass’ or ‘popular’ culture” (Hollinger, “Playing” 185). In the art world, during the nineteen-sixties, Pop Art emerged partially in thanks to postmodern thought and featured the faces of media icons and immortalized everyday objects such as soup cans, toilets, and Brillo boxes, “assimilat[ing] the most advanced principals of abstract painting into the larger culture” (Schjeldahl 82). This assimilation is at once inclusive and excluding, and “[f]or many people, this act of leveling will always seem a barbaric assault in civilized values” (82). Postmodernism managed to construct a fragile bridge of rope and board that spans the massive chasm that exists between mass and high art, but this bridge is, nonetheless, delicate and in need of fortification. Andy Warhol was adept at “joining [. . .] aesthetic sophistication and mass appeal, [. . .] invest[ing] idioms with timeless eloquence” (82), and yet there is a resistance to accepting this as art, as something serious, as something that is more than a joke.

There is an interesting connection to be made concerning attention to the “everyday” quality of life. For Postmodernism, “the history and development of

the art movement [is] most notoriously concerned with ‘everyday life’” (Bann 155). High Art is a mode of expression that seeks to transcend and elevate, but art that incorporates pop culture or submits “everyday” commercial items for interpretation and inspection attempts to oppose realist depiction but attempts to do so by using the tools of the “real,” these same vulgar concepts. Since the tendency had been to avoid the popular or less serious objects of the world an aversion to it was created. One does not expect to see the popular, commercial, or vulgar in art. Rather, one expects to see fruit, landscape, women, men, children, death, love, birth, and so on. So, when seeing a figure of mass appeal, or a commercially common item, or object considered to be “vulgar” in an exhibit, such as a toilet, soup can, or pop idol like Mick Jagger, something so inherently popular, commercial, un-special or *un-serious*, “the shock of seeing a particular image transported from the mass media to the statement of ‘fine art’ is therefore immediately followed by the realization that it is not the same image any more” (Bann 116). It has been transplanted from the realm of something expected to something unexpected. It creates a kind of destabilization of its own, but also an excitement in the reader who now has an intimate relationship with the piece. There is an established link between the work and the audience, created by using something popular, commercial, or common and identifiable to connect them. This is something the audience knows intimately that has not commonly been explored in art, something to share. However, a difference can be found in the level of destabilization encountered in postmodern art and postmodern literature.

This destabilization, I believe, is especially strong and especially accessible in postmodern art and music, but not so much so in postmodern literature. The inclusion of the common, vulgar, and everyday is also, certainly, found in postmodern literature, but the sense of identification one may feel from recognizing the familiar in postmodern literature is greatly diminished by the impact of language. Therefore, this destabilization is much more present in the visual and auditory arts, or sensual arts, such as music, painting, photography, and sculpture. In these art forms that do not use language, there is less of an impulse to interpret. Sounds and sights are not things that humanity has constructed, but are experiences we have found, observed, and manipulated, whereas language is absolutely a fabricated invention. We did not find and use language. We created it. The experiences of sight and sound, and thus the interaction with the sensual arts, carry less inherent content than language-based art forms. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that the visual arts, such as painting, photography, and sculpture, and the auditory art of music may more easily circumvent the problem of meaning. It is not a huge *feat of will* to sit and gaze at a work of art and appreciate that work without grasping its content, whereas, to read a novel and appreciate its form without venturing an interpretation of its content, does in fact feel like a struggle against instinct. Similarly, it is not difficult to remain still and listen closely to a creative piece of music and react sensuously rather than intellectually. Originating in meaninglessness, in that the senses are not constructed and are, therefore, not innately meaningful like language, and stemming from a fountain of uncontrived sensation, the visual and auditory art

forms are versatile in their production and presentation, but language is a product of man. It is, by nature, contrived and inextricably commingled with meaning. Language sprang from an intellectual feat, as does a novel or story when a writer makes use of language. The creation and existence of language and linguistic art is inseparably linked to meaning and intellectual interpretation. Language and literature do not have the ability to be solely sensual experiences, as is the case with music and the visual arts, because they are simply not a sensory perception, but are a cerebral experience. Therefore, language and literature are unable to escape their content-oriented destiny: interpretation. This is why the destabilization that occurs in Pop Art and postmodern art is so different from any destabilization that occurs in postmodern literature. Postmodern art maintains an interesting antinomy that both pulls in its audience and repels them, but postmodern literature upsets this antinomy by repelling more than attracting because of its innate relationship with language and meaning.

The destabilization that occurs in the sensual arts is one that is positive, bringing the observer closer to the art form. In arts that require language, especially semi-logical language that resembles dialogue, such as novels, short stories, and essays, the recognition of everyday or common elements does bring the reader closer to the text, and, thus, the fragile bridge is constructed. However, the impulse to interpret language is so strong that the reader is pushed away by the insistence to resist this instinct more than he/she is drawn in by the familiarity of the structures included. Because literature is comprised of language, which is ultimately a product of humanity, it can not achieve absolute abstract

beauty or be valued merely for its form or what it is as is possible with the sensual arts. Thus, literature may never escape content or interpretation.

Ihab Hassan, famous for his succinct table of defining postmodern characteristics, includes Postmodernism's form in opposition to Modernism's content. Susan Sontag goes into more detail about this opposition in her influential essay "Against Interpretation." She posits that interpretation is a "hindrance", a "nuisance" (49), and "destroys" the text as it digs for meaning (50). She pleads with her audience to emphasize the form and disregard the content. The problem with applying this practice to literature is that we are left with a limiting dilemma. If we can not interpret the text, what do we do with it? Where do we search for merit? In Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*, the reader is given several references and messages that seem to fit together in a way so as to prompt interpretation. If we cannot do this, why are they there, and what can we do? Firstly, since reference after reference is given of incestuous relationships and the protagonist's name is Oedipa, the novel seems to establish a link to the play *Oedipus*. Secondly, Oedipa's scholarly mission, where she is told she could "waste [her] life [. . .] and never touch the truth" because she's so hung up on extracting the subtext from a play she has seen (Pynchon 80), seems to possibly be offering an interesting statement on literary criticism. But, according to Sontag, this information is irrelevant. In Postmodernism, there are no links, and there are no statements. Sontag suggests that *A Streetcar Named Desire* is simply "a play about a handsome brute named Stanley Kowalski and a faded mangy belle named Blanche DuBois" (52), and that this should be the extent of

our interaction with the text. According to Sontag, the text should be taken literally and its value lies completely in its form. "The temptation to interpret [. . .] should be resisted" (Sontag 52), so that we do not ruin the text by inferring a larger picture. So, when we examine Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and his use of the alphabet with Goldsworth's children and royalty of Zembla, our natural instinct is to think that Nabokov is such an artist that surely there is a reason for this. But, Sontag contends that our discussion involving the use of the alphabet as a statement on artificial order and our conception of Nabokov as attempting to provoke thought concerning the conventional ordering of stories is invalid. Further, as in her example with *A Streetcar Named Desire*, one would assume we are only allowed to view the novel at face value, but to do so would simultaneously eliminate the clever sarcasm involved in the writing and the arousing parallel to literary criticism. Similarly, under Sontag's reasoning, Borges' story "Pierre Menard" ceases to be an evocative statement on how each reader rewrites masterpieces of the past and how no one has a claim to originality, and becomes only a story of a man who re-writes *Don Quixote*. How can we approach this text as if no other connotations exist? The impulse to interpret is so strong, if we ignore the pieces that are being thrown out to us and refuse to collect and fit them together, we neglect the natural process of language and are thus performing an affected act. Language is, after all, an interpretive process. Our communication depends on linking the signifier and signified. We interpret language with every word we speak and understand. It is instinctual to interpret. The process is not a product of "a wish to replace" the work (52), as Sontag

accuses, but to supplement it and complete it, naturally. The reader carries the solution to its natural end, rather than synthetically replicating it. To deny this completion, then, feels unnatural and upsets the balanced antinomy experienced in postmodern art so that it is unbalanced in postmodern literature.

Nabokov's *Pale Fire* is just such an example of this upset antinomy.

Reveling in the manipulation of the structure of a book of poetry, Vladimir Nabokov uses over two-hundred and fifty pages to write extensive "commentary" on a thirty-five-page poem in his novel *Pale Fire*. It is this commentary which seems to be the actual content of the piece, although the poem itself should by no means be dismissed. By shifting the focus from the poem to the commentary, Nabokov manipulates the reader's concepts of how a book should be structured. He also plays with the reader's trust by inserting an extremely unreliable narrator and allowing him to author reliable structures, such as the foreword, of course the commentary, and, the index. These gestures are significant and amusing. The content of these structures is especially interesting. It is incredibly convoluted and misconceived. From beginning to end, the reader is fed a fallacious version of "the truth" that seemingly stacks delusion upon delusion until it is difficult to ascertain where and if a coherent "reality" exists. To take the novel at face value is to believe that the narrator, Kinbote, is King Charles Xavier Vseslav, from an country named "Zembla," unrecognizable to the reader as actually existing, and that John Shade was a dear friend of Kinbote's, who devoted much of the poem's imagery to Zembla and its landscapes, stories, and literature. Yet when Kinbote reads Shade's poem, he snarls, feeling deceived, as



if Shade owed Kinbote credit in his last poem. He reads it, looking for Zemblan references, and finds none, and exclaims in fury:

Where were the battlements of my sunset castle? Where was Zembla the Fair? Where her spine of mountains? Where her long thrill through the mist? And my lovely flower boys, and the spectrum of the stained windows, and the Black Rose Paladins, and the whole marvelous tale? Nothing of it was there! (Nabokov 296)

This passage indicates the ferocity with which Kinbote is obsessed with Shade's work, specifically, with being the central subject of Shade's poem. He is concerned more with what it *should* say than what it *does* say, and therefore goes to great lengths to include Zembla in his interpretations. He goes so far as to invent additions to the original draft and connect these additions to himself and his "country." Kinbote takes the phrase "a preterist" from line seventy-nine, purports an additional two lines, "[w]ritten against this in the margin of the draft" (107), and concludes that this, of course, is a nod to "a charming quatrain from [the] Zemblan counterpart of the Elder Edda" (107), that he must have quoted to Shade in a "lighter-hearted" moment (107).

Kinbote's ultimately delusional mind takes one phrase, expands it into an additional line of poetry, and links it to a Zemblan quatrain. With this level of delusion combined with the one-sided nature of the narration (in that there is no sane account of what happened), and the abundance of possibly false information, it seems impossible to take the novel at face value. To believe Kinbote seems wrong, and to speculate seems interpretive. To dig further by

discussing this novel as a possible statement against historical criticism or as a statement against excessive interpretation would also run the risk of archaeologically divining content. Delving into the novel presents an interpretive problem because, according to Postmodernism, content is irrelevant. The incoherence of the novel, or book of poetry, whichever it truly is, is not a flaw, but it does seem to call for extrapolation. One is moved to translate the commentary as a criticism of criticism, yet to do so means that we are digging archaeologically, which opposes the tenet of Postmodernism. However, denying this impulse seems awkward and unnatural too. In either case, for the “average” reader, the gates to the now supposedly public literary clubhouse seem less open than they once appeared.

Postmodern critics, Sontag chiefly among them, maintain that this impulse to interpret should not exist. It is a roadblock to be destroyed. Further, it is proposed that seeking to interpret postmodern works damages them. However, this impulse to interpret is unavoidable because of the tie to language. Denying this instinct leads us to an important question. If we are not to interpret postmodern novels, what are we to *do* with them? Sontag might counter with the question: “why must we *do* anything with them?” This is a good question to ask, and the answer lies in the unbalanced antinomy created by postmodern literature.

Postmodernism’s joy in chaos and extremity is refreshing and pleasurable. However, in terms of accessibility, the postmodern novel sometimes retains the necessity for a guide, just as its modernist predecessors do, because of its

“inherent and immediate difficulty” within the text (Barth 428). Similarly, the venerated cry of the content-less postmodernist writer echoes in the ears of the reader when tackling such ambiguous works as *Pale Fire*, *Crying of Lot 49*, and “Pierre Menard,” because it seems impossible to let the content lie in these works. This seems just as intimidating as the modernists’ dilemma, if not more so. In this case, how can Postmodernism be a more accessible brand of literature? How is it more closely linked to its public? Unlike music and the visual arts, a book is not so easily separated from interpretation. It is much more difficult for a reader to sit back and absorb the experience of a work of literature, of language, without being forced to interpret, on some level, its meaning. We cannot aesthetically enjoy literature/linguistic art for what it is as we can the sensual arts because of the natural impulse to interpret, and thus, a negative side effect occurs. Postmodernism, so acclaimed for bridging the gap and appealing to a larger group of readers, actually limits its accessibility and alienates its readers, becoming just as restricting as Modernism. Sontag would have us believe that this difficulty is a boundary to overcome, and this may be so, but, in effect, by resisting our instinct to interpret language, the reader is certainly distanced from postmodern literature. It seems to have moved forward in its acceptance of themes that further embrace the masses and popular culture, but it has not advanced in its ability to be more accessible, in terms of interpretation, than its predecessor.

Robert Scholes, in his work *Fabulation and Metafiction*, an expansion of his book *The Fabulators*, refers to this dilemma. He criticizes postmodern fiction,

especially extremely self-reflexive fiction, as being “ a narcissistic way of avoiding” harmony and pleasure (218). For Scholes, the emphasis should shift towards the reader so that it may truly bridge the gap. To cross the border, the writer must merge with the reader, not to pander to, but to partner with the audience, so as to finally integrate this literary club and eradicate exclusionary practices. The content should be more accessible. Instead, it fosters alienation and avoids integration (216). “Readers need imaginative help from writers” (218), and Scholes does not feel that they are getting it. In Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa* there are fifty-two chapters named alphabetically and are meant only to contain words beginning with the letters of the appropriate chapter. The technical form of this novel is astounding and this is an example of a purely formal work, resembling Georges Perec's lipograms and liponyms and the “S + 7” method of Oulipo. However, there is much debate over these works as to whether they are refreshingly experimental or distancing gimmicks that alienate the reader.

Scholes, for instance, criticizes this type of modern fiction by stating that:

There is a lot of writing going on today which is technically admirable and in accordance with all of the standards for literary excellence that have been established over the past generation. But not many people want to read this fiction. Not many people find this admirable work rewarding enough to justify whatever expenditure of time or energy it takes to read it. This is a crucial aspect of the situation of contemporary fiction. (Scholes, *Fabulation* 213)

Scholes, in fact, looks to Science Fiction as a source of future recognition and scholarly joy (218). It is this situation that further emphasizes the alienating quality of content-less postmodern literature.

Therefore, it is difficult to agree with Postmodernism's claim that it is a more democratic fiction that scorns the elitism of Modernism, since it seems to maintain a different but similar brand of exclusion. By concentrating so intensely on form, many postmodern works risk being too "self-involved" and "is threatened by over-elaboration" (Scholes, *Fabulation* 218), comprising a canon that threatens to become Borges' "Library of Babel," a collection that is "maddeningly inscrutable, useless from any practical sense, [and] aesthetically displeasing to all but the most fervent Dadaists" (McCaffery, "Form" 22).

### Magical Realism, the Fantastic, and the Anxiety of Relevance

The wave of Postmodernism seems to be cresting and crashing. Its lack of accessibility and exhausting form is leading some to think to the future of criticism. What shall we consider next? The answer to that question has been Magical Realism. Just as Postmodernism took the doctrines of Modernism, intensified and attempted to correct them, and emerged from beneath the waning breaker of Modernism, surfing the bulging wave of experimentation into the postmodern age, Magical Realism, for so long overlapping Postmodernism, is wriggling its way from beneath the tide of Postmodernism to ride into the next generation, opening criticism up to a literature which will be, hopefully, more primarily influenced by the fantastic. The elements of magic, Science Fiction, and

irrational seen in works by Italo Calvino, Gabriel García Márquez, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Jorge Louis Borges, and Salman Rushdie have sliced at Postmodernism and created a new era of magic and fabulation. They have emerged as “modern fabulation, [which] like the ancient fabling of Aesop, tends away from the representation of reality but returns toward actual human life” and are fabulators that “allegorize in peculiarly modern ways” (Scholes, *Fabulators* 11).

Magical Realism is an intensification and alteration of the experimental tenets of Postmodernism. There is attention and manipulation of form, as seen in its use of defamiliarization and grotesques, but also in its manipulation of traditional literary structures. Just as *Pale Fire* mimics a book of poetry, Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate is A Novel in Monthly Installments, With Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies*, as stated in the title. By interweaving recipes, romances, and remedies with plot, Esquivel manipulates the form of the book so that it resembles a woman's magazine. Just as *This is Not a Novel* is disconnected in its “narration,” Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* employs a narrator that is constantly interrupted by shifts in time whenever contacted by aliens, and metafiction certainly exists in García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In fact, many of these same authors are cited as both magical realist and postmodern. Yet, their inclusion as works of Magical Realism seems more fitting because Magical Realism is more a fusion of Modernism and Postmodernism. Accepting both the experimental practices and themes of Postmodernism and its inclusion of mass culture, technology, and media into its pages, and the emphasis of modernist writers on content, Magical Realism

attempts to merge these practices to produce works that maintain a gelatinous quality; they are, at once, solid yet fluid.

In order to avoid the dangerous narcissism of Postmodernism, this merging and balancing of form and content in order to avoid containing “too much form and not enough substance” (Scholes *Fabulation* 128), a practice some works indeed fall victim to, seems necessary, and the use of magic is crucial and called for. Magical Realism succeeds where both Modernism and Postmodernism have previously failed. Modernism’s largest hindrance was its singular devotion to realism and representation as the only “serious” subject matter, and also its insistence that *everything* must have a reason, that every component of a modernist text be content-laden. Postmodernism is found lacking in its singular devotion to form and antirepresentationalism, that everything must *not* have a reason or content. Therefore, Magical Realism compensates nicely for these impediments by both broadening literature to include more than just realism and representation, but maintaining a degree of representation, and also by insisting neither a necessity to or refusal to facilitate interpretation. By doing so, Magical Realism underlines the “worldwide movement for an increase in the fantastic in ‘high art’” (Rabkin 182), and by providing this increase, Magical Realism is able to create a literature that is both “delicious and high in protein” (Barth 39). Such literature reminds us that “new fiction [can] be so *wonderful* as well as merely important” (39), because if we avoid the “delicious,” as some feel Postmodernism does by alienating its readers, we destroy the “wonderful” of modern fiction. Barth refers to this wonderful new fiction when discussing Italo

Calvino. Barth considers him to be postmodern, but the attributes that he so loves about Calvino are his “enormously appealing space-age fables” and his ability as a “fine fantasist” (39). It is the fantastic, the Science Fiction, and the fabulation that Barth is drawn to in Calvino’s work. It is the Magical Realism.

Perhaps Postmodernism neglects making the works more accessible because doing so makes them less “serious.” Placing works of Magical Realism into the category of Postmodernism allows the magic to have been used for purposes of form and not content, thus skirting the abyss of irrelevance. The tendency to dismiss magic, Science Fiction, and Fantasy as escapist junk literature is one that should be addressed. The *Handbook to Literature* defines escape literature as:

writing whose clear intention is to amuse and beguile its readers by offering them a strange world or exciting adventures or puzzling mysteries. It aims at no higher purpose than amusement. Adventure stories, detective stories, tales of fantasy, and many humorous stories are frankly *escape literature*, and they exist for no other purpose than to translate readers for a time from a care-ridden actual world to an entrancing world of the imagination. (“Escape”)

The definition specifically names “tales of fantasy” as escapist with “no higher purpose” than amusement. The handbook, further, defines “fantasy” as

a conscious breaking free from reality. The term is applied to a work that takes place in a nonexistent and unreal world. such as fairyland, or concerns incredible and unreal characters, [ . . . ] or employs physical and



scientific principles not yet discovered or contrary to present experience, as in some science fiction and utopian fiction. ("Fantasy").

So, in the definition of escapism, both Fantasy and Science Fiction (in that it is included under the definition of "fantasy") are included as "tales of fantasy."

Similarly, one could include Magical Realism and all irrational fiction as "tales of fantasy," in that the definition of "fantasy" includes any work that "concerns incredible and unreal characters" ("Fantasy"). For Science Fiction and Fantasy, to be included and, tangentially, to imply that Magical Realism and other works of irrational fiction should be included in such a category seems unfair. Eric Rabkin rightly points out that "escape surely impl[ies] a delinquent evasion of responsibilities" (45), as if this type of literature is inherently *wrong* or *betraying* "legitimate" literature (literature with a capital "L"). Rabkin, in his book *The Fantastic in Literature*, suggests that we should abandon this negative view of escapist literature and face the fact that much 'high art,' such as *Oedipus*, *The Odyssey*, and *Metamorphoses*, would fit into the category of escapist literature. Instead of calling for an acceptance of escapism, I would rather see the definition as overly broad and outdated, in need of revision.

The definition of escapism includes the genres "[a]dventure stories, detective stories, tales of fantasy, and many humorous stories" under its sprawling shell as if every work within them were disposable. By dumping these genres into the category of escapist literature and, accordingly, identifying them as a single group which "aims at no higher purpose than amusement," the definition labels these genres as irrelevant. The same erroneous assumption

occurs when it is stated that escapist literature is “writing whose clear intention is to amuse and beguile its readers by offering them a strange world or exciting adventures or puzzling mysteries.” This quotation implies that by creating a reality that varies from our own most familiar concept of reality, a work exhibits a “clear intention [. . .] to amuse,” again, serving “no higher purpose.” Although it is true that works exist whose sole intention seems clearly to “translate readers for a time from a care-ridden actual world to an entrancing world of the imagination” so that they may escape from their problems, all “tales of fantasy” need not necessarily be derogatively placed into this category.

It is the fear of this label, the brand of insignificance and indulgence, that seems a likely motivation for the careful preoccupation of writers to maintain a “necessary” degree of seriousness, no matter how equally playful that writer might be. The error in thought lies in our definition of the word “serious.” To be relevant, a work must be taken seriously, thus must be serious, yet there is an inherent confusion in the word which means at once to have a “concern for what really matters” but also to not joke, or be playful, but to be “grave, solemn, [and] sedate” (“Serious”). The tendency to take to heart the brooding character of the word as qualifying the level of importance and attention it similarly invokes is what causes the dangerous commingling and subsequent confusion. The implied lack of levity and dependence upon gravity that seriousness denotes, the conception that something is serious if it is “composed and decorous” (“Serious”), is implicit in the use of the word “serious.” Instead of focusing only on its “concern for what matters,” for what is legitimate and justifiable, “worthy of salvation”

(“Justify”), it is the inclination to also focus on the somber and decorous implications that prompts a sometimes dismissive attitude towards the playful and defiant literature that flies in the face of that portion of the definition. In order to avoid unnecessary exclusion, we need to re-evaluate our definition of what is valuable and extract senselessly limiting notions, such as the importance for somberness and decorous gravity, from remaining in that definition. We must not be influenced by irrelevant connotations. When one is riding the wave of experimentation, it is useful to mark the abundance of critical sharks that circle the surfboard, waiting to gobble the playful occupant.

It is the anxiety of relevance and misconception of what is to be considered “serious” that threatens the modern writer, and it is this anxiety that tempts critics to be dismissive. As Larry McCaffery insightfully concludes:

In the case of the novel, the traditional emphasis on mimesis seemed to solve the problem [of significance]: fiction could be “significant” to the extent that it “mirrored the world”; its truths resulted from the writer’s ability verbally to recreate or imitate actual conditions in the world. Insofar as fiction successfully duplicated these conditions, it could reproduce the truth functions that existed in the world. (25)

But McCaffery also reveals the complications in this logic by pointing to Roland Barthes’ criticism of mimesis. Since, “from the référential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*” happens except language, there is no truth being expressed, and certainly, no reality (Barthes 177). It is this concern for significance, the anxiety of relevance, that still plagues modern fiction. Even though the

oppressive rule of mimesis has been overthrown, the desire to be important has left its deep impression in the malleable surface of literature.

Postmodernism may have abandoned the absolute form of mimesis, but it still clings to the inherent difficulty of the postmodernists' texts. Celebrating this revolutionary overthrow by placing *all* of its emphasis on form, Postmodernism has polarized its literature so that it represents an extreme literary tradition, decreasing the accessibility of the postmodern work. It has become "a criticism which denies the traditional critical imperatives without quite accepting the responsibilities of fiction" (Scholes, *Structural* 8). It is a complete abandonment of content and, thus, abandons the general reader altogether, favoring a celebration of form and the literary reader in an effort to remain serious and relevant.

In the midst of the postmodern era, Robert Scholes denounces critics for commonly dismissing Science Fiction, "a genre [. . .] about which so many people have firm opinions without any direct experience of its major texts" (*Structural* 47). The stigma of escapist literature haunts this genre as much as any other irrational work, in that so many readers and critics feel as if they "know" everything about the genre with limited exposure to it. Scholes' denouncements concerning the critical reception of Science Fiction can easily be applied to other neglected genres and their reception as well:

And what are some of the things which the traditional literary critic knows about SF? He knows that works of SF use the language clumsily, with neither grace nor wit. He knows that these works lack interesting characters, being populated by robots, some of whom are supposed to be

men and women. He knows that the plotting in these fictions is either hackneyed, episodic, or both. And he knows that their subject matter is unreal, escapist, and ultimately trivial. (Scholes, *Structural* 47)

As this is true for Science Fiction, it remains true for Fantasy and irrational literature as well. These genres are often written off as inconsequential and are viewed as works that do not fall into the “serious” category of literature commonly accepted by critics because it is irrational and not real, thus, not composed and decorous, or concerned with what matters. With elements too impossible to be accepted by realists and structures too traditional to be accepted by Postmodernists, these genres certainly do fall into a new literature and criticism of their own, a literature that absolutely deserves serious attention.

Many works of irrational fiction, such as those found in the genres of Magical Realism, Science Fiction, and Fantasy, are marginalized. They have become victims of a “literary criticism [that] has been notoriously untheoretical in its approach to works of fantasy, as to other texts” because of an elitist classification of these genres as escapist and thus irrelevant (Jackson 2). This classification is due partly to the practice of canonization and our outdated concepts concerning entry into the canon. In fact, if one were to name the privileged academic club of literature, it would most likely be emblazoned with the insignia “Club Canon” or, at least, some derivative of the word. Canonization as the process of sifting through narratives in order to judge what is accepted as a valuable work, worthy of study, and thus determining what is “deserving” of admission into the canon, is as misguided as proclaiming to have a definitive

concept of “reality.” The process of bestowing a capital “L” to particularly works of literature so that they are no longer “literature,” but “Literature,” panders to literary criticism’s grand visions of “knowing.” This is especially true when one considers the evaluation process that admits works into the canon, in which canonical is synonymous with High Culture and thus seriousness, and popular literature is synonymous with Low Culture and un-seriousness. This is a process in which the “distinction between serious and popular writing is a condition of canonicity” (Guillory 23). John Guillory, in his critically significant study of the canon, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, makes the distinction clear when he writes:

If we are rehearsing here the distinction between “serious” and “popular” literature, it should be emphasized that this distinction does not merely replicate the long-standing distinction between High Culture and Low Culture forms of writing[, . . . but] a distinction between two bodies of writing which are alike in respect of being equally “fictional” or “imaginative,” equally distinguishable from philosophy or history, but *unlike in value*. (131)

The support of this distinction between serious literature as a product of High Culture and canonical and popular literature as a product of Low Culture and noncanonical perpetuates the blindness also seen in relegating entire genres to the category of escapist or junk literature. Designating a work as popular thus achieves the same level of damage as designating a work as Science Fiction or Fantasy because a broad judgment is made concerning the value of these

groups. They are automatically demoted to the lower levels of education and culture.

Not only does the present process of canonization support these distinctions between popular and serious as High and Low, and thus varying widely in value, but, further, as Guillory illustrates, the noncanonical, or popular literature, is treated as “by definition subliterate or nonliterary,” and usually thought to contain an inferior system of language, a non-literary language of “real men,” a common language (133). Thus, this distinction, according to Guillory:

produce[s] a corresponding linguistic distinction when genres are distributed by the curricula of the educational institution in order to separate them out according to the *levels* of the system. Already in the early nineteenth century certain “popular” works are relegated to the lower levels of the system, other “serious” works to the higher, and this sorting out across the vertical structure of the educational system, initially very modest, is gradually more marked over the succeeding century and a half” (133).

So, a progressive sorting of literature, popular to the lower levels and serious to the higher levels, is in action. This sorting, in its arbitrary prejudice, further supports the dismissive belief that these works are literarily inferior, “subliterary or nonliterary” (133), and use a nonliterary language disqualifying them from admission into “Club Canon” because of their supposedly nonliterary quality.

It is another version of Patricia Waugh’s criticism of Modernism as an era of “insidious exclusion” that has leaked into and dribbled throughout modern

criticism and the process of canonization (Waugh 88). It seems to be the ultimate fallacy to assume a restrictive code as the absolute perception of literature or an ultimate sense of what is “not merely literature or even ‘good’ literature, but the *best*, the most important literature” (29), or “Literature.” By appropriating the bestowal of worthiness with such a limited process, literary criticism forcefully seizes valuation from the reader, narrowing the literary community from one that includes all who read or read critically, to one that consists of a small and elite board of directors that merely have the power to grant admission into Club Canon. The restrictive process of canonization, with such an exclusively defined canon, requires that works be “designated literature by the minority of readers who, in a given time and place, possess the social and institutional *power* (as Nietzsche would say) that enables their views on the matter to prevail” (Freedman 27). Therefore, It ceases to be an objective judgment based on any substantive value but is based more on a rigid and bureaucratic system’s power to designate. By setting up a single and all-powerful category that all literature must enter to be seriously considered, a doctrine of restriction and an anxiety of relevance is perpetuated. Writers of Science Fiction, for example, are frustrated by those in power because of the “professors and critics who for most of the century have controlled the modernist literary canon define and dismiss science fiction — frequently in absolute ignorance of its texts — as ‘genre fiction,’ that is, not ‘literature,’ in order to restrict ‘literature’ to the privileged mode, realism” (Le Guin 20). Because of this restriction, much literature, especially Science Fiction, Fantasy, and other non-realist texts, is excluded from this realm of study.



In terms of their anxiety of relevance, Magical Realism and Postmodernism differ in that Magical Realism does not lose its general reader in its interpretive process. With Magical Realism, the reader is free to interpret and extrapolate the magic as meaning something and is not restricted by an instinct to necessarily participate in or to necessarily avoid interpretation. The magic doesn't always have to automatically mean something, but it doesn't automatically have to *not* mean anything either. This produces an even deeper degree of literary freedom. There are no restrictions here. It is not a rebellion against content, nor does it have a cultish obsession with content either.

Magical Realism has slowly gained acceptance as a mode in part because of its incorporation of the *real* alongside the unreal. It too attempts to remain relevant with its sound mixture of realism and magic, creating a variant of the fantastic that "most literary critics [. . .] approve of, [yet] take no notice whatever of the popular and commercial forms of fantasy" (Le Guin 29). Juggling a series of critical requirements that have enabled its admission into the realm of serious criticism, Magical Realism is able to maintain experimentation chiefly with its use of the supernatural, but also maintains a "serious" content through the use of its realism. This allows Magical Realism to remain relevant ("approved of"), serious, and accessible. Certainly, the next step in critical acceptance is letting go of the real altogether, or at least allowing the scales to be tipped in favor of the fantastic.

There now exists upon the timescape of literature an easy scale of the fantastic whose mercury has steadily risen toward the fringe of the fantastic.

Abandoning the cold regions of mimesis, elements of the fantastic have slowly crept into this heavy liquid, heating it, expanding it, and slowly dragging it upward. In Modernism, we have seen the liberation of time and form from traditional structures, but also witnessed its struggle with elitism in that it was still laboring beneath the heavy burden of “high art” and was a slave to content and representation above all else. In Postmodernism, the elastic loosened to include a heightened level of experimentation in form which incorporated many fantastic conventions, but also employed an absolute rejection of content and interpretation. Magical Realism welcomes the supernatural and irrational as an equal partner in its fiction and works as a supplement to the realism, finding a comfortable middle ground between the extremes of Fantasy and realism. We can only assume that the next definitive move will be toward a literary tradition that not only welcomes magic, science, and the fantastic as an equal partner, but as a dominating motif, a tradition that not only tolerates its existence, but shares ground and yields it. One can only hope that the waves will roll on and the temperature will rise to produce this newly generative and lush tropical bionetwork of criticism and literature.

## CHAPTER IV

### PLACING SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

I think it is necessary to designate that a difference exists between the types of literature we are discussing. To be clear, I am differentiating Science Fiction and Fantasy from works of Magical Realism or fantastic fiction in several very distinct ways. As previously discussed, Magical Realism is a balanced synthesis of realism and the supernatural and offers no explanation for supernatural or irrational events that occur, making it analogous to Todorov's definition of the fantastic. Magical Realism merges worlds into one fluid and ambiguous text, fantastically, whereas most Science Fiction and Fantasy texts *create* their own worlds and offer explanations within the text for irrational events that are occurring, resembling Todorov's definition of the marvelous. Instead of merging rational and irrational, Science Fiction and Fantasy distinctly separate the magical/fantasy elements and discard most of the realist/mimetic components. Science Fiction creates its own worlds by deliberately and meticulously defining its landscape. Just as with Fantasy, we are given explanations of how the secondary world of Science Fiction differs from our own so that we may understand that we are in a future world, or a parallel world, or a post-apocalyptic world, or a world where a certain type of technology is available.

Ursula Le Guin, a prominent author of the “New Wave” of Science Fiction, sets her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* in a distinct secondary world where the aliens of Gethen are ambisexual, and the landscape of their world, the aliens’ culture, appearance, lack of sexuality, and periods of kemmer go unquestioned. The novel clearly establishes that the events that occur are taking place in a world that is most definitely not our own. J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth from *The Lord of the Rings* is a carefully delineated world tangentially related to our own but still very separate. The presence of hobbits, elves, and wizards is attributed to the creation of this world. It does not create the same quality of destabilization because the realist element has been, essentially, extracted. This remains true of most works of Science Fiction as well, especially works from Science Fiction’s “Golden Age.” Therefore, Science Fiction and Fantasy use a greater degree of magic/the irrational in their texts and invest a higher level of creation/explanation into their supernatural worlds, and it is in this way that they differ from Magical Realism. However, the three genres are connected by their acute divergence from traditional realism and their shared acceptance of the supernatural and irrational. It is this divergence and acceptance that tends to separate these genres from serious literature and is what threatens their relevance and acceptance into the canon.

#### The Separation/Coexistence of the Real/Unreal

It is important to note that Science Fiction has experienced a gradual shifting towards the postmodern and in this shifting, postmodern Science Fiction

has undergone a split in representation. Resembling the differentiation between the overt magic of Magical Realism's "tropical lush" and the more subtle magic of the "northerly spare," works of Science Fiction can also now be separated into "technologically spare" and "marvelously rich" varieties. These are terms I have created which are, of course, inspired by Faris' differentiation of magic. On one end of the continuum, we find the "marvelously rich," equivalent to Faris' tropical lush. In Faris' description of the "tropical lush," we recognize a literature where one finds that there is a "pervasive magic" (165). It is abundant and everywhere. Science Fiction's "marvelously rich" literature is characterized by pervasive technology that changes the landscape of the novel to one that is virtually unrecognizable and distinctly different from our own familiar one, allied with Todorov's marvelous literature and seen in such works as Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Orwell's *1984*, and Gibson's *Neuromancer*. On the other end of the continuum, we see the "technologically spare," equivalent to Faris' "northerly spare." Like Faris' "northerly spare," where "there is less magic and its range is more circumscribed" (165), Science Fiction has produced many "technologically spare" texts, such as Damon Knight's "The Handler" and William Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum," in which the technology, futurism, and/or other-worldly nature is sufficiently present but more subdued.

Gibson's *Neuromancer* and his short story, *The Gernsback Continuum*, represent the spectrum of the spare and rich. *Neuromancer* is a completely separate world consisting of pure technology. With Gibson's use of computer-cowboys and cyberspace decks "set in a near-future trash-culture ruled by multi-

national corporations and kept going by black-market economies, all frenetically dedicated to the circulation of computerized data" (Hollinger, "Cybernetic" 32), the novel redefines reality into a secondary world that is distinctly different from our concept of familiar experience. It is overtly technical and has altered reality so that it is indeed an independent world, familiar but very different. People and concepts are recognizable but clearly subverted.

Unlike this novel, in Gibson's short story, "The Gernsback Continuum," the narrator lives in a fictional reality too similar to our own to succeed in creating a secondary world, and Gibson's object is indeed to add a subtle madness into a familiar primary world. The narrator of this short story remembers "Sunday morning television in the Fifties" when he would "sit there with a peanut butter sandwich and a glass of milk" as he listened to the TV drone about the flying-car-filled future to be expected (Gibson 458). He is intimately familiar with the styles of the Thirties through the Eighties, and when his associate, Kihn, asks, "How many people survived the Sixties in California without having the odd hallucination?" (461), it is implied that the narrator's experience may be a hallucination because the narrator himself is a product of this era as well. In fact, no time-period is mentioned beyond the eighties, and, given that the story was written in 1981, we are to assume that the "The Gernsback Continuum" takes place in a contemporary setting, removing any futuristic quality from the work.

It is not a novel of another reality, temporal or otherwise. In the narrator's world, he drives a Toyota, lives in a perfectly normal version of Los Angeles, and visits an unchanged England. The irrational element is introduced by the

appearance of a “semiotic ghost,” supposedly a result of the “sci-fi imagery that permeates our culture” (Gibson 461). The narrator sees “Art Deco futuroids” (464), and “semiotic phantoms” (461), who drive futuristic cars, live in towering techno-cities, and exist as genetically “perfect,” in the generic blue-eyed, blond-haired, white-robed “Hitler Youth propagand[ist]” sense (464). The irrational is very subtle in this work. In its allusions to semiology and conflation of pop culture and reality, it smacks of Postmodernism. So, not all Science Fiction completely produces the secondary world that *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Neuromancer* succeed in producing. This is, in fact, an interesting development in Science Fiction. Although most Science Fiction does, indeed, create an otherworldly effect, it is important to note the differences within the genre. Nonetheless, despite Science Fiction’s progressive and changing quality, the literary community continually strips Science Fiction of its narrative multiplicity and texture, and flattens it so that all works may be slipped into the two-dimensional slot of “genre fiction.”

Works that maintain their three-dimensional status and evade the flattening foot of criticism are those that incorporate the irrational with the rational, as opposed to clearly separating them, and are becoming more accepted as a result of the expansion of literature attributed to Postmodernism. This can be seen in the critical reception given to authors such as Vonnegut, Pynchon, Borges, Calvino, and García Márquez, who are linked to both Postmodernism and Magical Realism, and in some cases, as with Pynchon and Vonnegut, with the “technologically spare” varieties of Science Fiction. These

writers incorporate the irrational (fantasy/fantastic) into seemingly rational texts. "To know why they use fantasy, how they use fantasy, that they use fantasy, is essential to any comprehension of postmodern fiction" (Le Guin 29), and, similarly, to any comprehension of Magical Realism. However, the acceptance that this group of writers, and others like them, receives hinges on the presence of the rational along with the irrational. It is the complete divergence from rationality and realism that has prevented Magical Realism's supernatural cousins, Fantasy and Science Fiction, from receiving critical recognition. Even the "technologically spare" varieties of Science Fiction lack critical attention because of their inclusion into the Science Fiction genre, although, of the attention that Science Fiction does receive, these works benefit from a large part of it. This lack of attention to Science Fiction is briefly addressed in Vonnegut's acclaimed novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut introduces the character Kilgore Trout, a Science-Fiction writer and Vonnegut's supposed alter ego:

"Are- are you *Kilgore Trout*?"

"Yes." [. . .] He did not think of himself as a writer for the simple reason that the world had never allowed him to think of himself that way.

"The- the writer?" said Billy.

"The what?" [. . .]

"There's a writer named Kilgore Trout."

"There *is*?" Trout looked foolish and dazed.

"You never heard of him?"

Trout shook his head. "Nobody—nobody ever did." (Vonnegut 169)



Vonnegut acknowledges the lack of attention towards Science Fiction in this particular section, specifically the lack of serious attention, since “the world had never allowed him to think of himself” as really a writer (169). Rosemary Jackson corroborates this opinion in her essay on Fantasy when she points out that the “fantastic has constantly been dismissed by critics as being an embrace of madness, irrationality, or narcissism and it has been opposed to the humane and more civilized practice of ‘realistic’ literature” (172).

Although a connection exists between Magical Realism, Science Fiction, and Fantasy in their use of the supernatural and irrational, they are connected to a larger network of categories that includes Modernism and Postmodernism. The ruling tenet of Modernism, Postmodernism, Magical Realism, Fantasy, and Science Fiction, the element that connects *these* rich fields of modern fiction, is their common use of subverting rigid structures of narrative. Each of these eras and genres attempts to overthrow convention through a conscious, progressive, and systematic rejection of traditional literary practices. Rabkin describes Fantasy’s subversion as a practice of reversals. It “exists only against a background to which it offers a direct reversal” (216), capsizing reality in order to explore it. Although Science Fiction and Fantasy generally separate their fictional world from our own, oftentimes they will base their works on familiar ideologies and simply reverse and subvert these beliefs, displacing them into an entirely marvelous reality. Rabkin describes this process of reversal and subversion at length, detailing the way in which works of Fantasy that contain a higher level of

the fantastic:

[. . .] begin by reversing larger numbers of external ground rules in order to establish their narrative worlds. [. . . W]ithin a given genre, or in a given narrative world, the still operative ground rules imported from the external world, or even the newly created internal ground rules, can be reversed again. The more of this that occurs, the more fantastic a work is. [. . .] By understanding the mental reversal implicit in a realistic novel, we can see the dialectic relations possible between external and internal ground rules.

The fantastic gives us a chance to try out new, 'unrealistic' possibilities, and thus, perhaps, change seen reality. (216)

There is an overlapping progression to this process of subversion in modern literature which is not necessarily chronological, but certainly present. First, Modernism subverted the traditionally rigid form of mimesis and altered it to include metafiction, dislocated chronology, juxtaposition of perspectives, and so on, but remained loyal to referentiality and content and maintained a high-brow elitism concerning the types of texts considered as "Literature." Then, Postmodernism practiced the subversion of form seen in modernist texts to an exponential degree and cut the ties to mimesis and content altogether. When we examine texts of Magical Realism, we see that the subversion of form is less severe than in Postmodernism, but is present. It reattaches a tenuous cord to content, but subverts the readers' concept of reality more than Postmodernism texts with its injection of the supernatural as a component of reality. Fantasy and Science Fiction transfer the subversion of reality seen in Magical Realism to its

own literature and takes this to the next level by inordinately reversing the ground rules of “reality” as we outwardly perceive it.

In Fantasy and Science Fiction, our concept of reality is subverted, and then the subversions are subverted. The more the text experiments with the readers’ concept of reality, disturbing them with a “dislocated narrative form” (Jackson 23), the more fantastic and subversive the work is. Rosemary Jackson indicates that Fantasy’s propensity for subversion and dislocating narrative makes it an open system that “cannot be closed off. It lies inside closed systems, infiltrating, opening spaces where unity had been assumed. [. . .] It introduces multiple, contradictory ‘truths’: it becomes polysemic” (23). This constant subversion creates a level of ambiguity and semiotic confusion that postmodern critics should enjoy. Science Fiction, for example, as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay observes, “has always thrived on the rejection of certain classical ‘truths’: for example, that human nature is unchangeable, that values can be eternal, that social power is derived from nature” (306). The experimentation with truth and reality takes the subversion and ideals of Postmodernism to a new level of play.

It is Fantasy and Science Fiction’s practice of twisting reality so severely that it is almost unrecognizable that simultaneously links it with and distinguishes it from Postmodernism and Magical Realism. It is what detracts from its critical attraction, and yet it is what holds the most potential for critical attention. Placed “side by side with the ‘canonic’ genres there is a great number of works of fiction which have so far been neglected, or considered solely as nonfiction [. . .] or considered as marginal aberrations from another properly canonic tradition”

(Suvin xv). Works of Postmodernism and Magical Realism have slowly gained critical attention. It is time to turn our attention more completely to other forms of the fantastic.

### Science Fiction and Fantasy as "Genre Fiction"

The main drawback of works within a genre is the necessity of these texts to pull similar conventions from the collective pool of the genre in question. After all, the very word "genre" implies a generic grouping of works based on the similarities that they share in technical devices, formal devices, style, subject matter and so on. The placement of a work into a genre suggests that similar conventions will exist between it and other works within the grouping. It is the use of similar techniques, conventions, or doctrines within a work that prompts critics and readers to group works together into categories.

Although the genres of Fantasy and Science Fiction themselves subvert traditional mimetic conventions, the practice of drawing upon the same subversive conventions within the genre in the same way jeopardizes the subversive quality of these conventions so that they run the risk of becoming static and expected. For instance, in the Western genre, finding a man in black dueling a man in white at high noon in front of a saloon would constitute a flat and stereotypical depiction of the old west and would certainly be expected, even clichéd. If a work of Science Fiction fills its pages with stagnant or unoriginal portrayals of rocketships, flying saucers, ray guns, and green Martians, the effect is the same. Consistently referencing the same types of characters and plot

twists designates the text as equally flat and stale. This especially occurred in the Science Fiction up until the Fifties, during its “Golden Age,” when “ideas were assimilated to the general discourse of science fiction” and “used up” (Attebery, “Closing” 210). It is the tendency of some Science Fiction and Fantasy writers, especially in mid-twentieth-century pulp Science Fiction, that has doomed much genre fiction to be dismissed as a group, prompting critics to discard the genre as a whole instead of evaluating works within the group individually.

It does seem natural, once works have been linked together in some sort of group or genre, to then order the works according to value within the genre, some being especially intriguing in their use of these techniques while others seeming contrived. There is no harm in this practice. After all, it is the ability of the writers within these groups to uniquely use these conventions within the texts, or create new ones, that pushes their value to greater heights than others. However, while participating in this evaluative elimination process, one must cut the fat scrupulously, taking care not to sever valuable meat from the body of “Literature” by dismissing the entire genre instead of works within the genre. Again, placing this entire mode of writing at the bottom of the scale of importance instead of ordering works within the group seems rash and irresponsible. Ursula Le Guin warns that “[g]enre is a useful concept only when used not evaluatively but descriptively” (20). Ultimately, it is not the presence of genre conventions and similarities that should be at issue in a text, but what the author has done with them. Science Fiction is in an invaluable position, having, as it does, a considerably trashy past. However, the wasteland of icons serves as a collective

dump of Science Fiction kitsch in which Science Fiction writers can gather bits of pop culture and reconfigure them. Therefore, we see that the “best contemporary science fiction writers have used the past creatively rather than imitatively, generating multilayered narratives of great beauty and complexity” (Attebery, “Closing” 212). Cyberpunk draws upon this junkyard, but also incorporates its own pieces. McHale’s praise of Cyberpunk’s novelty which “lies not in the absolute newness of any particular component or components, but in a shift of dominance or center of gravity reflected in the combination of components and their relative conspicuousness in cyberpunk texts” (*Constructing* 246). For McHale, Cyberpunk has value not in its newness, but in its emphasis, a valuable distinction.

Clive Barker, renowned English writer of horror, makes a useful distinction in the value of works within a genre, stating that “fantastic fiction offers the writer exceptional possibilities [for subversion. . . . It] should be judged according to how enthusiastically it seizes the opportunity to do what it can do *uniquely*” (100). While it is true that, within the genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy, one may find equally contrived and overused conventions at work, one will also find just as many that are not. Le Guin makes this clear when she affirms that “the existence of muzak does not disprove the existence of music” (29). An open reader will find just as many texts of Science Fiction and Fantasy that “do what [they] can do *uniquely*,” and it is this quality of uniqueness that distinguishes some works from others. This is why Rabkin and Jackson *value* Fantasy and Science Fiction, because within a genre that is subversive, to skillfully use these conventions

uniquely elicits an amazing and valuable literature of experimentation. Although there may be works that produce lifeless narratives, these are not the works that Rabkin and Jackson refer to when they praise the disturbance and dislocation that they feel is so valuable in works of Science Fiction and Fantasy.

These genres do not consist wholly of stereotypical texts, but, judging from the “notoriously untheoretical” approach of literary criticism to these irrationalist genres, the critics share a different opinion (Jackson 2). It is the practice of routinely dismissing Science Fiction, Fantasy, and other supernatural texts in their entirety as hackneyed and contrived that betrays the tradition of criticism that so many esteem. To do so is to assume that every work within the grouping, without exception, neglects to produce anything of literary, linguistic, metaphoric, or aesthetic worth. Rich, diverse, complex, and subversive supernatural literature is time after time overstepped as an irrelevant and slightly repugnant nuisance.

#### Defamiliarization and the Literalization of Metaphor in Science Fiction

Science Fiction uses many of the same techniques as Magical Realism. Like Magical Realism, Science Fiction makes use of defamiliarization and often literalizes metaphor, carrying the intangible into reality, dramatizing it. As previously discussed, defamiliarization involves a “new way of seeing and rendering the everyday, thereby ‘creating a new world view’” (Guenther 36), such as with Márquez’ discovery of ice and Süskind’s sensual wood experience. Defamiliarization subverts ordinary objects and ideas so that they are *almost*

unrecognizable. It is new yet familiar, and because of this subversion, we “participate in the fresh wonder of that experience” as if it were the first time (Faris 177). In this way, Science Fiction also makes use of objects, phenomena, and ideas that then “take on lives of their own and become magical in that way” (170).

George Orwell's *1984*, a work that is dystopian Science Fiction in its creation of a secondary world taking place in a future time, seizes the concerns over a tendency for revisionist history and sterilization of language and provides a new way of seeing these fears, certainly “creating a new world view” (Guenther 36), as seen in Orwell's creation of the Ministry of Truth and use of Newspeak. These fears are executed and exaggerated, almost grotesquely, to achieve their extreme result. Revisionist history is personified by the Ministry of Truth where documents consistently undergo a “process of continuous alteration [. . .] scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as necessary” (Orwell 36). Language is watered down to its most ridiculously puerile base, being merely a “hybrid jargon of the Ministries” that fosters such concepts as doublespeak and has no word for rebellion (139). In both cases, common experiences and concerns are transmuted into literal incarnations embodied by the Ministry of Truth. Our greatest fears are literally realized, and our realist perceptions are twisted to embody fantastic representations. They are inflated and perverted so that they are familiar, but magical and grotesque at the same time. Intangible and common anxieties become tangible and weird realities. Therefore, “SF often generates elements of its worlds by literalizing metaphors from everyday discourse or



mainstream fiction and poetry" (McHale, *Constructing* 246), that forces the reader to rethink familiar concepts, "short-circuiting habits of mind that insulate us from this world" (31).

In Damon Knight's "The Handler," included in Le Guin and Attiebery's *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*, Knight reworks a common theme and transmutes cliché to reality, therefore defamiliarizing it to the point of grotesquerie. The vulnerability of revealing one's true self and the capacity of humanity for superficiality is actualized in this melancholy work of short Science Fiction. Harry is a handler, dwarfish and shy, who exists within and manipulates the larger character Pete, a boisterous and charismatic entertainer. They are understood, within the story, to be two parts of a whole. They are the inner and the outer, the introverted and the extroverted merged into one balanced whole, and, yet, the reactions they receive are quite dissimilar. When Harry emerges from within Pete, the people whom Pete has been entertaining, who were once "sore-throated with enthusiasm," suddenly fall "silent" (Knight 46). The people that, for the dynamic and energetic Pete, gather "around him in arcs of concentric circles" (46), react to Harry, Pete's small sweaty puppeteer or handler, "politely," and "turn away, [to] form conversational groups" (47), ignoring him completely. Pete's inner self *literally* climbs out of the external persona and is at once revealed and rejected. Although it is not made abundantly clear whether or not Harry and Pete are of the same mind, the implication is that they are. Thus, Knight portrays the common conflict between one's inner (Harry) and outer (Pete) self by *literally* assigning the two facets seemingly individual personalities

and dramatizes the superficiality of the masses and the vulnerability of exposure in this short story. Knight takes a familiar situation, relating to one's peers openly and experiencing a rejection of this honesty, and literalizes the intangible inner vulnerability that is concealed by an exuberant persona, subverting it until it is almost unrecognizable.

Not only is Knight's "The Handler" an example of literalization and defamiliarization, but it also aptly demonstrates Science Fiction's concern for the ontological. Harry and Pete's co-existence prompts such ontological questions as "[w]hich world is this?" (McHale, *Postmodernist* 10), and also "Which of my selves?" (*Constructing* 254), a question McHale has claimed Science Fiction has not often enough asked, yet here, it is obviously addressed.

### Reflexivity and Metafiction in Modern Science Fiction

Christine Brooke-Rose carefully outlines the various definitions and explanations of metafiction, stating that metafiction:

[. . .] is ultimately a narrational metatheorem whose subject matter is fictional systems themselves' [. . .] a parody of interpretation which shows up the multiplicity of the real and the naivety of trying 'to reach a total synthesis of life within narrative.' (352).

This parodic element and emphasis on the plurality, or as Brooke-Rose calls it, "multiplicity" of reality is continuously exemplified in Science Fiction. Le Guin praises Science Fiction for its progressive spirit, in that it has "increasingly shared in [the] reflexive movement" of metafiction, drawing on "the mature body

of science fiction [. . .] to explore and test the possibilities and potentiality of form, emotion, and significance” (19).

Recognizing the tired structures within its fiction and a prior tradition of recognizable “formula fiction,” the modern Science-Fiction writer often draws upon these techniques and contrived symbols in an effort to parody its own fictional qualities, using them “as dead items to be manipulated as in a game, or living patterns to be used in a work of art” (Le Guin 22). Recognizing their genre confines and conventions, Science Fiction writers “work with the discourse developed by their predecessors, exploiting the formal and stylistic innovations that had previously been of secondary importance” in the pulp driven era of Science Fiction’s “Golden Age” (Attebery, “Closing” 211). This is seen in the previously discussed example of “The Gernsback Continuum” in which the narrator is haunted by “semiotic ghost[s]” as a result of the “sci-fi imagery that permeates our culture” (Gibson 461). Like the girl assaulted by the “*bar hade*” (bear head) on a flying saucer, the narrator is “clued into the main vein” of the “sci-fi [. . .] culture” (461). Thus, he is plagued by visions which are a literalization of the intangible permeation of Science Fiction in our culture, “bits of deep cultural imagery that have split off and taken a life of their own. [. . . A] plane [which] was part of the mass unconscious” that fades once he distances himself from reality by burying himself in bad TV (461). Not only are they literalized intangibles, but they serve to make the story one focused upon itself, the genre of Science Fiction.

Further, the catalyst of these visions is a photography assignment which requires the narrator to capture the distinctive memorabilia of Science Fiction's "Golden Age," stylized to represent the look of the future. Cohen, an agent for a company who publishes "big, trendy 'trade' paper-backs" and Dialta Downes, a pop-art historian (Gibson 457), want pictures of this memorabilia to capture the unrealized expectations of an era gone by. For them, these neglected artifacts are "segments of a dreamworld, abandoned in the uncaring present" (458), representative of "a kind of alternate America: a 1980 that never happened. An architecture of broken dreams" (460). This mis-projected future, prompted by a past Science Fiction literature and sci-fi culture secure in its vision for the future, creates a metafictional quality in the story. It underlines the "the ways science fiction has shaped our expectations and even our sense of ourselves" (Attebery, "Closing" 211), causing the story to be one of many Science-Fiction "metafictions, [all] gleefully pointing out the holes in their own fictional premises" ("Closing" 211). The unrealized future in "The Gernsback Continuum" is one such hole. This is playful Science Fiction about Science Fiction, parodying its own ability to miss the mark.

Also, within this short story, one finds several reflexive moments when the text points to itself, creating metaphors for itself within the text. When Kihn teasingly says, "Of course not. It wasn't like that at all; it was 'in a setting of clear reality,' right? Everything normal, and then there's the monster" (461), he clearly embodies the "technologically spare" quality of the text. It is an inherently real setting with the "monster" of the exaggerated futurism conspicuously and

surprisingly injected into it. Gibson piercingly points to his own text with this passage. In another section, he seems to refer to literature in a metaphor of Victorian versus pop style. In the Victorian Age:

all pencil sharpeners had looked like pencil sharpeners—your basic Victorian mechanism, perhaps with a curlicue of decorative trim. After the advent of the designers, some pencil sharpeners looked as though they'd been put together in wind tunnels. For the most part, the change was only skin-deep; under the streamlined chrome shell, you'd find the same Victorian mechanism. (458)

The Victorian pencil sharpener seems to function as a metaphor for mimetic literature before the advent of modern experimental literature, Modernism, which changed the shell of literature, the form, and further stylized it, but beneath, the mechanism remained the same. Beneath the twisted, wind-tunneled text remained the grand structures and links to representation. Gibson references literature within his literature, though subtly in this case, and celebrates the reflexivity of metafiction.

Cyberpunk, a more recent development of Science Fiction, involves implanted worlds (cyberspace or matrix) within the fictional world. Brian McHale explores this reflexive tendency in *Constructing Postmodernism* and intuitively identifies this world-within-a-world status as a type of metafiction, given that there is a type of author within the novel creating the cyberspace world. The creators of “reality” within cyberspace/the matrix bring a reflexive quality to cyberpunk, and the matrix itself is “a scale-model of the fictional world itself, a fictional-world-

within-the-fictional-world [. . . and] makes possible, in other words, metafictional reflection *by* the text on its own ontological procedures” (253). We have seen a resurgence in the appeal of this type of cybernetic metafiction in the popularity of such films as Kathryn Bigelow’s *Strange Days* in 1995 and Andy and Larry Wachowski’s *The Matrix* in 1999. Many have claimed that Cyberpunk was a short-lived phenomenon, but in the ontological exploration of reality that these films pursue and the ready reception of this shocking exploration, it is clear that the potential of cyberspace has yet to be exhausted, especially in this age of constant technological and data-driven upheaval.

McHale also discusses the burning of the library in Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* as a “metafictional displacement of the apocalypse” (162). Since the characters destroy texts (by burning them) and thus, “in effect [. . .] destroy a world” (162), the destruction of a library is the “ultimate destruction, the ruination of [. . .] the storehouse of our culture from which, if it were to survive intact, our world could be reconstructed” (162). This concern for literature and narrative as separate worlds in need of preservation and their ultimate destruction leading to a metafictional apocalypse seems to resemble Winston Smith’s systematic revision of all existing texts, and the continual elimination/destruction of original texts. Winston casually destroys communications and documents with an ease that is “as nearly as possible unconscious” (Orwell 36). All tangible history is thrown “into the memory hole to be devoured by the flames” (36). This is more than just the destruction of a library, as is seen in Eco’s work, but is the erasure of absolutely all discourse. The storehouse of culture, in Orwell’s world, does not

survive intact, and thus that parallel world can never be reconstructed. It is the ultimate displaced apocalypse because of its very thoroughness and methodical obliteration.

### Fantasy in Context

With Science Fiction, a certain degree of legitimacy is obtained that is denied Fantasy because, in terms of science, oftentimes the reader will view the new world that is created in Science Fiction as one that may possibly occur someday, as an extrapolation of our present world. Even in works where this does not seem possible, the use of logical science legitimizes the text. Fantasy, on the other hand, “asserts what both writer and reader know to be false [. . . and] offers an explicitly impossible narrative” (Attebery, “Fantasy” 15). Therefore, Science Fiction is more accessible to readers, writers, and critics because, although it is more irrational than Postmodernism and Magical Realism, it does not epitomize the complete divergence from reality (and relevancy) in the way that Fantasy does. Where Science Fiction has experienced multiple waves of experimentation, the genre of Fantasy has been more limited. One reason for this is the hesitation of writers to create works of pure Fantasy that incorporate fairy-tale components such as trolls, wizards, dragons, elves, fairies, and so on, because of the stigma attached to Fantasy literature as works that completely diverge from reality and, thus, are escapist and irrelevant. For Fantasy, the association of fairy-tales with children’s literature, another category of writing deprecated more than appreciated, intensifies the stigma. Often viewed as

childish and unimportant, the ability of Fantasy to challenge the reader, presenting “a number of problems in interpreting and evaluating” a text that is so separate from our familiar frame of reference, is overlooked (Attebery, “Fantasy” 16). Fantasy equally enjoys subverting reality so that it is unrecognizable, yet, because of this subversion, is delicately linked to reality, “reversing larger numbers of external ground rules in order to establish [its own] narrative worlds” (Rabkin 216). This relationship between the primary and secondary worlds allows Fantasy free reign to play with our perceptions and familiar ideologies. The Fantasy writer has “complete artistic freedom, within the self-constructed framework” (Swinfen 76). It is a literature that “of course, starts out with an advantage: arresting strangeness. But that advantage has been turned against it, and has contributed to its disrepute” (Tolkien 48). This stigma of disrepute and irrelevance is the final barrier that criticism must overcome. The complete divergence from reality is the ultimate act of rebellion, and yet is simultaneously the ultimate taboo of literature.

### Secondary and Primary Worlds

Fantasy’s primary value derives from its writers’ abilities as “sub-creator”(Tolkien 37). Fantasy “makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what [. . .] relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside” (37). The creation of these secondary worlds redefines the “Primary World” and its set of laws in order to redefine what is true and what is not. The nature of these worlds is various.



They may be “remote secondary worlds [. . .] juxtaposed primary and secondary worlds with magical portals serving as gateways between them; and still others have created worlds-within-worlds” (Zahorski and Boyer 58-59). As readers enter a work of Fantasy, there is a necessity to leave one’s conception of reality behind, and yet, the secondary worlds recall the primary world so that there simultaneously exists a necessity to access these conceptions. There is an ontological dilemma in reading Fantasy in that the primary and secondary worlds merge. At one moment, readers are enveloped in Middle-Earth, but at the next, they also find themselves referencing the primary world for context, because the creation of a secondary world is often based on the primary. In Tolkien, we reference our store of knowledge concerning ancient maps, kings and kingdoms, wizardry, dragons and so on, but this reference is fuzzy. We do not have direct access to these structures. It is quite improbable that many people have met a king or held an ancient map, and even harder to belief that someone has direct access to wizards or dragons. The only really familiar aspect of Middle-Earth is its inanimate landscape and the race of Man. In Fantasy, there is often a “similarity of structure, and a reasonable cause-and-effect relationship” in the laws of nature and it usually does not “move into the remote physical settings of some science fiction” (Swinfen 77). However, some laws remain familiar, some altered, while others are discarded, and one never knows which codes one will find unassaulted: C.S. Lewis’ beasts of Narnia speak, Tolkien’s trees (Ents) walk, L’Engle’s Meg experiences a fourth and fifth dimension of time. At the same time, the Pevensie children, from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and Meg, from *A Wrinkle*

*in Time*, are from our primary world, therefore incorporating it into the secondary. Tolkien includes the race of Man in the population of Middle-Earth, allowing a level of familiarity to infiltrate the unknown. The secondary world is at once linked to and independent from our primary world or “reality.” Therefore we are never quite sure where our world ends and the world of Fantasy begins. One thing is certain. The created world, although linked to our own, has created a new set of rules for itself, erasing all sense of “knowing” in the reader and completing a thorough separation from our realm of reference. This complete divergence from reality requires a rethinking of referential value because, “[i]n a fantasy, all our assumptions about natural process and human behavior are open to question, and the validating procedures applicable to realist texts are, if not rendered completely useless, at least made conditional upon other sorts of validation” (Attebery, “Fantasy” 17).

### Fantasy’s Dislocation of Time

Experiments with time in works of Fantasy are especially of interest. Different works will treat time in different ways. Although Stephen King is commonly thought of as a writer of horror, he has created a very interesting collection of Fantasy. *The Dark Tower* series is a confounding mixing of genres that takes place, primarily, in a magical realm, qualifying it as Fantasy. In a conflation of the western and Fantasy genres, King’s world elevates gunslingers as knights, but places them in a medieval kingdom. It is not medieval in terms of chronology, for remnants of the present appear in the text (such as abandoned

machinery and the lyrics to *Hey Jude*), but in terms of style. There is a monarchy and hierarchical system, the language is roughly archaic, and there are wizards and magic. Roland is the last gunslinger, from the land of Gilead, and he is on a quest to fix the dark tower. The tower is a structure of major importance in *The Dark Tower* series and acts as the axis of the universe, the “nexus of Time” (King, *The Gunslinger* 303), tying time and space and parallel worlds together. It is what gives order to the universe and some force is corrupting it so that the workings of time, the people, and the culture, essentially every aspect of life in Roland’s world, is tainted. Time is stilted, and the odd citizenry are afflicted with a strange disease. The amazing melding of genres in this series lends an original element to this Fantasy. Just as the tower is the nexus of time and reality in Roland’s world, the series is a nexus of much fiction in King’s world.

Stephen King’s *Insomnia* is a work tangentially related to the series, and its use of time is intriguing. Because of its references to the tower, it offers embedded worlds. There is the secondary world of the text: Ralph suffers from insomnia and this lack of sleep acts as a portal to a world not seen by others. He sees auras around people and witnesses the presence of three little bald doctors whom no one else seems to see and who also measure life and end it by cutting the balloon strings of these auras. Within this secondary world is a tertiary world, the world of the tower, which potentially embeds multiple worlds within it. Ralph and his friend Lois are introduced to the concept of the tower by two of the little bald doctors. In *Insomnia*, Ralph and Lois are raised by the bald men to a higher level of the tower where time moves faster. When Ralph and Lois ascend into the

upper levels of the tower, King describes this phenomenon through Ralph's perspective:

Lois stirred, and as Ralph turned to look at her, he saw an amazing thing: the sky overhead was growing pale. He guessed it must be five in the morning. They had arrived at the hospital at around nine o'clock on Tuesday evening, and now all at once it was Wednesday, October 6<sup>th</sup>. Ralph had heard of time flying, but this was ridiculous. (464)

Time operates at different speeds on different levels of the tower. What feels like seconds to Lois and Ralph in their tertiary world is actually hours to the secondary world within the novel. The confusion of time helps to distinguish the difference in the worlds, and we are left again asking, "what world is this" and, further "what time is this?" Nothing is concrete. In *The Dark Tower* series, at the end of the first book, *The Gunslinger*, Roland spends an evening talking to Walter, the man in black, and wakes to "find himself ten years older" (303). In the second book, *The Drawing of the Three*, Roland enters parallel realities through portals, and these realities resemble our primary world at different points in our history. Throughout *The Dark Tower* series, the play with time and the embedding of worlds is endless. King demonstrates his talent with this "sub-creative art which plays strange tricks with the world and all that is in it" (Tolkien 53). Much more could be written about the subject, but to do so would neglect too many other works. King is not the only writer of Fantasy to play with time and space in such a way. The use of multiple and fantastic dimensions in *A Wrinkle in Time* is an obvious example. Ann Swinfen devotes an entire section of her book,

*In Defence of Fantasy*, to works of “time displacement” (44), or “time fantasy” (45), citing Norton Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth* and Dodie Smith’s *The Starlight Barking* where, in both cases, characters experience shifts in time in a tertiary world, that does not match the “real time” of the secondary world of the novel. These time fantasies are especially intriguing because of the distinct disruption of a fundamental natural law. Time is a dominant principle of existence that writers have played with using flashbacks and disjointed narrative, but no realist narrator can create their own laws of time or *worlds* of time as a writer of Fantasy or even Science Fiction can. The effect is jarring and radical. Thus, these genres take this experimentation to a greater and more interesting level.

Those works of Fantasy, that are not concerned with time but create secondary worlds by rewriting the world, are truly interesting works. By either drawing upon a previous literature of fairy-tale, myth, and legend, writers of Fantasy share the Science Fiction writer’s position of subverting previous works. Legends, myth, and fairy-tale are mingled to create a new work entirely, such as with Tolkien’s use of “*Beowulf*, the Scandinavian *Eddas*, the Finnish *Kalevala*, [and] the Celtic mythos” into a seamless and original creation is an example of such, not to mention his reliance on familiar characters such as elves, dwarves, and wizards (Attebery, *Fantasy Tradition* 11). Tolkien changes these by erasing the smallness or cuteness of the elves and dwarves. He creates a more serious representation of the two.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

From the modernists' dislocation of time and juxtaposition of conflicting narratives, to the increased reflexivity and playfulness of the postmodernists, to the magical realists' use of destabilization, and the Science Fiction and Fantasy writers' disjointed secondary worlds, we have been witness to a shift in writing from a literature that preserves tradition and mimesis to one that perverts form and has slowly edged away from the mimetic and representational confines. The acceptance of Modernism and Postmodernism is thoroughly established and Magical Realism is emerging from beneath the shadow of Postmodernism as a force of its own. The headway that Postmodernism has made in opening the doors to the canon is substantial, especially in its attempts to bridge the gap between High and Low culture, but in order to truly succeed in such an attempt, the bridge between them must be fortified and widened and the doors to "Club Canon" must be further oiled. Literary acceptance still clings tenaciously to realism as a legitimizing element and it is only when the ties to mimesis are completely severed that a truly open form of literary acceptance may be attained.

Postmodernism claims a celebration of fragmentation and divergence and an allowance for multiple realities and selves to exist. It breaks boundaries in the

most extreme and positive sense, avoiding the limitations of exclusion. It is recursive and metafictional and avoids pretension. It is a literature of freedom, and this freedom is what has opened the canon to other forms. However, Postmodernism has, in its singular devotion to form above content, in fact, limited itself. It cannot bridge the gap if it, in discarding its reader, is not accessible. In literature's inextricable relationship to language, content is inevitable. There is no escape for discourse because it is an intellectually engaging activity. It is not an event to be sensed, heard, seen, felt, or tasted, but a mental experience to be perceived and understood, to be interpreted. Writing must be read, and, thus, it inherently needs its readers. So, a level of representation/interpretation is necessary, but that representation need not be linked to realism or mimesis. It need not pander, and it need not be unadorned or uncomplicated. It needs only to be approachable. To purposely confound is to exclude.

One must question whether the height of complexity found in Postmodernism is not another mode of elitism, different but similar to the High-brow exclusion of Modernism. Is there an anxiety of irrelevance motivating Postmodernism? Is this just a further attempt to maintain seriousness? Is this necessity for seriousness what excludes Science Fiction and Fantasy from critical attention? With the acceptance of Magical Realism, the door creeps open. At last the supernatural is awarded provisional entry into criticism and alludes the stigma of irrationalism and irrelevance.

Science Fiction and Fantasy literature are often dismissed as negligible in importance, viewed as genres that are not "serious" because they are irrational

and not real, thus, not composed and decorous, or concerned with what matters. Their in-between status, containing elements too impossible to be accepted by realists and structures too traditional to be accepted by Postmodernists, these genres certainly do fall into a literature and criticism of their own, a literature that absolutely deserves serious attention. They are playful, ontological, reflexive, and provocative. As Scholes eloquently writes:

We have to think about the future all the time. When we get up in the morning, we have to think about the rest of the day. When we put down a word, we have to think about the rest of the sentence. We can't get away from thinking about the future. As readers of writers, we have to think about the future of ourselves and our fellow readers. (*Fabulation* 212)

In considering the future of literature and criticism, to significantly consider the value and complexity of Science Fiction and Fantasy is to supply a substantial portion of the “rest of the day,” and a momentous clause to “the rest of the sentence.” The acceptance of Magical Realism is a mark of progress. The future of criticism and our *continued* progress depends on exploring these neglected genres.



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