

THE DISJOINTED MIRROR: HOW MAGICAL
REALISM BREAKS DOWN
DICHOTOMIES

THESIS

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Magical realism creates an ambiguous environment. In the fictional space of a magical realist novel, little is homogenized. Instead, magical realism creates a system of binary oppositions that work to distort the notion of realism while also creating a degree of variations. The degree of variations is a system of opposites that work, not as binary poles, but as connected ideas that expand from each other. For example, take the term “magical realism.” The opposition created between “magic” and “real” interacts on a variation of degrees: the world is not magic or real, but somewhere in between. While the name insinuates a contradictory opposition—something that is magical cannot be real—the novel incorporates both systems and presents them in a world where they co-exist and neither has precedence. Wendy Faris, in her book *Ordinary Enchantments*, believes, “The magical realist vision thus exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions” (21). The world depicted in a magical realist novel does not reside in one side of the mirror or the other, but instead lies upon a connection between the two. In other words, it is both at once and connected by this “imaginary point” instead of divided by it.

In this fictional space, not just magic and realism are juxtaposed, but a system of oppositions. Each works in a similar way to the mirror metaphor Faris discusses. This creates a fictional world where space becomes reflected off a system of two sided mirrors, creating a long line of fragmented images. In order to provide a way to look at all these distorted images in a connected way, I will focus on the use of oral techniques in magical realist novels.

Oral literature, like magical realism, is a name composed of contraries. Oral literature refers to texts that use oral techniques in written form—oral literature can be either works transferred to paper from oral language or literature that has strong ties to the oral consciousness. Walter Ong, when talking about Jack Goody, claims, "Jack Goody has convincingly shown how shifts hitherto labeled as shifts from magic to science, or from the so-called 'prelogical' to the more and more 'rational' state of consciousness, or from the Levi-Strauss's 'savage' mind to domesticated thought, can be more economically and cogently explained as shifts from orality to various stages of literacy" (Ong 28). If a critic is to accept Goody's assertion that the shifts from magic to rational can be explained as shifts from orality to literacy, then a method of writing that uses magical presence, even if it is literate, will have some traces of orality—even if it is unconsciously. Yet one cannot dismiss the fact that magical realism still contains characteristics of a literate culture. Similar to the relationship between magic and realism, orality and literacy work off a shared presence. Although oral techniques are used, the mirror is once again "double-sided." Magical realism stays in an area of gray and is both oral and literate at the same time.

The oral techniques present in magical realist novels work to subvert the notion of realist fiction. That is not to say that the subversion makes realist fiction and magical realism opposites. In a magical realist novel, magic is part of reality not separate from it. Instead, magical realist authors subvert the understanding of reality and the realist techniques used to record it. Realism works off the see-it-and-write-it technique; realism is tied to the rational world of literacy—everything is recorded and written exactly as the author *perceives* reality. Yet, magical realism is the rebellious offspring of Daisy Miller, creating a world that accepts that something is lost in the translation from reality to literature. In this “loss,” magical realism creates a new, hybrid understanding of reality, one that is both rational and irrational. By including the irrational circumstances of life, and thus the parts of reality one cannot explain, magical realism creates a fictional space that is not stagnant but active—active because the text is re-creating reality as it records reality. One way magical realism does this is through textualization. Textualization draws the reader or the characters into the world of the text; the text *becomes reality*. The presence of oral techniques is seen in the novels’ assertion that words have power. Unlike realist fiction, which tries to capture reality in a true manner, magical realist novels create an environment that is both its own world and a reflection of our world. The reader is aware he is reading a story just as the story becomes real itself.

The presence of oral techniques is also seen in the re-telling of myth and history. In a magical realist novel, history and myth are often shaped and changed to create a new history. In this re-imagination of the past, the authors incorporate the mythic understanding of life into the historical understanding. The placement of myth and history together is an act of remembrance. Ong believes that one technique of an oral

culture is that it produces minor variants or repetitions of myth (Ong 42). The cultures repeat these stories because the repetition helps the orator remember the facts of the story. The act of remembrance involved with a magical realist novel fills a different kind of need: the placement provides the authors a way to remember their cultural mythology and then use this memory to challenge the Dominant understanding of history. While often magical realist variations of myth and history are not minor, the creation of new stories from old lore suggests that nothing can be simply written down and recorded. The mixture of myth and history subverts the idea of what we know as recorded “truth” by demonstrating a relationship between myth and history. This relationship not only adds validity to myth, but also highlights the function of story in history. Yet the authors do not seek to destroy historical credence, but show the relationship between myth and history; once again the mirror reflects both sides of the issue, giving precedence to neither.

In looking at the hybrid understanding of oppositions, I hope to come to an understanding of how dichotomies are distorted and disrupted in a magical realist novel. In order to look at the hybrid nature of magical realism, I have picked books that contain some element of all three of these oppositions (oral and literate, reality and fiction, and history and myth). Furthermore, I have included books that are not part of the Latin boom commonly associated with magical realism. Instead, I have picked one book from the United States (*Ceremony*), one book from Canada (*Green Grass, Running Water*), and one book from England (*Fire and Hemlock*). These books also help demonstrate the mercurial nature of magical realism. I have picked Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* to represent the presence of magical

realism in Native American literature and I picked Diana Wynne Jones' *Fire and Hemlock* to show magical realism's presence in children's literature. Through this selection of books, I hope to provide a broader perspective for my topic. These books will also provide a demonstration of how magical realism has moved away from being associated only with Latin America.

My thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter two of my thesis starts by defining the term "magical realism." I discuss the history of the term as well as its characteristics in order to develop a broader idea of how the mode functions. Understanding the difference between the various terms associated with magical realism (magic realism and the marvelous real) is important in order to refrain from using the terms incorrectly and thus interchangeably. I then apply the characteristics of magical realism to the two oral techniques I discussed above (the power of words and repetition of stories). These oral techniques are applied to magical realist techniques in chapters three and four. By developing the term "magical realism" in the first chapter, I demonstrate how the characteristics of the mode are seen in the use of oral techniques. Chapter five looks at the functions of a hybrid literature and how this relates to magical realism.

CHAPTER 2

MAGICAL REALISM: FROM THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS

I have titled this chapter “Magical Realism: From the Cutting Room Floor” because in the original creation of my study I was not going to include the history and definition of magical realism. The way I saw my study developing was that I was looking at the interaction of dichotomies and how magical realism creates a hybrid of two contrary ideas. Yet, once I started exploring my ideas I realized I needed a solid foundation for my study. Without a foundation of theory and a solid understanding of how magical realism functions, the rest of the study has no basis. This is especially important considering the variations of the term magical realism (magic realism and marvelous real are the two I have in mind). These two terms are the precursors of the contemporary understanding of magical realism and, although they have important ties to the contemporary understanding of magical realism, should not be confused with the definition of magical realism: “One of the main sources of confusion surrounding the terms is the lack of accuracy of their application. Each variation for the term has developed in specific and different contexts and yet they have become mistakenly

interchangeable in critical usage” (Bowers 2). As Bowers points out, one must accept the differences in the terms and understand how each variation is a different understanding. Once this is achieved, the definition and history of the term can be, as in my case, resurrected from the cutting room floor and used as a foundation piece for looking at the mode.

Of course, a foundation piece is not the only purpose of looking at magical realism’s history and characteristics: looking at the history and characteristics minimizes the risk of using the term incorrectly. Bowers’ statement draws attention to one of the key problems of dealing with magical realism: critics tend to use the three different variations of the term (magic realism, the marvelous real, and magical realism) as one idea. In doing so, the critics dilute the meaning and make the application of the term a questionable cliché. I say a “questionable cliché” because it produces a term that can be applicable to many different types of novels; interchanging the terms makes the meaning slip to include an abyss of possibilities. One should approach application of the term with timid reservation. The term has a complicated history and should be treated as such. There should be no haste to apply the term without first looking at where it came from. In an attempt to use the term accurately, I will first discuss the history of the term and the characteristics that define it.

The History of Magic(al) Realism

I do not want to belabor the history of the term and its formation because the aim of my thesis is not to define magical realism, but to show how it works. Instead, I will focus on the formation of the three key terms (magic realism, the marvelous real, and magical realism) in order to avoid the pitfalls of using the term incorrectly. I further hope

to demonstrate the European influences on the creation of the mode and displace it (or the ideas of it) from a strictly Latin American technique.

The global success of Latin American magical realist writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges has made the term “magical realism” commonly associated with Latin American writing. The term has become part of what is now termed the “Latin boom,” where a talented group of Latin American writers brought the magical realist technique to global recognition. Yet, magical realism is a narrative mode and cannot be placed in one geographical region. Maggie Ann Bowers, in her book *Magic(al) Realism*, points out the problems of seeing magical realism as merely a Latin American phenomenon: “Many consider that the over-association of magical realism with Latin America has led to it being seen as a passing fashion in the literary history of a certain region, and its application elsewhere as a tired and borrowed cliché” (121). Although Latin American writers formed the modern idea of magical realism, the original creation of the term was European.

Critics such as Wendy Faris, Amaryll Chanady, Louis Zamora, and Maggie Bowers place the creation of the term “magic realism” with the German art critic Franz Roh. Roh’s definition of “magic realism” referred to a work of art that “differs greatly from its predecessor (expressionist art) in its attention to accurate detail, a smooth photograph-like clarity of picture and the representation of the mystical non-material aspects of reality” (Bowers 9). For Roh, the magic stemmed from a grotesque depiction of mundane life. It was a spiritual magic, one that celebrated the magic (and horrors) of everyday existence. The ordinary and mundane had a dream-like quality similar to the

style of the surrealist. Also like surrealism, magic realism worked to synchronize the contradiction of opposites (Bowers 13).

Yet a distinction should be made between the aims of magic realism and the aims of surrealism. Because the two forms were happening at the same time, magic realism often gets confused with surrealism. Surrealist painting represents a dream-like reality; it captures images from the psychological perspective. Magic realism advocates a fidelity to real life and captures the object realistically in order to form it anew. Roh believed that through close observation of actual objects, a person could perceive the inner complexities and mysteries of life (Bowers 12-3). This departure from surrealist painting should be emphasized. Unlike surrealist art, magic realism poses real objects in real setting. Although the styles incorporate the dream-like characteristics of surrealism, in the sense it focuses on the distortion of everyday *objects*, magic realism does not distort everyday *reality*.

The point is made clearer in Roh's essay, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism." In this essay, Roh describes the aims of this new art:

In contrast, we are offered a new style that is thoroughly of this world, that celebrates the mundane. [...] But considered carefully, this new world of objects is still alien to the current idea of Realism. How it stupefies the rearguard and seems to them almost as inappropriate as Expressionism itself! How it employs various techniques inherited from the previous period, techniques that endow all things with a deeper meaning and reveal mysteries that always threaten the secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things. (18)

The style of magic realism is first and foremost “of this world.” Unlike the dream-landscapes of the surrealist, Roh’s art celebrates the existence of man. Through representing the objects as strange distortions, magic realism is able to show the inner nature of existence. Magic realism aims to distort the ordinary objects of reality while placing these objects in a realistic setting. In other words, it creates a grotesque representation of the ordinary in order to show the magic of being.

Roh’s ideas had an influence on global art. Magic realism became an accepted mode of expression, not just in the European continents, but in North America as well. Yet, it was not until 1927 that Roh’s ideas found the most significant echo with the Latin American publication of extracts from his book titled *Revista de Occidente* (Bowers 14). Roh’s publication had a resounding effect on Cuban writer and critic Alejo Carpentier. Carpentier changed the term to fit a new breed of magic realism he termed *lo real maravilloso* (marvelous real). Carpentier sought to distinguish his marvelous real from Roh’s concept of magic realism as well as the surrealist movement. Carpentier felt that Roh and the surrealists were obsessed with the marvelous as pretentious display; it was a premeditated and fabricated demonstration of marvelous reality. The art did not place belief in the visual demonstrations it brought forth: “It seems that the marvelous invoked in disbelief—the case of the Surrealists for so many years—was never anything more than a literary ruse, just as boring in the end as the literature that is oneiric ‘by arrangement’ or those praises of folly that are now back in style” (Carpentier 86). Carpentier draws attention to the fabricated nature of the surrealist painting. The surrealist juxtaposed objects that would rarely be found together in real life (like clocks melting in a desert). In doing so, they willed the marvelous into existence; the dream

creators become bureaucrats (Carpentier 85). For Carpentier, it is a formulaic demonstration of art. It lacks the true imagination of experience and works from a pre-coded idea of the marvelous.

The presence of a marvelous reality is something Carpentier attempts to territorialize and ex-communicate from the European continent. For him, the European continent represents the dull ordinariness of reality whereas Latin America represents the realization of dreams (Durix 105). He asserts that the idea of the marvelous real is something that belongs only to the Latin American way of life. This creates a striking difference between the American and European artist: “The American artist is organically immersed in the dynamics of his continent, whereas the European creator, often entrammelled in his ‘classicism’, can only look for an escapist kind of art, which is not really concerned with the reality of the world around” (Durix 107). Carpentier advocates a system of representation where the artist must believe in the presence of the marvelous in order for the marvelous to be loyal to the presentation.

Although Carpentier’s marvelous real is noticeably “European” influenced, he creates the term in a way that characterizes it as a strictly Latin American phenomenon. Carpentier felt that Latin America had a particular affinity for the marvelous because of its rich cultural heritage:

Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [metizaje], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is

the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?

(Carpentier 88)

Carpentier goes to great lengths to deconstruct the representation of the marvelous in European magic realism and surrealist painting in order to develop a different perception of the idea. Carpentier stresses the need for the artist to believe in the images of the marvelous, as well as the need to represent the diverse, cultural history of Latin America. In doing so, Carpentier creates the term marvelous real to describe the movement seen in Latin America. Maggie Bowers defines marvelous real as “a concept that could represent for him [Carpentier] the mixture of differing cultural systems and the variety of experiences that create an extraordinary atmosphere, alternative attitude and differing appreciation of reality in Latin America” (15). For Carpentier, the marvelous real is something that belongs to the Latin American way of seeing.

Angel Flores took up the discussion of Carpentier’s marvelous real when he published his article, “Magical Realism in Spanish America.” Controversially, Flores does not give credit to Carpentier for bringing the concept of Roh’s magic realism to the Latin American continent. Instead, Flores argues that magical realism is a continuation of the romantic realist fiction seen in Spanish literature and its European equivalents. This creates a new history of influences that include such writers as Miguel de Saavedra Cervantes and Franz Kafka (Bowers 16-7).

Flores pinpoints the development of magical realism to the 1935 publication of Jorge Luis Borges’ collection of short stories titled, *Historia universal de la infamia* [*A Universal History of Infamy*] (Bowers 17). Flores believes that magical realism stems from the realistic writings of pre-World War I. He discusses the influence of Franz

Kafka on Borges' ideas and writings. Kafka's mixing of dream and reality helped create the magical realism fusion of realism and fantasy (Flores 111-13). What Borges develops from Kafka's writing is a mixture of European and Latin American ideas: "[Borges] is often seen as the predecessor of current-day magical realists, gleaning influences from both European and Latin American cultural movements. The mixture of cultural influences has remained a key aspect of magical realist writing" (Bowers 18).

Flores' magical realism is different than the contemporary application of the term. Flores' magical realism has five characteristics: 1.) time exists in a timeless mercurial state and the marvelous happens as part of reality. 2.) magical realism clings to reality in order to prevent the authors' tales from becoming supernatural. 3.) the narrative takes place in a well-prepared fashion, which leads the reader to a place of confusion and ambiguity. 4.) the writings often dehumanize. 5.) the style of magical realist writing is a well-knit display of the structural understanding of writing (Flores 115-16). Although the characteristics Flores describes are similar to the contemporary use of the term, he is not noted for the "creation" of the idea, but instead he is important for his revival of the mode:

Following the publication of Flores' essay there was renewed interest in Latin America in Carpentier and his form of marvelous realism. The combination of these influences led to the second wave of magic(al) realist writing which is best known as "magical realism" but which is not directly associated with the definition of the term as outlined by Angel Flores except that it does combine elements of both marvelous realism and magic realism. (Bowers 18)

As Bowers states, Flores had an impact on reviving discussion of Carpentier and Roh. Similar to the contemporary idea of the term, Flores combines the idea of magic realism and marvelous real. Flores believes magical realism belongs strictly to Latin America at the same time he discusses the European influences and magical realist writings of Kafka. The obvious contradiction of his ideas should be noted:

If magical realism is described as imaginative and innovative fiction that has assimilated the most modern narrative and stylistic techniques, and can be found in Kafka as well as Borges, it cannot be “genuinely Latin American” or the “authentic expression” of the continent.[...] What we see in Flores’ final lines is what I call a territorialization of the imaginary. A particular manifestation of international avant-garde fiction is ascribed to a particular continent in an act of appropriation that is not adequately justified in the argumentation of the essay [Flores’ essay]. (Chanady, “Territorialization” 131).

In the process of doing what Carpentier sought to do (claim magical realism as a Latin American idea) Flores also places the idea outside itself; he deconstructs his own claim. While Flores’ contribution was only brief and limited, he did have a hand in bringing the discussion of the mode back into circulation; from this revival, the new wave of magical realist authors, Gabriel García Márquez being the most famous, redefined the term once again. The characteristics of this “new” magical realism, which is something I will discuss later in this chapter, is what I will be referring to when I mention “magical realism.”

Magical realism's most noticeable difference from Carpentier and Flores' ideas is that it is a mode that cannot be "territorialized" by one continent. The belief in such, not only forgets the strong European influences of its history, but also fails to consider, as Chanady states, that a mode is a fictitious world that belongs to several different locations and periods of literature ("Chapter One" 2). Although the mercurial nature of magical realism causes problems for the application of the term, it is this characteristic that makes it different from Flores' and Carpentier's ideas and places it outside (as well as within) Latin American.

Magical realism also differs from Roh in the application of the idea of "magic." Roh believed that the magic refers to the mystery of life; it stemmed from the distortion of everyday reality. Magical realism defines magic as anything that refers to extraordinary occurrences that cannot be accounted for through rational science (Bowers 20). Further, magical realism does not attempt to dispel the magic, but presents it in a matter-of-fact way. Magical realism does not distance magic from reality by pointing out the difference, but instead it makes magic *part* of reality.

The history of magical realism can be explored and dissected at greater depth than I have provided here. I have provided a brief outline of the history of the term in order to demonstrate the intricate nature of the term itself. It is important to remember that there is a difference between applications of the term that needs to be taken into consideration. For the remainder of this thesis, I will be focusing on the contemporary idea of magical realism.

Characteristics of Magical Realism

Providing a comprehensive definition of magical realism is almost as hard as providing a history of the term. The characteristics of magical realism often find themselves encroaching on the borders of other literary terms and genres. This, mixed with the complicated history of the term, has led to confusion of what magical realism means. Once magical realism has been made distinct from similar genres and terms, I will discuss the specific characteristics seen in magical realism, using Wendy Faris' five characteristics of magical realism as an outline.

The most obvious place to start in distinguishing magical realism from related genres and terms is to go back to the history of the term. Roh and Carpentier saw the need to distinguish magic realism and the marvelous real from the surrealist movement. Surrealism is a term that is often confused for magical realism because the two ideas share similar goals: "Although there are debates about what surrealism means, it is often confused with magical realism as it explores the non-pragmatic, non-realist aspects of human existence" (Bowers 23). Similar to the idea of the surrealists, magical realism attempts to write against a "realistic" depiction of life. Both styles attempt to capture the parts of reality that are un-explainable.

While the two terms share similar ideas, surrealism and magical realism have different ways to present magic. In surrealist works, the magical elements come from the depiction of dream in reality; it explores the imagination and the mind. This creates a "artificial" example of magic: "While magical realism is based on an ordered, even if irrational, perspective, surrealism brings about "artificial" combinations" (Bowers 21). Unlike the surrealists, magical realism rarely situates magic in the realm of the

imagination because the imagination is something that cannot be completely known: “The extraordinary in magical realism is rarely presented in the form of dream or a psychological experience because to do so takes the magic out of recognizable material reality and places it into the little understood world of the imagination” (Bowers 24). Magical realism works off the presentation and acceptance of magic in a “recognizable material reality.” Because magical realism relies on the realistic depiction of magic, placing the magic in the frame of the imagination would create a separate world of the magic. This would destroy the balance magical realism creates between what is real and what is magic.

Maggie Bowers believes a similar problem is seen with accepting magical realist works as being allegorical. Allegory works off the association that there is a second meaning to the text. The plot and structure of the story is second to the reader’s interpretation of the underlying purpose of the allegory (Bowers 27). In this sense, the plot of the story is a façade for what the author is really trying to say. Underneath all the decorations of language hides a purpose. This aim of allegorical writing complicates the “truth” of magic in magical realist texts. If the story is created as a frame for allegory, then the presentation of the magic as part of the real is artificial. Because magical realism works off the reader’s acceptance of the magical and realistic elements of the story, allegory undermines the presentation of a dual world (Bowers 27). That is not to say that allegory cannot be incorporated into magical realist stories. As Maggie Bowers points out with Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, allegory and magical realism can coexist. She believes that for the narrator of *Midnight’s Children*, the simple act of turning back in time and telling the story is magical in itself. In this sense, the magical aspects are

essential to the plot and the allegory (Bowers 28). If allegory is present in magical realism, it cannot destroy the realness of the magic; the plot cannot be undermined by the presence of a second meaning. The magical elements of the novel must interact with the allegorical elements and the plot to create a balance between the three. In other words, the reader should be able to accept the magic elements as a real depiction of life while also accepting that the story presents an allegorical meaning.

The fantastic is another term that is commonly associated and interchanged for magical realism. Bowers points this out when she says, "It is often erroneously assumed that magic realism and magical realism are forms of fantastical writing. When critics discuss magical realist novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in terms of the fantastic, their approach to these texts provides them with very different interpretations to those by magical realist critics" (25). The fantastic works to point out the magic as something different from the reality. In doing so, it draws attention to the presence of something extraordinary in a realistic novel; it distances the two. On the other hand, magical realism accepts the extraordinary as an occurrence of everyday reality. Amaryll Chanady calls this difference resolved versus unresolved antinomy. She believes that the presence of two conflicting codes presents an unresolved tension in the fantastic. In the fantastic, the real and the magic are both present and always separate. Thus, the two create an unresolved tension. In a magical realist text, however, the tension between real and magic is felt, yet never separated as different "presences" in the fictional reality. The author stays balanced between magic and real and the characters and reader accept the magic as part of the fictional reality; magical realism blends the real and magic and resolves the tension:

Authorial reticence plays an essential role in each of these two modes, but it fulfils a different function in both cases. While it creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation in the fantastic, it facilitates acceptance in magical realism. In the one, it makes the mysterious more unacceptable, and in the other, it integrates the supernatural into the code of the natural, which must redefine its borders. In magical realism, the mere act of explaining the supernatural would eliminate its position of equivalence with respect to our conventional view of reality. (“Chapter One” 30)

It is this blending of the magic with the real that distinguishes magical realism from the fantastic as well as most other terms or genres. Although a text can incorporate magically real moments, unless the text accepts the magical events as part of everyday reality, the text cannot be called magical realism.

Like understanding the difference between the application of magic realism, the marvelous real, and magical realism, understanding what modes/genres magical realism differ from is essential in understanding magical realism as a literary mode. By providing a limitation for the term and eliminating the contexts in which magical realism can be incorrectly used, an understanding of what magical realism means can be obtained. The term must have limitations in order to keep it from containing endless variations. If the term contains boundless variations, the definition of magical realism has no validity. In other words, if it is everything at once, it can never be a distinct mode.

Yet, magical realism is a distinct mode, with a set of distinct characteristics. As magical realism critic Wendy Faris points out, there are five characteristics of magical

realism. The first characteristic of magical realism Faris discusses is called “the irreducible element of magic.” Faris defines the irreducible element as something we cannot explain by the logical rules of the universe (Faris 7). The element of magic does not settle questions between what is real and what is magical. Instead, the magical becomes integrated into everyday life. Faris points out that the authors of magical realist texts present the irreducible element of magic the same way they depict the realistic descriptions of the texts. The descriptions of magic and real are treated similarly and preserve the everyday reality of magic (7). In *Fire and Hemlock*, the presence of a trash monster is something that is very real, yet unmistakably magical; it is something that is accepted but not explained. Part of this acceptance comes from the description of the two incidents. Diana Wynne Jones describes the blowing trash (the real) in the same manner she describes the monster (the magical): “The rubbish pounced and pattered behind them in the wind. Almost like little creatures running after us, Polly thought in a dreamlike way” (Jones 251). The description of the trash blowing in the wind is something that can be related to everyday life. It is described in a way a reader can visualize the incident. Similarly, the formation of the trash into a monster is treated with the same straight-faced description: “In the middle of the dark little street, the pattering rubbish was slowly piling upon itself, floating slowly and deliberately into a nightmare shape” (Jones 251). In both cases, the presence of the trash is treated with realistic integrity. Jones does not present one as more real as the other, but places the descriptions in similar styles. In both instances, the trash is personified and has life-like qualities. In the first (the real description of trash), the life of the trash is a result of the blowing wind. In the second (the magic), the life comes from the creation of the monster.

The irreducible element of magic is incorporated into the novel in a way that does not need commenting on. The narrator and characters accept the presentation as part of reality and refrain from the need to distinguish between the two (Faris 8). Amaryll Chanady believes, “What the magical realist [author] does, on the other hand, is to present a world view that is radically different from ours [yet] as equally valid. He [the author] neither censures nor shows surprise” (“Chapter One” 30). Chanady’s description of authorial reticence demonstrates the need for an author to refrain from commenting on the existence of the irreducible element: “the magic in these texts refuses to be entirely assimilated into their realism; it does not brutally shock but neither does it melt away, so that it is like a grain of sand in the oyster of that realism (Faris 8-9). By doing this, neither the magic nor the real are favored; the presence of both exists in a variation of degrees. The text is magical at the same time it is realistic; it is not one or the other.

By presenting two codes of reality (one magical and the other “real”), the irreducible element of magic often distorts the logical interaction of cause and effect (Faris 10). In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Melquiades’ manuscript turns out to be the story the reader is reading; it is both a recording and a prediction of incidents (Faris 10). The relationship between the orders of the events becomes dysfunctional; the writing of the manuscript happened before the reading of the manuscript, yet the text seems to be recording as the reader is reading. Similarly, in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, Tayo witnesses his Uncle die in the Philippine jungles. Although his Uncle is back in America, the reader later finds out Tayo’s Uncle did die. It is unknown whether Tayo’s vision of his Uncle’s death is the cause or effect of his dying.

Fittingly enough, the real often becomes ridiculous and the marvelous becomes mundane (Faris 11). In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the characters accept the magical presence of the gypsies, the drought of amnesia, the years of flooding, yet they are horrified and frightened by the presence of movies and the railroad. The irreducible element of magic becomes such a part of the reality that reality becomes just as amazing. The amalgamation of the real and the magic distorts the perception of reality and magic, creating a new perception.

The irreducible element of magic further blurs the distinction between the two by pointing out the magic of the ordinary. Wendy Fairs points out, "In magical realism, reality's outrageousness is often underscored because ordinary people react to magical events in recognizable and sometimes also in disturbing ways, a circumstance that normalizes the magical event but also defamiliarizes, underlines, or critiques extraordinary aspects of the real" (13). In Joanne Harris' *Chocolat*, Vianne Rocher has the ability to see the inner desires of her customers and produce chocolate that fulfills their desire. This is magical. Yet, the result of her chocolate's allure on the local priest and his decadent act of devouring and covering himself in the chocolate is real and shows the inner anguish of repressed desire:

It is like one of my dreams. I roll in chocolates. I imagine myself in a field of chocolates, on a beach of chocolates, basking-rooting-gorging. I have no time to read the labels; I cram chocolates into my mouth at random. ...I can hear myself making sounds as I eat, moaning, keening sounds of ecstasy and despair, as if the pig within has finally found a voice. *He is risen!* The sound of the bells jangles me out of my

enchantment... In five minutes the early worshipers will begin to arrive at mass. Already I must have been missed. I grab my cudgel with fingers slimed with melted chocolate. Suddenly I know where she keeps her stock. The old cellar, cool and dry, where flour sacks were once kept. I can get there. I know I can. *He is risen!* I turn, holding my cudgel, desperate for time, time..." (Harris 299-300)

In this case, magic serves as a cause for commentary on religion. Harris attacks the suppression of desire and pleasure associated with priesthood. In this sense, the magic grows out of the emotion (real); the magic emerges from the need to express desire. Yet, the magic is not treated as different from the real; the narrator distances himself from commenting on the validity. In doing this, the extraordinary action of the incident is seen in the Priest's consumption of desire (the real) and not Vianne's ability to produce that desire in chocolate.

The second characteristic Faris attributes to magical realism is that "its descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world" (Faris 14). This characteristic of magical realism accounts for the realistic qualities of the story. The story does not abandon the techniques of realistic fiction, but instead uses them to depict a world that is familiar to the reader (Faris 14). Through the use of detail, the authors create a novel that is situated in the real. Although the novels ground themselves in the reality, they also include the presence of another reality. This is the magical. Besides the inclusion of an irreducible element of magic, magical realist authors include magical details. In doing so, magical realism blends the real and the magical. In the article "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism," Rawdon Wilson presents a

parable about two brothers. One of the brothers represents fantasy while the second brother represents magical realism. Although the brothers have a similar and fantastic understanding of the world, they each describe the world in their own way:

In the second brother's narratives [magical realism] there were no single axioms from which everything descended, or from which the world hung, but there were instead two codes that were interwound, twisted in a grip closer than blood and mind, in a tight choreography of antithesis... In the second brother's imagined narratives, the possibilities of the two worlds were always copresent, their codes lovingly interwound, and clung fiercely to each other. (Wilson 212)

Wilson describes this process as a kind of dance; the elements of the real cling to the elements of magic to create this singular movement of a mixed reality. By posing two methods of thinking together, magical realist authors are able to use the techniques of realist fiction while also departing from mimesis. In magical realist texts, the magic grows from the real; it shows that the magic is part of the real but hidden, moving slowly behind the real.

One example of the mixing of magic and real is the way the authors situate their novels in a specific time and place (Faris 15). The opening of *Chocolat* tells the reader it is February 11th, on the winds of the carnival, when Vianne Rocher walks into the French town of Lansquenet. Similarly, Silko situates her novel *Ceremony* after World War II. The authors ground the stories in reality in order to give the novel a realistic appeal. This idea is further demonstrated by the inclusion of history and myth: "If we focus on reference rather than on description, we may witness idiosyncratic recreations of

historical events, but events grounded firmly in historical realities, often alternate versions of officially sanctioned accounts” (Faris 15). Magical realist writers often place the story in a historical context, giving the novel a feeling of realistic fidelity. From this realistic fidelity, the authors recreate historical versions of the “truth” and give the reader an alternate version—this is an idea we will look at with more detail in chapter three.

What is important to remember is that the rewriting of a John Wayne movie in *Green Grass, Running Water* places the story in a historical (or textual) context, while also creating a fictional recreation of the event. It intensifies the “dance” of the real and the magical by distorting the historical reality it is using. The elders distort the original ending of the movie (that John Wayne wins the battle), making the ending alien to the reader. Yet, it is a “re-creation” that is grounded in the reality of the novel; the act of changing the ending does not upset the novel’s presentation of reality.

Faris’ third characteristic of magical realism is the presence of unsettling doubts. The reader hesitates between the acceptance of the magical presence and the dismissal of the magic as dream or imagination (Faris, *Ordinary* 17). This is a particularly difficult characteristic to define because accepting the magic is an integral part of magical realism. Amaryll Chanady believes that the reader is presented two conflicting codes of reality. Instead of dismissing the antinomy between the two codes, the author promotes the validity of the magic and resolves the reader’s tension between the presence of two codes; it combines them into one new reality (“Chapter One” 30). The reader hesitates because the events are told in such a way that they could be true.

The hesitation occurs partly because the reader notices that the events described are contrary to logical ideas. The magic is irrational and can be easily dismissed as such.

Yet the author must present the story with an awareness of logical codes—which is one reason magical realism is placed in realistic settings—in order to demonstrate that the author understands the difference between logic and irrational thought. Through this authorial demonstration, the unsettling doubts are minimized (Chanady, “Chapter One” 25). For example, Polly’s creation of Thomas Piper Hardware in the town of Stow-on-the-Water is an irrational element of magic. In other words, she created the fictional idea of the town with Mr. Lynn before she realized the town and hardware shop existed. Yet Leslie, another creation of Polly’s story really does exist. Furthermore, he moves from Stow-on-the-Water and re-locates to Middleton, where Polly interacts with him outside the created Stow-on-the-Water. When the reader first experiences the presence of a town Polly imagined in her “hero games” with Mr. Lynn, the reader might hesitate between accepting the town as real and dismissing the presentation as irrational. Yet, when Leslie moves away from Stow-on-the-Water, and interacts with the people in the realistic setting of Middleton, the town becomes obviously real and moves outside itself. Jones presents a logical demonstration of the realness of Leslie; he no longer exists only in Stow-on-the-Water (a town that was created by Polly and Tom), but he emerges into Middleton. Magical realism settles the unsettling doubt by making the magic valid through logic.

Faris’ fourth characteristic of magical realism is the “closeness or near merging of two realms, two worlds” (21). Amaryll Chanady believes that magical realism is characterized by the presence of conflicting, but individually coherent, perspectives. One perspective is based on a rational view of reality and the other accepts the supernatural as part of reality (“Chapter One” 21-2). These two perspectives represent the two worlds

Faris discusses. In order for these conflicting views to intersect, a third space must be created.

In *Fire and Hemlock* there is literally a third space created: Nowhere. This “nowhere” is not a separate sphere of existence, however: “She [Polly] found her mind dwelling on Nowhere, as she and Tom used to imagine it. You slipped between Here and Now to the hidden Now and Here—as Laurel had once told another Tom, there was a bonny path in the middle—but you did not necessarily leave the world” (Jones 405). The near merging of realism might make it appear as if the magic is from another world or explained away. But, as a reader sees at the start of *Fire and Hemlock*, when Tom turns the vases to read several different messages, the realization of Nowhere really depends on perception; the vases can read “where now” or “now here,” despite the fact they individually say, “nowhere.”

Fire and Hemlock shares a similar view of magic with Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*. The presence of magic and magical events is attributed and resolved to one person—in this sense, magic is almost pushed out of reality and into fantasy. Yet, the magic the person commits—in Bulgakov’s novel it is Satan and in Jones’ novel it is Laurel—the instance where magic does happen, belongs to this world—or the fictional reality of the text. Although we know how Thomas Piper Hardware came into existence—through the “gift” of truth Laurel gives Tom—we cannot explain the strong connection Edna, Piper, and Leslie have to reality. Piper is Tom’s brother who traded Tom to Laurel for his own freedom. In this sense, Piper existed before Tom created him; it is as if Piper existed all along. In this light, *Fire and Hemlock* creates an enigma; in true magical realist fashion, the magic is such a part of the everyday reality

that it cannot be separated, leaving the reader with the question, “which came first, the magic or the real?” Yet, it does not matter because they are one and the same, intertwined in a dance, both distinctly unique, but connected at a “third space” where there is room for a new reality.

This third space represents what cannot be accepted in one or the other; the polar opposition and intermingling of magic and real creates a new literary space that is a compromise between the polarity of real and magic, a place where the two realms are able to mingle as one and create infinite possibilities. The third space is neither magical nor real, but a hybrid of the two. Faris uses the metaphor of a double-sided mirror to describe the idea. On one side of the mirror there is the magic and on the other side there is the real. In the case of magical realism, the mirror reflects in both directions. Therefore, the third space created by the near merging or closeness of the two realms would be the point where the reflection expands in both directions; it is the area where both worlds intersect:

Magical realism strives, with greater or lesser success, to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death. Capturing such boundaries between spaces is to exist in a third space, in the fertile interstices between these extremes of time and space. (Cooper 1)

As Brenda Cooper points out, magical realism’s attempt to unify oppositions creates a realm where the capturing of such oppositions is possible. Wendy Faris expands on the idea of merging oppositions by stating, “In terms of cultural history, magical realism

often merges ancient or traditional—sometimes indigenous—and modern worlds. Ontologically, within the texts, it integrates the magical and the material. Generically, it combines realism and the fantastic” (21). Magical realism does not just function to merge magic and realism. Instead, it creates a series of oppositions that connect in a third space where the intersection of opposition exists. It is this ability of merging realms, of capturing infinite possibilities by connecting contradictory ideas, which will be explored in more detail as my thesis continues.

The fifth characteristic Faris attributes to magical realism is that the fictions often work to disturb “notions of time, space, and identity” (23). Magical realism distorts the notion of time by constantly playing with what time means. Faris points out the distortion of time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, towns get rained on for years. Memory is tampered with and distorted so that all that is remembered is forgotten and seems like the re-telling of the past. Women live well over a hundred years and time repeats itself through each generation. In *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly and Tom create Thomas Piper, who, before Tom and Polly created him, traded his freedom from Laurel for Tom’s life.

Similarly, the identification of space is encroached on. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, characters mix and interact between the oral creation story being told and the textual story of Lionel. This “mixing” creates a breakdown in boundaries. Jones also disrupts space in her novel *Fire and Hemlock*. In *Fire and Hemlock*, space is disrupted when Mr. Leroy is able to find Polly wherever she goes. No matter where she is, Mr. Leroy can find her. This draws upon the security of enclosure. A person feels secure that he has a boundary of his own. If space has no boundaries or limits that prohibit it from

being encroached on, then there really is no personal space. The disruption of space points out that realms (the oral story or Polly's security) cannot be separated from the world into individual space. This is an idea that is seen in magical realism in many ways. Most obviously, the realm of magic and real, although they might appear as separate spaces, cannot be separated; magic encroaches on the real.

Magical realism also distorts the notion of identity. In *Green Grass, Running Water* and *Ceremony*, identity is fragmented and the characters are balanced between Western ideas and Native American heritage. In *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly's identity is fragmented between being a hero (male) or a young girl. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, identity is literally traded between the twins. A similar distortion of identity is seen in *Green Grass, Running Water*. The four elders change their names to Robinson Crusoe, Hawkeye, Ishmael, and the Lone Ranger. Furthermore, they change their sex from female to male (or at least make themselves appear male). Magical realism allows the characters to change names, sex, and heritage. This all points out the fluid nature of identity. The magic questions the characters' perceptions of their own selves; it asks them to look inwards while it also plays with the notion of identity outwards.

A reader should take particular notice of the fragmentation of identity because critics like Brenda Cooper often call magical realism a hybrid type of writing. Maggie Bowers points out that this is a problem associated with magical realism; that it often relies on the knowledge of Western culture in order to incorporate a "native discourse." Because magical realism distorts the heritage it seeks to display—by mixing it with dominant culture—the writers reinforce colonial attitudes. Instead of dismissing Western culture, magical realist writers sympathize with it (Bowers 124-25). Despite the fact that

the mode often incorporates a “dominant” culture’s viewpoint, the hybridity the mode creates allows for a “third space” that changes the unified understanding of a dominant culture. Although magical realism might work to deconstruct itself, in the sense it fragments, distorts, and makes fun of the very cultural identification it works to show, the deconstruction is not without purpose; by doing so, magical realist texts demonstrate the problems of culture. Culture is diluted, a watery mixture of impurity. Because the authors of magical realist texts (Rushdie, Márquez, Silko, and King to name a few) are often struggling to remember their ancient heritage while living in a world of Western ideals, the fragmented nature of Western and Native culture is seen in the texts. In doing so, magical realism creates a new type of seeing. It is a hybrid, where Western ideas are depicted, then distorted, and then mixed with cultural heritage to emerge with a new creation of culture.

Just as I felt the need to distance magical realism from surrealism, allegory, and fantasy, I feel equally compelled to discuss the similarities magical realism has to postcolonial and postmodern literature. Postcolonial writers like Rushdie, Márquez, and Silko use magical realism because the characteristics of the mode allow for the postcolonial discussion:

First, due to its dual narrative structure, magical realism is able to present the postcolonial context from both the colonized peoples’ and the colonizers’ perspectives through its narrative structure as well as its themes. Second, it is able to produce a text which reveals the tensions and gaps of representation in such a context. Third, it provides a means to fill in the gaps of cultural representation in a postcolonial context by

recuperating the fragments and voices of forgotten or subsumed histories from the point of view of the colonized. (Bowers 97)

As Bowers points out, magical realism allows authors a way to discuss the distorted sense of identity felt within a colonized community; it is a tension between the colonizers' culture and the heritage that belongs to the colonized. The mode is particularly useful for demonstrating the boundaries of opposition set up by Western culture and then breaking these boundaries down. It is a subversive form of writing that allows the authors to present an alternative form of discussion.

For similar reasons, the mode is a useful tool to postmodern literature: "All these writers [Rushdie, Márquez, and Morrison] 'wage war on totality' by using magical realist devices to disrupt fixed categories of truth, reality, and history. Their multiple-perspectived texts and the disruption of categories creates a space beyond authorities' discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed" (Bowers 82). Magical realism offers postmodern writers a sphere of discourse where fixed categories are not only broken, but also distorted into one another. The use of metafictional story telling, disruption of categories, and breaking down of truth, reality, and history are important qualities of magical realism.

One should keep in mind, along with the characteristics of magical realism I have discussed, that magical realism, like surrealism, is reacting to the dominant position of realism. Realism comes from Aristotle's idea of mimesis. Mimesis is used to classify the fidelity with which art depicts life. Realism relies on a "truthful" demonstration of the quality of reality. Instead of using only realist techniques, magical realism combines fantasy with realism. In doing so, magical realism creates a new way of seeing: "The

plots of these [magical realist] fictions deal with issues of borders, change, mixing and synchronizing. And they do so, and this point is critical, in order to expose what they see as a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view” (Cooper 32). It is important to keep in mind that magical realism does not dismiss the presence of magic. As discussed throughout this chapter, it is this characteristic that distinguishes it from many other terms and genres. Instead, magical realism creates a third space where fiction can account for the un-explainable nature of reality.

This working outside realist techniques while also belonging to the logical codes of realist fiction is a characteristic that makes magical realism very post-modern:

Magical realist writing achieves this end [dis-placing discourse] by first appropriating the techniques of the ‘centr’-al line and then using these, not as in the case of these central movements, ‘realistically,’ that is, to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this ‘reality’ depends upon. (D’haen 195)

At the same time it is creating a “corrected reality,” magical realism is binding itself to this reality. By placing the novels in a realistic reality and then distorting reality with magic (and this magic is accepted as part of reality), magical realism is able to subvert realist fiction.

One of the most prominent ways magical realism subverts realist fiction is by including oral techniques in the novels. Instead of relying strictly on the tools of realism, magical realism incorporates the forgotten, primitive tools of orality. In doing so,

magical realism creates another opposition of contraries; orality and literacy represent two ways of thinking. I am not saying that magical realism creates an oral literature. Instead, I am suggesting that magical realism incorporates oral *techniques*. Bowers points out that many post-colonial texts use oral techniques as a way of looking at history from an alternate perspective. Oral voice provides a way of exploring alternate forms of history that do not agree with written doctrine (Bowers 99). Through the use of oral techniques, magical realism is able to subvert the notion of realist fiction. The following chapters will explore two different oral techniques used by magical realist writers that work against the prior understanding of how realist fiction functions.

CHAPTER 3

WORD PLAY AND PLAY WORDS

THE POWER OF STORY: TEXTUALIZATION

IN MAGICAL REALISM

“The truth about stories is that that’s all we are”

-Thomas King (*Truth 2*)

Stories have the ability to move us to grief, happiness, or despair. I do not know why stories have such a resounding effect on our emotions; it is as if the pain, pleasure, or moments we read about emerge from the text and enter our own world. We grow attached to the fictional characters we read about, almost as if we forget they are fiction. But stories have that ability, the ability to jump right out of the pages of the novel and enter our own hearts and minds. We might even forget the stories. I have trouble reciting all the parables I read as a youth, stories that told me how I should act. Yet, I know those stories are in the back of my mind, anchored to my memory. That is another power of stories; even if we forget these stories, they somehow find a place deep in the back of our mind, always there to help us make a decision.

We are raised on stories; generations of handed down tales about our family: romantic stories about how our parents met and stories of survival and relocation. How many times have we heard the “I used to walk five miles in the snow” from our grandparents? We also have stories all our own. Stories we tell about ourselves shape how others see us: moments of failure, greatness, and all the in-betweens. These stories also shape our own behavior; we learn from them and adapt. Yet, a story does not have to be about us for us to use it; it can be a story we have heard about other people. Once stories are told, we store them in our mind and use them to create perception.

We are all *types* of stories: oral stories, realistic stories, fantastic stories. Yet, not all stories interact with the receiver the same way. Some stories have a life of their own, a playground of words where they actively shift and create. In these stories, words literally play to create movement. Although they are play words, in the sense they are created from the imagination of the author, they have a moving, active life. There are no boundaries for this interaction.

A magical realist novel is this type of story. Unlike realist fiction, which is bound to a realistic interpretation of life, magical realism is able to move. It is able to bridge gaps between two worlds and, in this sense, jump back and forth between the two. In magical realism texts, words have power. It is this characteristic that links magical realism to oral storytelling: “Neither is it surprising that oral people commonly, and probably universally, consider words to have great power [...] The fact that oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven” (Ong 32). One cannot ignore the power words have

in magical realist fiction. They have the ability to *create* magic and story all their own. It is the act of telling a story that is magical. The stories create stories about stories, which are changed and manipulated into completely new stories; the recreation of story is a multi-layered display of the power of words. In doing so, magical realism is able to present fiction at the same time it is showing the *realness* of story. This positions fiction and truth along a degree plane; the story reminds the reader it is fiction at the same time it claims stories have power to create. The distinction between fiction and reality is blurred; mimesis is pitted against and intertwined with the realness of fiction. The reader does not know which one is more real, the reality depicted or the story(s) created from the story(s). This shows a new perception of the power of story, demonstrating that as King says, that's all we are.

Magical realist texts use a large amount of word play. The word play in magical realist novels is different from cleverly using words to create funny alternatives. What I mean by word play is that the words in magical realist novels literally play; they move and bounce around the margins of the pages and create a show of their own power. Scott Simpkins believes that magical realism uses magic in a self-conscious display to bridge the gaps between the ideal and the achievable. Although Simpkins sees this as a flaw of magical realism, he is quick to point out that the mode overcomes this flaw by using what I call word play. By commenting on its own imperfections while also presenting itself through story—in a sense, magical realism comments on its own storytelling—magical realism reflects on its shortcomings and generates a discussion about its own undefined modality (Simpkins 156). I do not know if I would completely subscribe to Simpkins' assertion that magical realism presents magic in a self-conscious display because the

mode relies on an acceptance of the magic; the reader does not see the magic any differently than the real. Whatever the case, Simpkins presents an interesting idea of what word play does in magical realist novels. By bringing attention to the critical act of writing, magical realism is able to discuss itself while it is also presenting the story; I would think this is magically real in itself. The process becomes a metafictional display of how storytelling functions.

In this metafictional display of the function of storytelling, magical realism takes power away from the author and places it in the language. Roland Barthes discusses the issue of authorial power in his essay “The Death of the Author.” Barthes believes that, “it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonally (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’” (Barthes 143). One cannot deny that language acts in a magical realist novel. The novels seem to embody this understanding of language and play with Barthes’ understanding of story. The author gives the power to the language, diminishes his/her own role in the text, and allows for a place where the power of language is displayed, understood, and real: “For him [the modern scriptor], on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins” (Barthes 146). Magical realist authors do not undermine the power of story (language), but instead show an understanding of how language reacts and creates something in and of itself—language, once written, no longer

belongs to the author, but belongs to itself. Language is real, powerful, and has a profound ability to shape a reader's understanding of reality.

Language is often the ultimate voice in a magical realist novel. The power of language is displayed and highlighted through what Jon Thiem in his essay "Textualization of the Reader" calls "textualization." For Thiem, there are two types of textualization. The first type of textualization is when a reader, author, or moderator is physically (and magically) transported into the fictional space of the novel. The second type is when the world of text protrudes from its fictional space and enters into the world of the reader (235-36). The first type of textualization is similar to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* where the reader (Aureliano) becomes a character of the manuscript he is reading (the reader learns Melquiades' manuscript is the story Aureliano and he are reading). The second type of textualization is when a fictional character has a fictional world impose on his world. For instance, if a character were reading a novel about a killer at the same time a killer is walking right behind him, this would be an example of the second type of textualization (236-36).

Textualization can also be metafictional because it makes the reader conscious of the act of reading. Yet, this attention to the process of story does not ask the reader to dismiss texts as merely fiction; instead it asserts that the reading process involves total immersion: "A textualization is, in a sense, a magical literalization of a common metaphor used to describe one effect of reading, that is, 'total absorption' in the story" (Thiem 240). This is an important implication to keep in mind. Instead of using metafictional techniques to point out the fictional facade of the story, textualization works to reinforce the power of story. Textualization is about immersing oneself in a

story so much that the story becomes the reader's reality. Textualization takes seriously the question of how readers may form texts and how the texts might form readers (Thiem 240). There is interplay between author, character, and reader and the roles associated with each:

Through textualization, the fictional reader ceases to be a reader and becomes a character in the text. The reader magically transcends his or her status as passive epigone, breaking the iron law of temporal succession. [...] In the sequence author-text-reader, the textualized reader leaps back to the prior, more powerful, and less belated textual position. Furthermore, by thus changing the text the author has produced, the textualized reader encroaches on the authorial position and assumes to some extent the authorial function of producer of texts. The simplest way in which the reader changes the text is by appearing in it. (Thiem 242).

Through the involvement of the reader, the roles are handed back and forth like a game of hot potato. This "game" involves the reader in the process of writing. The reader's involvement in the process is what Thomas King is getting at when he says, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*The Truth 2*). We hear stories, learn from them, and then change them in order to adapt them to our lives; the reader is also the author in this light.

Textualization seems like a suitable practice of magical realist authors because it challenges the polar opposition of fiction and reality. By definition, something that is fiction is made up, somehow not suitable enough to be called "real"; something we can say was a great depiction of life, but not necessarily truthful to life. Realism clings to

reality, attempting to catch and store it in the pages of a book—a display in a museum that a viewer can look at and say, “ah, now there is a great picture of life.” Realist writing is an act of depicting life realistically while magical realism challenges what we view as realistic. This is where textualization fits so well with magical realism. Textualization allows for magical realist writers to display the power of stories. Not content with viewing fiction as something that is less than reality, magical realism creates a world where fiction is reality. The stories the characters read and orate cross the boundary between their realm and the world of the reader. This insinuates that stories have a real presence in all aspects of life; the story is not something a person can leave once he finishes the book.

Diana Wynne Jones is an author who allows stories to enter in the realm of fictional realism; in other words, the fictional stories created in the book enter the realistic world that depicts the reader’s reality. This presence of different stories creates multiple layers. Martha Hixon offers that Diana Wynne Jones’ *Fire and Hemlock* creates three levels of story: “the ordinary events of Polly’s childhood, the sphere of creative imagination, and the supernatural realm of myth and fairy tale” (97). One might look at these three spaces and see exactly what magical realism creates in the first place: the ordinary childhood of Polly is the real, the supernatural world of myth and fairy tale is the magical, and the sphere of creative imagination is the “third space” magical realism creates where the overlapping of magical events and mundane life intersect. The three levels of story, like magical realism, intersect and interact in a way in which the three cannot really be separated. Although there are three levels of story, there is really only one story.

Martha Hixon's assertion offers insight into what textualization can do to the presentation of a story. Because the novel is a story about a story, there is a clash of boundaries that can only be called, as Polly calls her third space, "nowhere." It seems fitting that along with Hixon's three levels of story in *Fire and Hemlock*, there are three levels of textualization. Levels might be the wrong word seeing as the three examples do not take place in different spheres or degrees of power. Nevertheless, I use "levels" because the textualization in *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates three different types of textualization. Each case piles on to the other and provides something new and different to the novel. The three cases are different in both presentation and in the purpose of textualization.

Fittingly enough, the first level of textualization is seen in the structure of the story. Memory can be a fleeting possession. At the time something is happening the feelings and emotions involved in the event are overpowering. Then as time goes on and the incident starts to fade, a person can lose touch with the smell, the feel, and the sounds he planned to remember forever. Memory is like that sometimes. Memory can also be very powerful. It can bring back all the angst and happiness past experiences have held. In the case of *Fire and Hemlock*, memory is a little bit of both; Polly forgets her past only to remember it in graphic detail. Through this reminiscing of Polly's past the first level of textualization emerges. At the start of the novel, the reader finds out that he is reading a story about Polly's childhood. With an almost eerie presence, Polly's memory becomes the narrator of the novel. I say her memory becomes the narrator because the story is first and foremost structured by Polly's memory. The novel starts with a look back, a reflective glance into Polly's childhood that the reader is allowed to see.

Polly has what she calls a double memory. On one side, she has the dull everyday memory she believes is her reality. Then she has the memory she has forgotten and is suddenly recalling; this set of memories is full of supernatural magic. The presence of a double memory is similar to the short story she is reading at the start of the novel: “Polly picked the book up, with her finger in it to keep the place in the story she was reading. ‘Two-timer,’ it was called, and it was about someone who went back in time to his own childhood and changed things, so that his life ran differently the second time. She remembered the ending now. The man finished by having two sets of memories, and the story wasn’t worked out at all well” (Jones 4). Like the character in the story, Polly tries to change her childhood. She does this by forgetting she is a child: “Day after that, Polly had seriously set herself to grow up. She had worked at it all the next year. Granny had been quite sympathetic, but just a little sharp about it, rather like she was over Sports Day. ‘Don’t wish your life away,’ she said. It became almost a motto of Granny’s. [...] Polly stirred uneasily again. Because, it seemed to her, she might have done precisely that” (Jones 287). Polly’s alteration of memory is different from the man’s in the short story because she does not go back in time. Instead, she tries to move to the future. One way she does this is by enacting what she knows of adult love. She takes on the adult role of love and tries to possess Mr. Lynn. Like her mother, Polly wants to find out every secret of Mr. Lynn’s. Polly performs a spell that allows her to see Mr. Lynn when Mr. Lynn does not want to be seen. After this act, Laurel erases Polly’s memory and Polly inherits her dual memory. Akiko Yamazaki points out that, ““As it is clear to Polly when she finally recovers her memory, it was not love but possessiveness that motivated her [to spy on Tom]” (Yamazaki 114). Conquered by the need to be an adult, and knowing only

possessive adult relationships, Polly loses her childhood memory by attempting to own Mr. Lynn.

Another similarity between Polly's life and the short story she is reading is that her second memory, like Ed's story, is not very well worked out. Although Polly discovers the memories she lost, she does not know why she lost them. Furthermore, she does not know if the memories she has are true. After she goes through her second set of memories, she knows for certain that the short story "Two-timer" that she is reading at the start of the novel was written by her friend, Ed. Yet, when she finishes her second set of memories, she looks at the book:

Four years later Polly sat on the edge of her bed and took a bewildered look at the book as it now seemed to be. Only the cover design was the same. The title was different, the stories were different, and the writers were six people Polly had never heard of [...] The only story which seemed to have been in both sets of memories was that one ['Two-timer']—She turned to the list of contents. 'Two-timer,' she read, by Ann Abraham. / Ann Abraham! / 'But that one was Ed's!' she cried out. 'I remember—or do I?' (Jones 322)

This example raises several different implications. For starters, stories have the ability to change. The collection of stories changes everything except the one short story "Two-timer." Because Polly is living the story, it cannot be changed; it is real. Yet, the authors of the story do change. Ann replaces Ed as the author of the story. Like Ann's/Ed's "Two-timer," Polly's story (her second set of memories), is not worked out. Polly does not know what to accept about her second set of memories. She also does not know why

she has them. The reader also finds out that the story “Two-timer” was written before Polly developed two sets of memories. In this sense, the story is a predictor of her future; it is thought up, written, and published before it comes true. This is an example of the second type of textualization where the story enters into the world of the character. Ed’s fictional story becomes Polly’s reality.

The manipulation of the collection of short stories and the textualization that emerges from Ed’s story “Two-timers” divulges the power stories have to re-create themselves as well as be created in real terms. It is the second set of memories, the set that represents and reflects the story written by Ed, which is magical; this magical presence enters the ordinary set of memories Polly has and changes the way she remembers. In this interaction of memory and text, Jones highlights the difference between the way oral stories and written stories are told. Oral stories are told from the recording of the mind, not the pen. In this light, *Fire and Hemlock* is told from an oral mindset as well as a textual mindset; it is a novel about the memory of Polly as well as a textual look at her reaction to regaining her memory. Through this interaction, Jones displays the power of memory. Memory is something that belongs to the person and, although it might be forgotten, it stays in that person’s mind, dormant and ready to be recalled. Despite the validity Jones gives to memory, she does not favor one mind set or the other. A reader should also keep in mind that Polly’s “stroll down memory lane” is initiated by written story: “And the texts have the power to trigger her memory and to guide her to the right place, where she finally meets Tom again” (Yamazaki 113-14). As Akiko Yamazaki points out, the stories have the power to provide remembrance; they can remind readers about their own history and things people want them to forget.

Jean-Pierre Durix comes to a similar conclusion when he discusses the amnesia evident in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Durix believes that the loss of memory highlights the struggle of a post-colonial writer: “This comic exaggeration [the amnesia] can also be taken as a metaphor of the role of the post-colonial writer who has to invent new ways of using language in order to offset the dangers of losing the memory of his roots and of being wholly absorbed in the ‘de-realizing’ colonial language” (Durix 124-25). Similar to the concept Durix discusses in Márquez’s magical realist writing, Jones uses memory as a metaphor as well. For her, it is about remembering childhood. Instigated by Mr. Lynn’s ex-wife Laurel, Polly forgets her real childhood. She is forced into the “adult-role” by her own desires, as well as by Laurel’s manipulation. In Jones’ novel, it is a struggle of losing the memory of childhood while also re-defining one’s self as an adult. In Polly’s attempt to re-invent herself, she forgets her own personal history. As Jones shows, forgetting one’s own history is a dangerous loss that almost costs Mr. Lynn’s life. Luckily for Polly, stories are able to provide a form of remembering that cannot be forgotten; although stories can be changed, they cannot be erased.

Language has that power to make us remember. It has the ability to display before the reader what should not be forgotten. Think of all the history books a person is forced to read as a child; they are written forms of language used to keep us remembering. Diana Wynne Jones is no stranger to displaying the power of language in her books. As Deborah Kaplan states,

In the books of Diana Wynne Jones, characters who are able to write or tell stories have immense power over their own lives and the lives of others. ... Sometimes the characters’ stories literally shape the world in

which they live. Using the techniques of metatexts and metafiction—texts about texts, fiction about fiction—Jones emphasizes the world-shaping power of language in her created worlds. (53)

In *Fire and Hemlock*, the power of language is seen in Polly and Mr. Lynn’s “hero games.” In these games, Polly and Tom think up adventures for the fictional heroes, Tan Coul and Hero. The bizarre result of these games is that the stories they create come true: “It begins as an ordinary child’s game, yet the game magically takes on a life of its own because of Laurel’s gift of ‘true speech’ to Tom, taken from the folk ballad ‘Thomas the Rhymer’” (Hixon 100). The fictional stories Tom and Polly create literally come to life and enter the ordinary, mundane life of Polly; they bring magic into her world. As Polly states at the start of the novel, “Pretending was like that. Things seemed to make themselves up, once you got going” (Jones 21). Things certainly make themselves up once Tom and Polly start telling stories. They create towns, like Stow-on-the-Water, and hero incidents, like a giant attacking the supermarket. The stories both enter the world of the authors (in this case Polly and Tom) at the same time Polly and Tom enter the world of their creation. Polly and Tom can enter the “created” town of Stow-on-the-Water at the same time the fictional Leslie and Thomas Piper can enter Polly’s town of Middleton. In this sense, the hero games are a mixture of the second and first type of textualization: the stories Tom and Polly create come to exist in their world at the same time Polly and Tom also enter the world of their own creations.

Yet, the power of language is not a stable environment. Stow-on-the-Water might be a fictional town created from Polly’s imagination, but it certainly becomes very real. Martha Hixon claims,

Other details of the Pretend game also become true over the course of the novel but are skewed slightly from the way that Tom and Polly had envisioned them, as if they have a mind and life of their own—which they actually do, since once established through the imaginative storytelling, these creations have an independent existence and interact with the rest of the story. (100)

The creations of Edna, Thomas Piper, and Leslie become part of the environment in such a way that the reader wonders if they existed all along. Thomas ends up being Mr. Lynn's older brother who traded Mr. Lynn to Laurel for his own freedom. As Hixon points out, this "fact" seems to appear out of nowhere and implies a movement back in time of the story, a recreation of the history of the novel (Hixon 102). Leslie also "recreates" the novel, but in a forward progression instead of a backward. Leslie leaves Stow-on-the-Water and enters Middleton where he attends school. He becomes a permanent fixture in the lives of Polly and her friends, as well as the next conquest for Laurel. His presence rewrites the future events that will take place. Although the reader knows that Polly and Tom created these people, as well as the town they came from, it is not certain the context they emerged from; in other words, the characters manipulate their own story and change it in a way that they solidify their own place in everyday reality. This demonstrates the independence stories have from their authors. Although the authors can create the texts, they cannot contain them. The power resides in language and as Barthes claims, "to write is...to reach that point where only language acts..." (Barthes 143).

The ability of the hero games to create real stories appears to come from a gift Laurel gave Tom that makes Tom say the truth. This “truth gift” means, “anything [Tom] made up would prove to be true, and then come back and hit him. [...] She [Polly] had become connected to the gift because she helped Mr. Lynn make up Tan Coul. And she rather thought that the gift had been intended to be conveyed through the pictures Tom had been allowed to take—shoddy, second-rate pictures, until Polly had stepped in there too and mixed the pictures up” (Jones 380). Tom uses his ability to create “truth” to his advantage. Through Polly’s help (with the initiation of the hero games and the switching of the paintings), Tom is able to distance himself from Laurel using his truth gift. Through story, Tom is able to gain freedom. Yet, the stories he creates are also “truths.” If Laurel has bestowed upon Tom the gift of always speaking the truth and, in turn, what he speaks would prove to be true, then the stories Polly and he create, the ones that become textualized through the hero games, would have to be the truth. In other words, if Tom’s truth ability manifests these works of imagination into existence, then the realm of the imagination must be true in the first place.

Whatever the case, the presence of internal authors (Tom and Polly) who are allowed to create stories at the same time the external author (Wynne Jones) creates them, points out the questionable quality of authorial claim. As we saw with the authorship of the short story “Two-timers,” authorial role can be hard to pinpoint. In the case of “Two-timers,” the author does not matter; the story stays the same either way and that is what spurs Polly’s memory, not the author. The story changing power of the “hero games” seems to call into question the process of writing; it is as if Diana Wynne Jones is singling herself out at the same time she is dismissing her role. Deborah Kaplan

discusses this issue when she states, “By giving power to the authors within her stories, Jones both reinforces her own power and gives some of it away. Confusion of authorship makes the storyteller more powerful, rather than less. The storyteller is a strong figure, telling a powerful story, with which the reader is compelled to believe and identify” (62). The story is powerful because it has a life of its own. It seems to develop its own frame of telling and makes the author an almost magical figure who is weaving a story into existence—*real* existence. Jean-Pierre Durix believes that metafiction in the hands of magical realist writers like Rushdie and Márquez deconstructs the reader’s accepted views of reality (130). In the case of Jones, she is both altering how a reader views the reality of the text and at the same time she is changing how the reader views the reality of stories. By questioning the author’s presence, or who is really writing the story, Jones is bringing attention to the idea that stories do not need authors to be created; they have a mind of their own that is fully real, inherently true, and completely independent from the author.

In the realm of Jones’ novel *Fire and Hemlock*, stories are reality. Jones uses the myth of Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin as a structural framework for her novel: “In both cases [*Watching the Roses* and *Fire and Hemlock*] the pre-texts are used as the framework of the stories, and each of the novels can be read as an attempt to tell a realistic version of the original tale by giving it a modern setting, details, and characters with psychological depth” (Yamazaki 108). Because the myth(s) are the framework for the story, they cross the boundaries of their own margins and enter into the realm of Polly’s reality. It turns out that Mr. Lynn is a mixture of both Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin; Polly sees more similarities between Thomas the Rhymer and Mr. Lynn,

however (380). Laurel is the fairy queen who “owns” both young men. In this light, the myth(s) that prelude each chapter (and are books Mr. Lynn has given Polly to read), are the reality in which Polly lives; the myths are real and enter her own world. This is an example of the first type of textualization.

Because the myth of Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin is true to the situation Polly finds herself in, she is able to use the books to her advantage: “The night it is good Hallowe’en / The fairy folk do ride, / And they that would their true-love win / At Miles Cross they must bide” (Jones 385). Through this “charm,” as Polly’s Grandma calls it, Polly is able to find Tom and Laurel. In this example, the text serves as a literal map for Polly that tells the time and place she must go to find Tom. This is not the only hint Polly gets from the texts; the myths are full of instructions, an idea Polly points out once she starts to really *read* the texts: “The instructions, once you began to see them as that, were very clear and detailed” (Jones 385). This textualization of myth into reality alludes to the truth behind the creation of stories. Although the stories might seem mystical and be termed “myth,” the stories have a relevance to the life a person lives. Once a person understands this and really reads the texts in this way, the stories have the ability to save—as is the case with Polly.

Once the myths and stories enter into Polly’s world, they become part of her reality, and tools she can use to develop her behavior. In the story of Tam, a brave young girl (Janet) kept Tam from being sacrificed to the fairy queen by simply hanging on to him. Although Polly admires this feat of bravery, her solution to saving Tom from Laurel is much different than Janet’s: “To love someone enough to let them go, you had to let them go forever or you did not love them that much” (Jones 418). For Polly, the

solution to saving Tom is finding the strength to let him go. She cannot simply hang on because that shows possession; she would be no better than Laurel if she claimed Tom as her own. Akiko Yamazaki believes that the books Tom sends her and the past experiences Polly recovers from her second set of memory are used to find a way to save Tom from Laurel. There are several different examples Yamazaki draws upon: In “East of the Sun and West of the Moon,” a book Polly was sent from Tom, the heroine’s curiosity causes her lover to vanish. Then there is also Polly’s mother, Ivy, who cannot keep a relationship because she tries to possess every part of her spouse. Then there is Laurel, who is the ultimate example of possessive love, who literally uses her lover for herself. This combined list of stories and true life leads Polly to a way she can save Tom from Laurel’s grasp: she must lose to win (Yamazaki 114). Unlike Janet, Polly must disown Tom; she must free herself from following the same mistakes of possession seen with Laurel and Ivy. At the same time stories are interacting with Polly’s world as truth, they, and the environment they enter, are informing Polly of the proper ways to love. Although the reader does not know if Polly’s story will have a happy ending, in the sense he does not know if Tom and Polly’s love will stay free of possession, there is hope that the stories she and Tom have read and lived will serve as a map to “somewhere”: a place where their love can exist.

In all three levels of textualization, stories are praised for their powerful qualities. They are magic in the hands of Diana Wynne Jones, never stagnant, never confined, and always interacting with the environment in a way that pronounces their own validity. Through books, Polly becomes more aware of reality: “it is not clear whether the escape [into books] is *from* reality or deeper *into* it. One of Jones’s characteristic moves is to

unpick habitual assumptions, to call into doubt our unthinking trust in the world available to the five senses and to reveal the truth to be a good deal more startling” (Butler 69). Stories have the power to do that, to challenge the assumptions the reader places in the interaction of fiction and reality. Through textualization, reality is distorted by the interchanging of fiction: “All these ambiguities invite the readers as well as Polly to think about many different things: human relationships, texts, and the way reality and fiction illuminate each other. The dynamic power of *Fire and Hemlock* does not work only for Polly, but reaches out of the text into the readers’ reality, cultivating an intertextual awareness” (Yamazaki 114). The power of stories is that they can change; they can bring themselves to life and, in doing so, bring to life issues of remembrance, those tib-bits of information that a person should not forget. Once created, these stories are on their own until they enter our life, at which time they become part of us, and as Polly does, we use them to form a way of seeing deeper into reality; words have the power to shape.

In Thomas King’s novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, textualization occurs, but with different implications and aims. Although the presence of textualization still points out the power of stories, King’s novel is more about breaking down boundaries; it is a crossing of borders where trespassing is glorified, subversive, and always tricky. King is able to demonstrate the power of stories to cross the border of their own creation, which in turn shows the flexibility of stories. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, stories are both powerful and meaningless. Of course this presents an interesting paradox that only a novel as border shattering as *Green Grass, Running Water* can explore.

Before I discuss the examples of textualization, it might be prudent to give the story some kind of form. In a story that is about breaking down boundaries, giving

structure is something that is hard to do. Nevertheless, Sharon M. Bailey points out that King gives the novel structure by including four variations of the Native American creation myth. Through this myth, the story develops two separate frames: one based on the retelling of the creation myth and the other on a realistic depiction of a Canadian Blackfoot reservation. Of course these two plots rarely keep to themselves and interact with each other in strange and powerful ways. In the first frame of the story, the creation myth is told four times: first from First Woman, then Changing Woman, then Thought Woman, and finally Old Woman. Each retelling of the creation myth involves an interaction with a character from the Bible and a character from Western literary tradition. Through these interactions each of the four creation figures receives a Western name that she adapts: their names become the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye. Each of the versions of the myth ends when the teller is arrested and put in Fort Marion.

Of course the structure I just provided for the novel is an oversimplification of the fluid movement the two stories take. They really cannot be separated from one another because they are part of the same story. If there is one gift the novel has, it is the ability to cross the borders that are set up by Western culture. The novel asserts its own Native claim and breaks down the borders that it never accepted: "As it works to reposition the spaces subjugated as a result of the boundary impositions, *Green Grass, Running Water* also exposes the political ramifications of the original constructions" (Walton 73). A large part of this "repositioning" takes place through the textualization between stories.

The two plots of the story can also be divided into storytellers and characters. The first "realm" of the story, the creation myth, is where the story is narrated. In this

realm of narration, there is not one person who tells the story, but multiple narrators: Coyote, the narrator, Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye. These characters either have a part in telling the story or belong to the realm where story is told. This multi-voiced narrative stresses the presence of many stories: “This sublimation of authority, which derives from the recognition that we live in a world made of stories, stories which compete with one another for our attention, also creates a space for an Indian voice, so that instead of ‘stories about Indians’ we can create an ‘Indian’s story’” (Wiget 261). King’s “Indian story” does not provide an “authentic,” unhampered mythology of the Native American people; the story is an amalgamation of many Native American stories in the presence of Western mythology. Although I can not claim that King creates an authentic “Indian story,” I want to point out that what King does do is create a place where stories are the story; the novel is comprised of layers of stories—not just Indian stories, but Western stories as well—that interact with one another in a way that accounts for the power of stories to create. Fittingly enough, King uses the creation myth as the framework of his novel.

The creation myth is the section of the novel where story emerges. The characters depicted in this section are either narrators of the story or stories themselves. These characters are allowed to enter into the “realistic” section of the novel that depicts the Blackfoot reservation. The interaction does not work the other way around, however. This is an example of the first type of textualization where the narrator or author enters into the fictional world he is telling. Coyote and the narrator are characters in the story at the same time they are tellers of the story. When Coyote sees Dr. Hovaugh and Babo, Coyote states,

‘Hey,’ says Coyote, ‘look who’s back.’

‘Just ignore him,’ I says.

‘But maybe they’ll give us a ride,’ says that Coyote.

‘No time for that,’ I says. ‘We got to get back to the other story.’

‘By the way,’ says Coyote, ‘where are we?’

‘Canada,’ I says. ‘Come on.’

‘Canada,’ says Coyote. ‘I’ve never been to Canada.’ (*Green Grass* 261)

In this example of textualization, Coyote and the narrator have literally entered Canada and the story they are telling. They are placed in the fictional space of the novel. At this point, the two stories start to intersect one another. When Babo and Dr. Hovaugh are talking separately about omens and miracles, Coyote somehow magically overhears them: “‘Wow!’ says Coyote. ‘Omens and miracles. We haven’t had any of those yet.’ / ‘Get your head down,’ I says. ‘He’s going to see you’” (King, *Green Grass* 262). Coyote and the narrator do not only enter the world of the novel, but the two stories start to cross. Coyote and the narrator’s dialogue starts to interact with the second story in a way that each separation is a continuation of the other story; in other words, when Dr. Hovaugh and Babo’s story ends with the words ‘Omens and Miracles,’ Coyote and the narrator begin by taking up the discussion that was left off (*Green Grass* 262). This form of textualization draws attention to the mixing of author and characters. Although an author might tell the story, the author becomes part of the characters’ story just as much as the characters are part of the author. The two stories interact with each other, picking up where the other story left off. It is a continuation of dialogue that blurs the boundaries between the two realms of story; it is an interaction of story and author and the two,

although they might be separated by a paragraph break, are a continuation of each other; both are really just stories.

Similarly, the four Native American elders (Thought Woman, First Woman, Changing Woman, and Old Woman) who have adapted the more “Western names” of Lone Ranger, Hawkeye, Ishmael, and Robinson Crusoe, are the narrators of the story at the same time they are characters in the story. In each of the two roles, the names are different: in the creation myth part of the story, the Indians assume the more traditional names. In the written part of the story, the Indians are addressed by their “Western names.” Their names, of course, are not exclusive to either realm and the reader questions whether or not they have a preference for their names in the first place: “All the women accept their new names with the air of indulgence that one assumes when dealing with a misinformed but harmless fool” (Bailey 48).

At any rate, the four Indians assume the role of narrator; they each take turns telling the story, of both their own histories, and the story of Lionel, Alberta, and Eli. Although they are in the separate realm of the storyteller, they are simultaneously part of the story they are telling. In fact, they have to escape from Dr. Hovaugh’s—a name if said aloud sounds very similar to Jehovah—mental institution in order to interact with the story at all: “‘Good morning, Mary. What do we have for today?’ / ‘The police are downstairs.’ / ‘The police?’ / ‘Yes, sir... the Indians.’ / ‘The Indians?’ / ‘Yes, sir.’ / ‘Again?’ [...] ‘They’re just gone,’ said Mary. ‘Like before. They’ll be back’” (King, *Green Grass* 13-4). In order to “fix things,” as they seek to do, they must be able to escape from the real world and become storytellers themselves. In this light, the narrators escape the captivity of the story and enter the realm of the storyteller, only to remerge in

the real world of the novel. This shows the fluid nature of storyteller and reality. The four Indians are both stories themselves and creators of the story they are telling. This example of textualization highlights the role of the author; although the author is the “creator” of the story, and thus allowed to place himself in the tale, the author also must remove himself from the story (just as the Indians escaped the story) in order to be allowed to reemerge. In other words, in order to “fix things” through story, the author has to remove himself from the world of the characters and start the story correctly before he reenters it. This is evident in King’s own experience writing *Green Grass, Running Water*. In an interview with Peter Gzowski, Thomas King states,

I started off, not *knowing* this [that the creation myth would be the frame of his story], of course, but working on the assumption that Christian myth was the one that informed the world that I was working with. And the more I got into the novel I discovered that I couldn’t work with that: it didn’t give enough freedom to work with my fiction. [...] So I went back, and I began to use that [creation myth] as my basis for the fiction. (King, “Peter Gzowski” 70)

In King’s eyes, a novel needs freedom to be allowed to function on its own. This freedom comes from finding the right way to start the novel. It is no wonder that the four elders have a problem starting their story.

Starting a story is tricky business, coyote business as Thomas King might say. It involves finding the right voice to harness the power behind the story. Telling a story is about beginning the story correctly:

'In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. [...] 'Wait a minute,' said Robinson Crusoe. / 'Yes?' / 'That's the wrong story,' said Ishmael. 'That story comes later.' / 'But it's my turn,' said the Lone Ranger. / 'But you have to get it right,' said Hawkeye. / 'And,' said Robinson Crusoe, 'you can't tell it all by yourself.' / 'Yes,' said Ishmael. 'Remember what happened last time?' / 'Everybody makes mistakes,' said the Lone Ranger. / 'Best not to make them with stories.' (King, *Green Grass* 11)

The four elders cannot seem to find the right start to their story. Furthermore, they understand that stories have power and, therefore, one cannot make a mistake and misuse that power. This is another function of textualization in *Green Grass, Running Water*; King uses textualization to point out the misuse of stories. King attacks the idea of *truth* in stories by showing what would really happen if a reader took that truth to heart.

King uses textualization to decenter the Christian notion of Ultimate Truth. The four elders encounter various biblical characters in their stories. Two of the encounters involve the textualization of Noah and Jesus. In Changing Woman's encounter with Noah, he creates a set of rules for her to follow. One of these rules is that women must have big breasts (*Green Grass* 162). Sharon M. Bailey, in her article "The Arbitrary Nature of Story," believes that the constant presence of rules is an attempt to control the Indian women: "Throughout the novel, various biblical and cultural figures invoke rules, specifically Christian rules, in attempts to control the behavior of the Indian women. Furthermore, they are convinced that their rules will be heeded simply by the virtue of the fact that the rules are invoked, and they seem oblivious to discrepancies between the rules

and what can be observed to be the case” (47). The four women encounter a set of rules that attempt to confine them despite the obvious lack of application. How can Noah make all women have big breasts, after all? Bailey also points out the Christian basis for King’s “spoof” of the rules can be found in the Bible. She shows that Genesis 2:18-24 describes how Eve was created as a helper and sex partner to Adam and Corinthians 7:4 states that the wife does not govern her own person, but instead the husband governs her body (47). Both verses allude to what Noah’s rule is really getting at; if he wants his wife’s body to have big breasts, the wife should have them. As Bailey writes, “it is her Christian duty” (47). Yet, *Changing Woman* does not follow the rule and once Noah is unable to get her to procreate with him, he throws her off the ship: “This is a Christian ship, he shouts. I am a Christian man. This is a Christian journey. And if you can’t follow the rules, then you’re not wanted on the voyage” (King, *Green Grass* 163). Noah uses the scripture as a basis for his sexual desire. He institutes rules in order to make women sexual objects.

The same scriptures Bailey uses to look at *Changing Woman*’s encounter with Noah can also be applied to *Old Woman*’s encounter with *Young Man Walking on Water*. There is a difference between the two cases, however. In the case of Noah, the scripture is used to fulfill his sexual desire to reproduce. *Young Man Walking on Water* uses the scriptures as a basis for supremacy over *Old Woman*. After *Young Man Walking on Water* is unable to save a ship of sailors that have fallen in the water, *Old Woman* sings a song to the water. This song calms the rocking waves and boat and saves the men:

Hooray, says those men. We are saved. / Hooray, says Young Man Walking on Water. I have saved you. / Actually, says those men, that other person saved us. / Nonsense, says Young Man Walking on Water. That other person is a woman. That other person sings songs to waves. / That's me, says Old Woman. / A woman? Says those men. Sings songs to waves? They says that, too. [...] By golly, says those men. Young man Walking on Water must have saved us after all. We better follow him around. (King, *Green Grass* 390-91)

Of course the absurdity of this interaction is that although Old Woman saved the men, she does not get credit for it because she is a woman. This bias draws a connection to the subservient role women have to men in Christian doctrine—such as the two Bailey calls upon. Through the textualization of Noah and Jesus, King is able to attack the Truth placed in the Bible.

I remember someone once told me that the Bible could be used to make many different arguments; it can almost be construed to say whatever a person wants it to say. In this sense, one cannot place ultimate truth in stories; they can be used to say many different “truths.” Through the textualization of the Bible, King demonstrates the absurdity of using stories to create rules. In this case, if stories showed the ultimate truth, then women would be nothing more than objects of men’s affection.

The marginalization of women is also seen in the textualization of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. When Changing Woman enters the story of *Moby Dick*, she encounters Moby-Jane, the great black whale: “Blackwhaleblackwhaleblackwhal-
esbianblackwhalesbian-blackwhale, they all shout. Black whale, yells Ahab. You mean

white whale, don't you? Moby-Dick, the great male white whale? / That's not a white whale, says Changing Woman. That's a female whale and she's black (King, *Green Grass* 220). Although the whale Changing Woman encounters is both black and a lesbian, Ahab does not accept this fact. As Margery Fee and Jane Flick discuss in their article "Coyote Pedagogy," Ahab's reaction is "an attack on lesbians and the refusal to recognize blackness. Though his crew tells him the whale is black and female, Ahab persists in seeing a great white male whale. He also throws overboard anyone willing to see her for what she is (black, female, lesbian)" (135). King's textualization of Melville's novel brings attention to the "male-whiteness" of literature. The characters of *Moby Dick* are not allowed to see the whale as black and female. King also plays on the name of Moby-Dick by replacing it with Jane. If a reader combines the two names and removes the 'Moby,' the name becomes Dick-Jane. This is a reference to the Dick and Jane readers that depicted a perfect, white family. In this case, textualization is used to show the bias of Western literature.

The bias of Western literature is further pointed out when Coyote states, "'She means Moby-Dick.' Says Coyote. 'I read the book. It's Moby-Dick, the great white whale who destroys *Pequod*. / 'You haven't been reading your history,' I tell Coyote. 'It's English colonists who destroy the Pequots.' / 'But there isn't any Moby-Jane.' / 'Sure there is,' I says. 'Just look over there. What do you see?' / 'Well...I'll be,' says Coyote'" (King, *Green Grass* 220). Fee and Flick believe that the narrator is making a joke on the fact that Coyote has been reading the wrong books. Instead of reading *Moby-Dick*, it might have been more useful to read a book on American history. If Coyote had done this, he would know that *Moby-Dick* covers over a white society that killed its

enemies, sold the ones who lived into slavery, and abolished the use of Pequot names, destroying any record of them by adapting the name as something else. (Fee and Flick 136). Not only does this dialogue account for the failure to recognize who really destroyed the Pequots, but it also asks the reader to use his/her senses in judging stories. It is not enough to know that the story said it and therefore it is truth, but people must be able to use their senses in order to see for themselves if it is true or not. People should look outside the book, as Coyote does, to the reality described in the book. If people do that, then they will be able to perceive the real nature of the truth.

It is no surprise that with the ability stories have to shape perception, in the sense that Coyote cannot see the true nature of Moby-Jane because he has read the book *Moby-Dick*, that the four elders end up adapting names from the characters they meet: they become Ishmael, the Lone Ranger, Hawkeye, and Robinson Crusoe, respectively. It is also not surprising that these names refer to very white, male characters, who each have an “Indian” sidekick. In an interview with Peter Gzowski, King says he picked these names because he wanted to create an archetypal Indian:

Well, actually, he [The Lone Ranger] sort of is [an archetypal Indian character], in some kind of a strange way, within North American popular culture, you know, you’ve got the Lone Ranger and Tonto, you’ve got Ishmael and Queequeq, and you have Hawkeye and Chingachgook, and you have Robinson Crusoe and Friday, and these are all kind of—they’re archetypal characters in literature, but they’re Indian and white *buddies*, I suppose. But those are just the names that the old Indians have at the time that we meet them. In actual fact, these are four archetypal Indian women

who come right out of oral creation stories. [...] Each one of the women who open up the various sections that come out of the oral stories are really those old Indians as they come along, but they've just been forced to assume these *guises*—by history, by literature, by just the general run of the world—and so that's what they call themselves now. (67)

Not only have the women been forced to adopt Western names, but also they have made themselves appear male. What King does through the textualization of Western literature is show how literature shapes the perception of identity. The books we read define “Indianess” for us, so we no longer have to look to find it. Yet, as with the Indians, this perception is a guise, a way to hide the true nature of the self.

In the shaping power of books, there are no truths. In the closing pages of the novel, the narrator states, “‘There are no truths, Coyote,’ I says. ‘Only stories’ (King *Green Grass* 432). This is where people make mistakes when they tell the stories; they try to assert truth. Stories contain rules and establish perception. Thomas King uses textualization to show the reader this. He textualizes the truth about stories, as well as the truth about the rules set out by Ultimate Truth. In the end of the story, it is not truth that emerges, but story. The obvious paradox in King’s demonstration is that he tells us this through story. Yet, when it is all said and done King’s story ends with no resolution, just the start of another story: “‘Okay,’ says Coyote, ‘if you say so. But where did all that water come from?’ / ‘Sit down,’ I says to Coyote. / ‘But there is water everywhere,’ says Coyote. / ‘That’s true,’ I says. ‘And here’s how it happened’” (469). These parting words leave the reader with the feeling that the story is about to start over again. Yet, the importance of a story is not in the ending but the telling. Stories are told to entertain and

when the story is over, the only way to tell the story is to make sure that the author did not make the mistake of telling it incorrectly: telling the story so that it claims to have an answer to the question of 'what does it mean.' *Green Grass, Running Water* is absurd and it accepts its own absurdity. Stories are all that we are, nothing more. King reminds the reader of this through the act of textualization.

So I will go back to the beginning and retell the story over again. As Thomas King said, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*Truth 2*). Stories have the ability to shape our reality, to enter into our own world and create. They create themselves, first and foremost, and through this creation shape the reader. We take these stories, do with them as we will, and carry them with us. Magical realism's use of textualization reminds the reader of the power of words and stories at the same time it bonds itself to the oral culture. When stories were told orally, they had power; the act of telling a story was magical in itself. Magical realism goes back to these primitive roots in order to reconnect the reader with the role of language in our lives. In doing so, textualization also challenges the conventions of realist writing by drawing attention to its own creation; it is metafictional, bizarre, and always magical. Through textualization the author comments on his own role and gives some of his power away to the reader; after all, the readers do form part of the story themselves, because the reader takes the story out the books and brings it to reality. While the realist writers were busy trying to capture reality in novel form, they failed to realize the story is reality and that they did not need to attempt to capture anything more than the story. Writers like Jones and King remind the reader that stories are powerful and that they are part of reality. They place reality and fiction together in a way that the two merge, twist, and expand in different,

but parallel, directions. Although the definition of fiction is something that is not true, and, therefore, novels are inherently fiction, magical realism creates a new perception of stories. In the end, the novel is neither fiction, nor real, but a little bit of both.

CHAPTER 4

THAT ONE STORY...THE ONE ABOUT THE HITCHHIKER

THE MINGLING OF MYTH AND HISTORY

IN MAGICAL REALISM

There is a story I know, a story about a vanishing hitchhiker. The story is an old ghost story perfect for spooky nights. A friend of mine once told me it is called “The Presidio Hitchhiker”, although I have never been able to confirm the fact. To be honest, I do not know where I first heard the story, but I know I have heard it many times. My friend could be right that the story is a West Texas myth, but a person never really knows with stories.

This is because each time an oral story is told, it is changed. The orator remembers the facts, the beginning and the end, and the rest is changed to fit the mood, the feeling the orator is trying to convey. Oral stories are told from memory, so the orator remembers what he can: “In the total absence of any writing, there is nothing outside the thinker, no text, to enable him or her to produce the same line of thought again or even to verify whether he or she has done so or not” (Ong 34). My telling of the “hitchhiker

story” is no different; each time I tell the story it changes a little. The story slips from the original creation. Yet, the variations are only minor; the telling is still part of what it always was: a story.

Oral stories have the ability to regenerate themselves into something new while retelling a story that has already been told. As Walter Ong points out, “In oral tradition, there will be as many minor variations of a myth as there are repetitions of it, and the number of repetitions can be increased indefinitely” (Ong 42). That is not to say that oral stories are unoriginal. The narrator of an oral story must find ways to incite audience participation. Anyone who has been in front of a large crowd knows that keeping the audience involved can be hard. What Ong is pointing out is that oral stories involve a shared relationship with the past, the past that is stored in the memory of the teller. Essentially, oral stories are tied to memory. Not only are the narrators reciting what they can recall, but they are also reestablishing the past. As Ong discusses, oral cultures held the figures of the old man and old woman in high esteem because they were the repeaters of the past. They were the people who had the ability to remember and repeat the knowledge of the days of old (Ong 41).

My story does not achieve such high regard; the story is from my childhood, something I like to tell on long trips or at campfires. The story does not re-tell myth or any past knowledge. The tale is important in its own right because it tells something of my own past. Each time I tell the story, it reveals a little more about where I came from and what I have experienced. But it is not noble. Not in the way stories once were. No, my story is something of a scare, told to send shivers down the spines of the audience. The story is nothing more than a spooky myth about the dark highways crossing over the

wide spaces of Texas. I like to tell the story because it reunites me with the past, the past as I know it. This past is not part of the history that is recorded in books or taught in school. Instead, it is part of the past that belongs to my own ideals about where I came from and who I am today.

The story can be summed up relatively quickly. I am driving down some dark, eerie road when I encounter and pick up a stranded hitchhiker (I like to describe the hitchhiker with tattered clothes, just to set the mood). I drive this hitchhiker to her house and drop her off only to find out (the next day) that she left her suitcase in my car. When I go back to return the bag, I am informed by an older woman that the girl I picked up the night before died some years ago. Of course, if the story were told in an oral setting it would take much longer to tell; the person telling the story would get involved in the story as if it really happened to him/her. Yet, despite the use of first person, the detailed ambiance the teller throws in for mood, and the general feeling given by the orator that “this happened to me,” the story is rarely seen as truth.

So what makes this story “not true?” Well for starters, I said from the beginning that I had heard the story many times. Of course, the story is an oral story and after saying I have heard it many times, I stressed the fluid nature of oral stories. In this sense, the story is not the same story I heard. Is the story unbelievable because the “ghost” makes the story far-fetched? If so, that would be too perfect for my discussion on magical realism—the story is dismissed for being too supernatural. Then again, the story could be unbelievable because nobody picks up hitchhikers anymore. That is what is wrong with my story: the reality is made too unreal. Whatever the case, the point is that the story is

seldom seen as truth. Perhaps the story is unbelievable because of all these things mixed with one more key ingredient: it is an oral story.

Maybe if the story were recorded in a textbook it might be more believable (and I do not mean a textbook called *The Myths of West Texas*). There would be more validity if it were recorded and placed right next to the chapter on the Alamo in our Texas history books. But it is not; the story is something I have heard and do not believe myself. In this case, even the teller does not believe the story. Despite my disbelief, how does anyone know the story is false? Certainly someone could have experienced the story; the story might not all be myth. Nevertheless, we do not know if it is true and that is my point: it could be.

True or not, if the story were told in its entirety it tells the audience a little about me: where I came from, where I spent my first year of college, and what kind of stories I grew up with. The story tells the audience about my “culture,” so to speak. With my story, a person knows, if nothing else, that I had my fair share of campfires and long drives. Telling the story, whether truth, myth, or somewhere in-between, brings the audience and the teller back to those times: the heritage from which the story emerged.

In an act of remembrance and re-assertion of historical “truth”, magical realism achieves the union of oppositions. Going back to Ong’s notion that oral stories use repetition and variations of myth, I want to stress that oral stories involve these techniques in order to remember the story. The same can be said about magical realism, yet instead of remembering the story, the use of myth is about remembering something else: something inside the inner being. The act of remembering is about not forgetting

(the author's culture, the author's heritage) and offering another cultural viewpoint, one that looks from a marginalized culture:

Magical realists are postcolonials who avail themselves most forcefully of the devices of postmodernism, of pastiche, irony, parody, and intertextuality; they are alternatively recognized as oppositional to cultural imperialism, but also as reactionaries, who perpetuate the retention of the Western stereotype of the exotic Other. (Cooper 29)

The paradox Cooper discusses is that while magical realist authors react against cultural monopoly, they also create a domain where the "other" becomes exotic. Although it is true that magical realism often incorporates dominant understanding into the novel, the authors include dominant ideas to create a hybrid understanding of dominant culture. Despite the paradox of a hybrid mixture (it must embrace *both* ingredients), magical realist authors use dominant discourse as a way to incorporate a new cultural understanding. Therefore, the placement of the "exotic other" only exists to those who do not understand the language of a hybrid writer; in magical realism the "other" is not exotic and not even "other." S/He is a hybrid, belonging to both dominant and marginalized cultures—a recreation of sort. If magical realist authors are reactionaries, thus conservative thinkers who oppose progression, then the hybrid re-identification of dominant understanding makes no sense. A hybrid writer uses dominant culture in order to re-create (thus change) the understanding of the dominant idea—whatever that idea might be. Magical realist novels are about separating the myth of the culture (this glorification of history) to embrace the facts. It is a different kind of remembering, yet in some ways just as essential as oral narrators' need to remember stories.

Magical realist authors incorporate myth at the same time they place the text in a historical framework. In a space where opposition exists as cooperation, in the sense that the presence of binaries adds to the singularity of the novel, the history cannot be separated from the myth. For magical realist authors, history is another form of cultural mythology: history defines a civilization's past. Yet, it is important to stress that magical realist novels do not display history as a "created" fact, but instead mold it into myth, making both understandings of past equally valid. In other words, it questions the absolute truth of history by integrating the unrepresented, mythic understanding of past: "Many magical realist works include historical references, not only to situate their texts in a particular context, but also to bring into question already existing historical assumptions. In fact, postmodernist thinking about history usually emphasizes the lack of absolute historical truth and casts doubt over the existence of fact by indicating its link with narrative and stories" (Bowers 76-77). Myth, as one might say, is a story: a creation of reality that represents a certain culture's viewpoint. By placing this "story" next to historical "truth," magical realism links history with myth, thus, linking history with narrative and stories.

Yet in the realm of a magical realist novel, both history and myth are valid. Similar to the presence of fiction and reality, magical realism works in a sphere where history and myth overlap and create a new form of historical reference. The most noticeable presence of both history and myth is seen in magical realism's concept of time. For history, time is linear: Christopher Columbus sailed in 1492. From this initial action, several reactions happened. Dates are essential to understanding time in history. In myth, time is circular; myth repeats and retells. Magical realism distorts time—which

is one of the characteristics Faris offers of magical realism—and offers a new hybrid of time: “Magical realists’ time tries to be neither the linear time of history, nor the circular time of myth” (Cooper 33). By being neither circular nor linear, magical realism operates in a realm where time is new. It recreates the concept of history by offering a different view on historical consciousness: “The absence of a single linear time need not be read as the absence of a historical consciousness but rather as the operation of a different kind of historical consciousness” (Sangari 172). This is where I stress the commingling of myth and history. By staying balanced between the notion of linear history and circular myth, magical realism becomes neither. It recreates a mixture of the two, as it often does with binaries, and allows for the possibilities of both to exist. In this recreation of history, magical realism calls into question the reader’s understanding of how history is formed.

In magical realist texts, history is recreated to include the side of history that has been left out. The old cliché, surely it has become a cliché by now, states, “history is written by the conquerors.” If this is true, then the voice of the conquered is silent. Magical realism’s recreation of history allows cultural mythology to integrate itself into history. The merging of history and myth is about introducing the validity of myth (or shortcomings of history), placing myth next to history as if to say, “Here it is, another story.” After all, history and myth are both just ways of looking at the past.

I am sure it is unoriginal to claim that the dissection of the term “history” yields the two words, his- and -story. Taking a literal stance on the division of the word shows that history is exclusive; it becomes a narrative that only allows a male’s story to emerge. History, by its most literal identification, is about separation. Whether one agrees with this assertion is beside the point because language, whether consciously known or not,

has the ability to create. By dissecting the term and showing how each individual piece adds to the whole, I offer my understanding of the language. In this sense, the language has changed. As seen in the last chapter, language is a magical device, which once used, cannot be called back. Language integrates itself into the world and creates understanding. In *Ceremony*, the way language works as an ongoing form of creation is seen when Tayo talks about the Laguna medicine man Ku'oosh's choice of words:

The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with the strength inherent in spider webs woven across the paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. ... The story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love. (Silko, *Ceremony* 35-36).

Language should not be used haphazardly. In the article "An Ear for the Story, an Eye for the Pattern: Rereading *Ceremony*," Ellen Arnold shows how Ku'oosh's statement is indicative of the whole world as well as the word: "The word, like the world itself, is an intersection in a web of fluid relationships, which can be temporarily fixed by our attention from a particular perspective and read for abstract conceptual meaning, but which cannot be separated from the flux of reality and meaning [...]" (9). The idea of connection, or borderless intersection, is a prominent example of the intersection of myth and history in *Ceremony*. Silko instills in her reader a sense of wholeness, a circular

encompassing of an ongoing process of belonging, not separation. In *Ceremony*, the way for Tayo to cure his illness is to reunite himself with mother Earth and the myths of the Laguna people, while also accepting the fact that all stories, white, Laguna, etcetera, belong to the one story: life.

The story starts in what James Ruppert in his essay “No Boundaries, Only Transitions” calls a separation of Western and Native ideas. Although Ruppert is quick to point out that the story is Thought Women’s narrative, he also asserts that Silko uses two ways of thinking to tell the story. On one side, the reader is engaged in a Native myth, written in poetry. In this section, the story is told through poetry and represents a self-reflexive Western form that serves to carry across the traditional mythic stories of Laguna. Although the section is written in poetry, these lines connect to a Native discourse. The second realm of the story is the psychological despair of Tayo’s post-traumatic stress. This section tells the story of Tayo, a disjointed and fragmented war veteran. Ruppert believes Tayo’s psychological perception ties the prose part of *Ceremony* to Western identification; the Western readers can identify with the demonstration of post-traumatic stress (80). In this sense, the story is told in both a linear (Western) and circular (Mythic) pattern. Of course, this distinction is only a temporary reflection on Tayo’s formless identity. Tayo must heal himself by finding a compromise between these two stories. Tayo’s journey is what Ellen Arnold calls, “interplay of linear and cyclic modes, an articulation of the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic, the dichotomous and the relational, which allows him to negotiate multiple cultural experiences” (2). Part of Tayo’s healing involves the identification of his “self” and his relation to the whole. While the novel starts in a division of Western and Native

identifications, the novel works toward a convergence of stories: “linear time—beginning, middle, end—dissolves into a cycle of recapitulation and repetition” (Bell 49). It is here where borders are shattered and the boundary of “otherness” is obliterated.

Before Tayo can see the pattern of the story, he must identify the ways in which borders have segregated him. It seems that Tayo’s birth fated him to be an outsider to both Laguna and White culture. Tayo is a half-breed, and the fate of people of mixed heritage is a life on the borders. As Michael Parker asserts, “The Laguna reject Tayo because of his white heritage; the white reject him because of his Laguna heritage. He is isolated from both worlds and from both cultures” (24). Similarly Leslie Marmon Silko, who also has mixed heritage, tells a childhood memory of tourists who went to her school to take pictures of the Indians:

Then one day when I was older, in the third grade, white tourists came with cameras. All of my playmates started to bunch together to fit in the picture, and I was right there with them maneuvering myself into the group when I saw the tourist look at me with a particular expression. I knew instantly he did not want me to be in the picture; I stayed close to my playmates, hoping that I had misread the man’s face. But the tourist motioned for me to move away to one side, out of his picture. I remember my playmates looked puzzled, but I knew why the man did not want me in his picture: I looked different from my playmates. I was part white and he didn’t want me to spoil his snapshots of ‘Indians.’ (Silko, *Yellow Woman* 106)

Segregation is seen in Silko's personal story: segregation from her playmates for being part white and segregation from the tourist because she was still Indian. She was only "not Indian" in the mental image of what the tourist expected Indians to look like. There is a striking difference between ideas of "Indian" and what it means to be Native American. This is an area where Tayo must navigate himself. Michael Parker describes the beginning of Tayo's quest as a "personal search for a way to heal the psychological scars he carries, scars inflicted by confusion over his identity, by the abusiveness of an aunt who resents the fact that Tayo is half white, and by the rejection he endures at the hands of both Native and Anglo-Americans" (24). His Aunt constantly reminds Tayo of his mother's humiliation of the family and reinforces his identification with a mixed heritage. As Karen Wallace points out in her article "Liminality and Myth in Native American Fiction: *Ceremony* and *The Ancient Child*," "Mixed-bloods, a real consequence of colonization, are in a position to bridge the chasm between cultures. However, before Tayo can act in this capacity, he must come to terms with the fact that he equates indianness with loss" (105). Although Tayo's mixed blood represents a hindrance at the start of the novel, his identification with multiple cultures can be seen as a way to bridge the division between white and Indian.

The fragmentation of Tayo's identity is reinforced through his education. In school, the Laguna students are taught that their heritage is primitive. Tayo and Rocky are allowed to see the golden secret of reason (that the white culture and history contains a modern understanding of the world) but not allowed to partake in the process themselves. What they are taught in schools further alienates their ideas of their own heritage:

So he [Rocky] listened to his teachers, and he listened to the coach. They were proud of him. They told him, 'nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back.' Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world. After their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways. Old Grandma shook her head at him, but he called it superstition, and he opened his textbooks to show her. (Silko, *Ceremony* 51)

The schools teach Rocky and Tayo two things. The first of these "truths" is that to succeed in the white world, one must dismiss his/her "primitive" heritage. The second of these "truths" is that the Laguna way is inferior to the Western way. Belonging to neither, but having connections to both, Tayo is further alienated by the "advantage" he has over most Laguna people. Because Tayo is part white, Emo sees this as something Tayo holds over them: "He thinks he's something all right. Because he's part white. Don't you, half-breed?" (Silko, *Ceremony* 57). For Emo, being white is associated with being better. The only time that Emo calls Tayo an Indian is when Emo is verbally attacking him: "you drink like an Indian, and you're crazy like one too—but you aren't shit, white trash" (Silko, *Ceremony* 63). The negative connections tied to being Indian are seen with what Emo associates with Tayo's "white half" and his "Laguna half." Tayo's white heritage is something worth holding over Emo; Tayo's Indian heritage is something that designates drunken lunacy. The same connection is drawn between Rocky's idea of success and his idea of failure. As his teachers tell him, the only way for him to fail is to let the people at home hold him back. The nature of Laguna rituals is

primitive and merely superstition—according to the books, of course. In Rocky’s case, white culture represents success, while Laguna culture represents failure. What they have learned is that being white (or acting white) is better than being Laguna.

Tayo’s fragmentation of identity is seen in the vapor that is his own being. At the start of the novel, he is formless, a floating white cloud that has no voice: “For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls” (Silko, *Ceremony* 14). In this sense, Tayo has no boundaries. He is a mass of vapor that hovers over life like a cloud. Yet his borderless state does not show connection. Instead, it is vague and lacks any sense of inter-relation. While his state contains no borders, his presence as the invisible smoke is initiated by separation: separation from life, culture, and being. In Gregory Salyer’s article “Myth, Magic, and Dread: Reading Culture,” he believes Tayo’s association with white smoke represents his desperate attempt to integrate into the white culture. Because the doctors do not recognize Tayo’s division as a form of “otherness,” they treat him as a psychological patient and relentlessly question Tayo until he “splits” from his self and starts to refer to himself in the third person (Salyer 269). He tells the doctor at the start of the novel, “He can’t talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound” (Silko, *Ceremony* 15). At this point, Tayo has become an “other” to his own being. He does not belong to anything; he is invisible to all people. The doctors separate Tayo by treating him with pills that cloud his memory: “The smoke had been dense; visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there, and he had drifted in colors of smoke, was no pain, only pale, pale gray of the north wall by his bed. Their

medicine drained memory out of his thin arms and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes” (Silko, *Ceremony* 15). The medicine helps make Tayo invisible. He becomes a waking dream, where notions of reality are distant. Yet, he is not in a dream; he is the realization of the results of “otherness.” The doctors try to cure Tayo by placing a boundary between his past, his reality, and his self. As Salyer states, “What he [the doctor] has done is forced Tayo into distinctions of otherness and made those distinctions definitive. [...] What the doctor has not done is to provide Tayo with a story that can envelope those distinctions and hold them coherently so that the distinctions are not definitive or ultimate but fade into the larger perspective of story” (269-70). Tayo starts the novel in a world where boundaries are definite and the connection of opposing stories do not exist. Tayo is both different and formless; he is not connected to the central story of life.

Elaine Jahner believes that Tayo’s vagueness (seen by his vapor state) is relative to the lack of understanding events. For Jahner, Tayo and the reader must navigate the novel from event to event in order to learn the connection between contemporary action and the mythic prototype. In this sense, Tayo’s formless cloud represents his inability to understand the false boundaries and relationships. Tayo remembers the argument between Reed Woman and her sister Corn Woman (in the second poem of the novel), and recalls how Reed Woman’s removal from her world takes all the rains away. Because he knows that action is relative to myth, Tayo blames himself for wishing away the rain (Jahner 40-41). Silko juxtaposes Reed Woman’s story in the second poem with Tayo’s dismissal of the rain. The first line of contemporary action following Reed Woman’s myth states, “So he prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass

turned yellow and it did no grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying” (Silko, *Ceremony* 14). The connection between contemporary action and mythic action is highlighted in the relationship between the poem and Tayo. Tayo, who represents the present story, is connected to the past stories and myths in a way that he realizes, yet does not fully see. As Jahner points out, Tayo takes blame for the drought because he knows the power of words, yet he does not see the true boundaries between things (41). Therefore, his quest to find a center and a form works from finding a way to understand the connection between stories and life.

The problem with finding this connection is that “witchery” attempts to displace understanding of connections. Witchery is “a term Betonie uses to describe the deception that is destroying Laguna” (Parker 25). Betonie sees witchery as the dismissal of the stories of healing and the acceptance of stories of destruction. The witchery works to separate people by providing the world with a false center. Emo, Leroy, and Harley are victims of this witchery; they have been tricked by witchery. What they have been tricked into believing is that “after their service in World War II, white society would accept them into full membership. Instead, they found themselves more isolated than their ancestors had been because their ancestors never hoped for acceptance by whites” (Parker 25). Emo, Harley, and Leroy relive their days of acceptance by routinely telling stories. The stories these three men choose to tell are tales circumscribing what they see as their “glory days.” They are stories about conquest, which revolve around their service in World War II.

These stories that Emo, Harely, and Leroy tell become their own personal myths. They become so adapted to mimicking the white culture that they cannot separate

themselves from the façade. Although the point of Tayo's ceremony is that the white culture and the Laguna culture are connected, Emo, Harely, and Leroy's mimicking becomes a replacement of their own heritage: "They are able to maintain the interpretative strategies that were taught to them through white culture and thereby forget the wholeness narrated through Laguna legends" (Salyer 270). By accepting so wholly their own belief that they are part of the white society, they dismiss their own understanding of connection. They see a division between being white and being Laguna, where one is better than the other. Their stories become ways to heal their dismissal from white culture. Yet, stories can be dangerous because they are connected to the center of life. They are a form of supernatural power that cannot be taken back. Just as Tayo cursed the rain away by words, Emo, Harely, and Leroy's stories also become forms of spiritual healing—only for them, it is stories that believe in the center of witchery and dismiss the Laguna idea of belonging: "The night progressed according to that ritual: from cursing the barren dry land the white man had left them, to talking about San Diego and the cities where the white women were still waiting for them to come back to give them another taste of what white women never got enough of" (Silko, *Ceremony* 61). I want to look at Silko's use of the word "ritual." The word insinuates that the stories Emo, Harley, and Leroy tell become part of a ceremony; that they are a religious act of remembrance that replaces the Laguna's ceremony of connection.

This ritual only has room for stories of the past, stories dealing with the war and how the three men were part of white culture. The three Indians monopolize the ritual and have a clear idea of what is accepted. When Tayo attempts to tell a story about the present, one that brings forth the idea that the acceptance the men once had because of

war—because they were needed—is no longer the case, Emo Harley, and Leroy dismiss the story (Silko, *Ceremony* 41-2). As Tayo attempts to show, the rituals, the stories the three men tell, need to change to incorporate the whole understanding of event. Yet, following Tayo's story, Harely starts to recite a time he had two blonds in bed, and thus, "they forget Tayo's story" (Silko, *Ceremony* 43). The ritual Emo, Harely, and Leroy partake in only allows stories that deal with how much better life was during the war, where the women they "encountered" during their service are still waiting for something they could not get enough of. For the three Laguna men, the rituals, the healing process of stories, is substituted with drinking and their own stories of conquest. Gregory Salyer talks about this idea when he states,

White women are the ultimate conquest for Emo, Harely, and Leroy, and their stories of conquest at one point appropriate the form of the Laguna legends that Silko weaves into the novel in verse form. She even has these men banging beer bottles like drums as they tell these stories, as if they were sacred chants. [...] While the stories become the myths they live by, they only enrage Tayo and make him sicker. [...] Tayo seems to know that he cannot be healed by continued conquest, that is, by the extension of otherness into different areas; what he needs instead is to bring some coherence to the many shards of his existence. Difference creates the possibility of conquest; storytelling creates the possibility of coherence. (Salyer 270-71)

I particularly like the last line of his statement because I think that it demonstrates the way in which the witchery works against coherence. The stories that the three Laguna

men tell are stories that continually separate themselves from both sides of culture: they are separated from the whites because they no longer are needed to fight, yet they divorce themselves from the Laguna people by dismissing the relevance of their own values and stories. Their temporary acceptance into white culture was on the terms of destruction and this feeling of annihilation is continued each time they tell their own stories, which as Salyer points out become mythic.

The problem with witchery is that it tries to confuse how one understands stories. On the second page of the novel, the reader encounters the understanding of how witchery works to confuse the stories: “You don’t have anything / if you don’t have stories. / Their evil is mighty / but it can’t stand up to our stories. / So they try to destroy the stories / let the stories be confused or forgotten. / They would like that / They would be happy / Because we would be defenseless then. / He rubbed his belly. / I keep them here” (2). The stories that the three Laguna men tell each other are ways for the witchery to achieve this confusion. Their tales are about division, conquest, and destruction. It is no wonder that Tayo, who is trying to recover from his dislocation, attacks Emo during one of the “ritual” story telling. Further, it is no surprise that Tayo stabs Emo in his stomach, the place where the teller at the start of the novel stores his/her stories: “He got stronger with every jerk Emo made, and he felt that he would get well if he killed him. But they wouldn’t let him do it; they grabbed his arms and pulled his hands out of Emo’s belly” (Silko, *Ceremony* 63). Tayo attempts to heal himself by attacking Emo. Although he infiltrates the place where the stories are kept, his actions were those of a destroyer; his actions were those of conquest, not healing. Because of this, the stories continue, the

fragmentation carries on. Tayo must find a way to connect his past, these rituals of conquest, with his present and future.

While Emo, Harely, and Leroy live in the past, Tayo is constantly trying to disconnect himself from his past. In this way, both parties forget that the past is part of the future, which is gathered in the time of the present. The present is the only place a person can be sure of time. When Tayo searches the canyon for the missing cattle, the novel reads, "The ride into the mountain had branched into all directions of time. He knew then why the oldtimers could only speak of yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment: the only certainty" (192). Thomas King describes the Native writer's use of the present as a way of reclaiming his/her own being. The problem, as he sees it, in living in the past is assuming there is no future or present:

What Native writers discovered, I believe, was that the North American past, the one that had been created in novels and histories, the one that had been heard on radio and seen on theatre screens and on television, the one that had been part of every school curriculum for the last two hundred years, that past was unusable, for it had not only trapped the Native people in a time warp, it also insisted that our past was all we had.

No present.

No future.

And to believe in such a past is to be dead.

Faced with such a proposition, and knowing from empirical evidence that we were very much alive, physically and culturally, Native writers began to use the Native present as a way to resurrect a Native past and to

imagine a Native future. To create, in words, as it were, a Native universe. (*Truth* 106)

The past is uncertain; the past is also a place that implies there is no hope for a future. Yet, the past is part of the present and future and therefore cannot be dismissed as Tayo tries to do. Stricken with the grief of the past, Tayo disjoins himself from his own history. This creates a wider chasm in the rift between convergences. The rift becomes one more separation Tayo must mend; yet, it is a division that can only be mended in the certainty of the present. The notion of the present serves as a point where Tayo can re-imagine his self. The present allows for a place to question Tayo's prior understanding of time because it is a median between past and future. As Ruppert asserts, the movement between past stories (the poem sections) and present narrative becomes less jarring as this union of time happens and distinctions between psychological, mythic, sociological, and communal narratives thin as all stories merge to become one (83). The reader comes to understand that the past, both the poems about Thought Woman and World War II, are part of the present because they are stories that are always changing, always connected and seen in the contemporary narrative of Tayo.

Tayo's connection to the story comes from an understanding of love, not hate. Gregory Salyer believes that an important aspect of Tayo's cure is his ability to see past the gender differences imposed by his friends' stories. Salyer believes that although Tayo does not make women a form of conquest (as seen with Emo, Leroy, and Harley), he does not have a sense of "narrative wholeness" in relation to women. His mother left him and his aunt treats him as if he is unwanted. Betonie tells Tayo that one part of his ceremony will deal with a woman. While many women enter Tayo's ceremony, it is

evident that in regards to the mythological significance they are all one woman: Mother Earth (Salyer 271). Tayo must also overcome indifference: indifference to his life and his land. Another rift Emo's stories create is isolation from the land. The rituals are about conquering women, reliving the destruction of war, and cursing the Earth.

Although Tayo never subscribes to the ritual acts of cursing the Earth, he treats the Earth with indifference. He remembers what Josiah tells him about the Earth, but does not fully understand his connection. The idea is similar to Tayo's understanding that he cursed away the rain; he knows he is to blame, but he has no solution. In order to understand how to connect back to the land and finish the story, Tayo must learn to love, for "nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained" (Silko, *Ceremony* 220). There are two mythical women that Tayo encounters that help him achieve this objective: the first is Night Swan and the second is Ts'eh.

There is something foretelling in Tayo's encounter with Night Swan. For starters, it happens before Tayo goes to war. In this sense, it a prequel of what is to come. Then there are the parting words Night Swan bestows upon Tayo: "You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now" (100). Salyer calls this encounter a foreshadow; I prefer to look at it as a connection Tayo draws from his present ceremony to the instances of the past. Whatever one chooses to call the meeting, the event is vital to Tayo's understanding of love. Night Swan represents the mythic figure of Woman Veiled in Rain Clouds (Tse pi'na). She is surrounded by the color blue, which further connects her to the west, the winds, the rain, and Mt. Taylor, Laguna's sacred mountain (Salyer 271). When Tayo makes love to her it is described as a union of nature and passion: "She moved under him,

her rhythm merging into the sound of the wind shaking the rafters and the sound of the rain in the tree. And he was lost somewhere, deep beneath the surface of his own body and consciousness, swimming away from all his life before that hour” (Silko, *Ceremony* 99). This passage highlights the connection Night Swan shows Tayo: “The dancer Nightswan introduces Tayo to his own body’s connection to earth. [...] Through Nightswan, Tayo feels the power of wind and rain penetrate human and natural landscape” (Reyes 40). Although Tayo does not understand this connection when he first encounters it (this is highlighted by the parting words of Night Swan), it is used as a starting point for his eventual understanding of the connection between body and land. After Tayo returns from war, he goes to visit Night Swan’s house:

The place felt good; he leaned back against the wall until its surface pushed against his backbone solidly. He picked up a fragment of fallen plaster and drew dusty white stripes across the backs of his hands, the way ceremonial dancers sometimes did, except they used the white clay and not old plaster. [...] He rubbed it carefully across his light brown skin, the stark white gypsum making a spotted pattern, and then he knew why it was done by the dancers: it connected them to the earth. (Silko, *Ceremony* 104).

There are multiple connections happening in this passage. Tayo, through the act of spreading the plaster over himself, becomes connected to the land and his people. He is also connected to the missing cattle through the spotted white pattern the chalk makes. Furthermore, Night Swan was the one who introduced Josiah to the cattle in the first place. Then there is the connection Tayo feels to Night Swan: “Tayo learns through the

woman's flesh to feel his own connectedness, so that the place bears her presence in his remembering their time together, the space of memory sensual and earthen" (Garcia 41). Although Tayo is unaware of the importance of his meeting with Night Swan, his return to her home shows the inner connection between events. The return is a merging of past, present, and future, as Tayo is about to embark on the search for the spotted cattle.

Night Swan's importance is also felt when Tayo meets Ts'eh. Ts'eh, whose name is an abbreviation of the Laguna word Tse-pi'na (meaning Mt. Taylor), is connected to Laguna's sacred mountain, Mt. Taylor: "you never told me your name,' he [Tayo] said. / 'I'm a Montaña,' she said. 'You can call me Ts'eh. That's my nickname because my Indian name is so long. All of us kids did that'" (Silko, *Ceremony* 223). Just as the color blue surrounded Night Swan, Ts'eh is associated with the color yellow. This connects her to the corn mother, pollen, and the Yellow Woman tales of Laguna mythology (Salyer 271). Like Tayo's encounter with Night swan, Tayo feels the earth surround him when he dreams of making love to Ts'eh: "He felt the warm sand on his toes and knees; he felt her body, and it was warm as sand and he couldn't feel where her body ended and the sand began" (232). As with Night Swan, passion is described as a unification of land and body. Through the encounters with two female expressions of mother earth, Tayo is able to realize his connection to the Earth. Through this connection, the land starts to regain some life and by the time he is saying goodbye to Ts'eh, the land is green again: "A year ago he and Harley had ridden down the road on the burro and mule, but this time the grass along the road was green and thick, and to the east, south, and west, as far as he could see, the land was green again" (Silko, *Ceremony* 234). Tayo not only learns to love Ts'eh, and thus the Earth, but he also understands how much he

loves his family. Through this connection of love, “he is restored to his family almost as a son. Auntie now talks with him the same way she talks to Robert and Grandma. He sees his own strength and knows that he is healed” (Ruppert 90). Through the mythic figures of Night Swan and Ts’eh, Tayo connects himself with the earth and the healing power of love.

Tayo’s process of healing involves more than embracing love and reinventing his understanding of time; the healing involves a connection between all borders, fences, and boundaries that separate the greater connectedness of life. The diminishing of borders does not just highlight the Laguna mythical idea that all things are connected, but it also implies the need to transgress borders and limitations. Borders are set up to create distinctions between objects: not just binaries, but continents and cultures as well. Silko discusses the problems of enforcing borders in an interview with Florence Boos:

The most important thing right now which people must watch out for is jingoism and hysteria about immigrants and immigration. [The U.S. government] is building an iron curtain, a steel wall—Rudolfo Ortiz calls it the Tortilla Curtain—but it’s ugly. They’re trying to seal off Mexico from the United States. But [those they are sealing off] are Indians, Native Americans, American Indians, original possessors of this continent, and [those who hate them] want to create a hysteria here so that it will justify U.S. troops opening fire and shooting and killing. The future could be a horrendous blood bath and upheaval not seen since the Civil War. Right now the border patrol stops [Indian] people. I’ve been stopped three or four times and have had dogs put on me. (Silko, “An Interview” 143)

For Silko, the need to unite distinctions is not just a mythical/curing need, but also one that is needed in order to reinstate the individual freedom given to people living on the borders. The process of boundaries designates ownership, possession, and division. Boundaries also involve favoring one side over the other; in the case of the United States and Mexico, the problem of border enforcement creates a distinction that the United States is favored because Mexico has no need to set up its own “Tortilla Curtain.” Of course it does not matter which country is truly favored, only that the need to separate the two implies that one is better than the other. In *Ceremony*, the issue of border enforcement is a metaphorical one that deals with the distinctions between cultures and stories. Tayo’s eventual healing comes from understanding how all stories fit into one story, always changing and always part of the whole.

As Tayo’s ceremony unfolds, a reader notices that the distinctions between the contemporary action and the mythic story start to blur. Ruppert draws attention to this idea when he states, “Those distinctions that could be made between psychological, mythic, sociological, and communal narratives are conflated as all levels of narrative become one story” (81). This is not to say that the contemporary form does not mirror the mythic form from the very onset. To say such a thing would be to ignore that *Ceremony* is Thought Woman’s story as well. Furthermore, dismissing the interconnection between the mythic, poetic form and the contemporary, prose form would be a failure to see what Silko is trying to show the reader: all stories are part of the same story. Instead, the distinction between myth and reality start to melt into a new mythic-reality. The mixing is a process of untangling, one that the reader and protagonist must discover:

These two types [of narrative] are contemporary and mythic tellings, the timeless and the time-bound narratives. The two are not independent of each other in that they constantly shape each other, but finding out how they interact is complicated by the fact that all which occurs in the time-bound framework is confused because the way of knowing, the various kinds of narrative are all entangled. (Jahner 39)

Of course, Tayo's healing relies on his understanding of how all stories fit together, an acceptance that stories are tangled. Although the two narratives represent different ways of telling, they are both classified with the same name: story. Part of Silko's goal is breaking down the distinction between "those categories Western discourse has termed myth and reality" (Ruppert 81). Although myth is normally seen as story and reality as truth, Silko creates a discourse that blurs the distinction between reality and myth. This is what is meant by saying the distinctions between mythic action and contemporary action blur. The amalgamation of myth and reality allows for a unified view of reality; reality is not just what we live, but also the stories we are told. The mythic-reality created in *Ceremony* allows the reader a way to experience the inter-connection of stories; the form of the story mirrors the ceremony. In this sense, the novel progresses to a connection between Western and Native realms as Tayo moves toward his own untangling of the stories.

For Tayo to counteract the witchery that has desecrated his land, he must find a way to merge the two realms (or all realms) of story into one. Tayo must look at what Salyer calls the two ways of being and realize that to be a creator he must connect all things:

For Silko there are two ways of being in the world. In one humans are at odds with themselves, their creators, and their environment separated by fragmenting and disorienting interpretations. In another human beings are centered in a multiplying reflection of the cosmos whose focus is not the individual but the dynamic relationship of all things connected by stories.

The former are called destroyers, and the latter are creators. (272)

Tayo starts the novel in the first realm; a realm reflected by a disjointed prose narrative that moves back and forth in time and has little connection to a unified narrative. The contemporary narrative starts in a fragmentation of past, present, and future; nothing is clear or unified. The start of the novel highlights Tayo's fragmentation, his disorientation from the connection of objects. As already discussed, Tayo starts the novel as an invisible vapor. Yet there must be connections, a limitless progression between borderless distinctions. As Susan Scarberry points out, "The world, in Leslie Silko's novel, is fragile or precariously balanced, and it is each individual's moral responsibility to combat witchery at large which seeks to destroy the natural continuity of life relationships. By cultivating active memory, particularly of old stories, individuals... forestall the witchery which is advanced, if not generated, through forgetfulness" (19). At the start of the novel, Tayo clouds his past with beer, trying to find some way to forget his regret. The act of forgetting dismisses the connection between past and present. Yet, because his sickness is part of something larger, "his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything" (Silko, *Ceremony* 125-26). Once Tayo begins to realize the connection between all things, he starts to take an active part in forming his new identity (Scarberry 23). In order to be "born again," in the sense that he

must re-establish his connection to the whole, he must purge himself by “trying to vomit out everything—all the past, all his life” (168). Through this purging, Tayo re-establishes his connection to memory and immediately after follows an old Laguna road: “He followed the wagon road to Laguna, going by memory and the edges of old ruts” (169). Scarberry believes this action shows that “Tayo is on the right track [to forming his identity], going home with memory as a guide, growing towards self-acceptance” (23). By allowing his memory (and the history of those before him) to serve as his path back to Laguna, Tayo is showing an acceptance of the past; the past becomes a map for the present.

The past also meets the present in the final site of Tayo’s ceremony. Fittingly enough, Silko places the point where all things meet on the grounds of an old Uranium mine. Witchery works off conquest, distortion, and destruction, and Silko uses the uranium mine as a place where all stories converge and the fate of all things are held:

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah’s voice and Rocky’s voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery’s final ceremonial sand painting. (Silko, *Ceremony* 246)

The uranium mine highlights the interconnection of all people because the Uranium bomb has the ability to destroy everyone—the Bomb does not discriminate between races. The site is the ultimate show of the power the destroyers have. Michael Parker

believes that the Uranium mine is special to Tayo, not only because it is sacred to the Laguna people, but also because it is the source for nuclear weapons (27). While the site holds Laguna significance, the importance is not just limited to Laguna; it is the place where all peoples' fate meets. This is a show of how stories meet: Laguna myths and sacred grounds are transformed into tools for the destroyers. In this sense, the Laguna story is the nuclear site; this nuclear site is everyone's story as well.

The past connects to the future in what Reyes Garcia believes to be the clearest example of political themes in Silko's *Ceremony*: "[S]ince the uranium used for making nuclear weapons is mined mostly on Native American lands by large multinational corporations—Laguna lands being the primary source of it. The nuclear issue is inseparable from the politics of exterminism alluded to earlier" (Garcia 40). At Trinity Site Tayo realizes that his fragmentation, the voices and nightmares that constantly dissolve into his reality, are the truth of life; he finally sees the pattern: "He cried with relief at finally seeing the pattern, the way all stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (Silko, *Ceremony* 246). This passage highlights the separation that was forced on Tayo at the start of the novel. The doctors, who treated his borderless state as a mental problem, forced Tayo into a state of otherness. Yet, at the point where all fates are held, Tayo realizes that reality is a mixture of every story, a connection of all events; the process Tayo goes through to re-create his identity is a ceremony in the renewal of his connection to all things.

Once Tayo achieves this understanding and sees the pattern of how all stories are connected, both realms of stories (mythic and contemporary) become fully integrated into each other and Rocky and Josiah carry Tayo home:

As clouds gather, the spirits of the dead are present in much the same way that the dead return with rain clouds as katchinas. The transition is complete when Josiah and Rocky wrap Tayo up and take him home—he is at last dreaming with his eyes open. Myth and reality have merged in the story still being told, the meditative discourse developing in both spheres. We must remember that the mythic story of the Destroyers is not a traditional Laguna narrative, but a translation, a mediation that both addresses and furthers Native discourse. (Ruppert 84).

The passage Ruppert refers to also highlights the connection between many different oppositions: the past becomes the present, myth becomes reality, and dreams become real. In this passage, the mythic story becomes fully realized in the contemporary narrative and, thus, all connections are realized, allowing Tayo to dismiss his guilt of failing Rocky and Josiah. In this realization, Tayo becomes part of the greater whole: “the patient is healed as harmonic balance is struck, successively reinstating Tayo into various aspects of his personal, familial, social and natural environment, which makes him one with the Laguna view of cosmology” (Swan 314).

Tayo redefines his identity through a process that reclaims his own connection to the greater weaving of the stories. The final understanding Tayo must confront is the need to see that stories are always changing. Betonie tells Tayo, “The people nowadays have an idea about ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as

they have always been done, maybe because one slip-up or mistake and the whole ceremony must be stopped...But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began...You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing” (Silko, *Ceremony* 126). For ceremonies to account for these changes they too must morph; the ceremonies must adapt themselves to the new stories being told. The chance of nuclear holocaust was something that was not realized until the stories changed. Just as Tayo’s story is now part of the Laguna story, Tayo must account for the idea that new stories will emerge and cause other stories to become de-centered. Stories are like the stars that are always moving in a circular rotation, moving in a way that each night they represent something new. Just like the stars, stories change as well:

“Everywhere he looked he saw a world made of stories; as old Grandma called them. It was a world alive, always changing and moving; and if you knew where to look, you could see it, sometimes almost imperceptible, like the motion of the stars across the sky” (Silko, *Ceremony* 95).

This understanding is essential, not just to Laguna people, but all people. The white people must understand the stories they cling to are working to destroy:

If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery; they would never know that they were still being manipulated by those who knew how to stir the ingredients together: white thievery and injustice boiling up the anger and hatred that would finally destroy the world: the starving against the fat, the colored against the white. (Silko, *Ceremony* 191)

The passage calls for an acceptance of stories; a change of understanding that allows for the fact that white people can be thieves. The present stories, the ones taught to Tayo, do not allow for an understanding of the lie they tell themselves: one can call this Manifest Destiny. Once the stories are changed, and the truth emerges, then the destroyers will have no way to control the white people. The confusion of stories is one tool witchery employs. As Tayo finds out through his healing, all stories are connected and all fates intersect. If the world is to get better, the white people must realize that their stories hurt themselves as much as the Native Americans: “The theft of Indian land, the stripping away of Indian humanity, and the attempted destruction of Indian culture work together to destroy the white man as much as they work to destroy the Native American. For good or ill, the destinies of both are tied together. The magic that works to save one saves both” (Parker 26). This acceptance means a re-writing of history; the white people must account for the destruction the witchery has caused them to enact.

History and myth are connected and displayed in Silko’s *Ceremony*. The white cloud that covers Tayo’s identity at the start of the novel becomes analogous to his separation and isolation. This isolation comes from his failure to understand his connection to the greater cycle of stories. He dismisses his native myths and tries to find a way to integrate himself into white society. Once unable, Tayo becomes divided. Of course, this sense of dismissal from white culture is something that is felt throughout the novel. Emo, Harley, and Leroy desperately seek a way to become accepted in the white culture that once embraced them. Yet, their acceptance came with an expiration date and was only allowed as long as they were needed in war. Once the war was over, they were sent back to the reservation to go about their days drinking and reliving the stories of

conquest. This is a realization of history and retells the affliction that befell war veterans of all nationalities. The mythic stories and contemporary stories interact in order to highlight the connection between all forms of stories. The interaction also works to reinforce the understanding of myth and history.

Although some of this discussion might have been well suited for the previous chapter—most noticeably the power of stories—I chose to place the discussion in this chapter because myth and history are integrated into the power of stories so much that to separate them would be impossible. Myth, history, and reality are all part of a greater circle of relations. Myth provides a frame for the story and also highlights the path to understanding connection. Furthermore, the whole of *Ceremony* can be seen as a prayer to finding this connection. The novel starts and ends with prayer, and works to connect Tayo to place. In this connection, all distinctions of “otherness” are unified:

Within this unfolding pattern, the boundaries of difference are subsumed within a universal history and a timeless universal binary of creation/destruction that holds the potential to reconnect all humanity into one clan again. Thus Silko refigures Indian survival as dependent on the maintenance of cultural boundaries that must be both separate—protect against the encroachments of the dominant culture—and connect—join with the dominant culture in recognition that mutual survival is interdependent and dependent on the stories, both old and new, tribal and western, that can map that survival. (Arnold 6-7)

It is no surprise, then, that Silko’s final ceremonial event takes place at Trinity Site—the ultimate symbol of why unification is needed. Because all lives are connected to the

presence of this uranium mine, all stories are part of the greater end. If a person does not look at the stories, and notice how stories and life change, then one will never realize how witchery is using them—for witchery works off confusing the stories. The path against the destroyers means confronting one's guilt, swallowing it, only to purge it out, and be reborn with a greater understanding of how all of life is connected—finding the one place where all stories converge.

Finding the point of convergence is really where myth and history start to merge and change into something new and different; they become a hybrid of each other. While hybridity suggests a mixture of two different materials—or in the case of myth and history, two different ways to classify the past—the road to achieving the amalgamation can take different forms. This is the case with Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. While Silko shows that all stories (myth and history) are connected together as part of the one story, King blends myth and history under one idea: trickster discourse. The image of a trickster is an important mythic element of Native American traditions. Although the trickster does not belong to Native cultures alone—*Huckleberry Finn* comes to mind—the mythic trickster Coyote has ties to Native oral tradition: “The familiar trickster figure [Coyote] from First Nations/Native American tales, [is] an especially important personage in the mythology of traditional oral literature of Native North America” (Flick 143). King uses Coyote as one of the narrators of the story. As a narrator, or perhaps because that is just how life is, the story becomes polluted with cases of the trickster at work. The trickster becomes a running motif that, while it is a large part of the oral stories of Coyote, is also a key ingredient in the Western understanding of the world. The world is full of tricksters and the presence of historical incidents in *Green*

Grass, Running Water become instances where the trickster is at play. By veiling *Green Grass, Running Water* in trickster discourse, King displays the interconnection between myth and history; he retells history as another example of mythic stories.

As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, King relies on an understanding of Native American myths and Christian (Western) myths. Also discussed in Chapter Three is the way King uses textualization to question the notion of Truth in these myths. King's subversion of Christian truth through textualization is important to understanding how myth and history intermingle. In the case of Noah, King brings to life the literal assertion that women are objects of men's sexual desires. King's textualization is a revisualization of the Western story of Noah:

Green Grass, Running Water proffers a number of revisionary 'counter-memories' of dominant discourse master-narratives. It resituates myth and history by relating both from Native perspectives. While, on one level, King's novel draws attention to the sexism embedded in Christian mythology, on another, it works to decentre the primacy of Christian myth by re-positioning its origin in Native culture. (Walton 79)

King plays a trick on Christian creation myths; he tells them from a Native perspective. While re-imagining the stories as if they were real, King highlights the "trick" behind their creation. If these stories were taken as ultimate Truth and acted out in a literal mind-set, some would be sexist, egotistical, and exclusive. They are designed to see the world in a certain way, yet quoted as holding ultimate Truth. The Christian myths King cites are exclusive and each interaction between the four elders and the Christian figures ends in expulsion—from the Garden of Eden, from Noah's ship, from Young Man

Walking on Water. In telling Christian myth from a Native perspective, King highlights the trick behind the Christian stories: they only belong to a certain group and Native Americans are not part of that group.

The second trick accomplished in King's textualization of Christian mythology is that it becomes part of the Native story as well. While Walton (above quote) shows that King offers a Native perspective on Western ideology, she fails to take into consideration the hybrid nature of the interaction; it is Western mythology co-existing, interacting, and, paradoxically, excluding Native mythology. In this sense, King finds a way to incorporate Native discourse into Western mythology by re-inventing the story to include the Native perspective, only to end the interaction with exclusion. King's trick is that he includes Native perspective only to show how it is excluded. Ultimately, he re-creates Western ideology to involve the Native perspective, which fittingly enough is one of exclusion; the mythology becomes both Western and Native: the myths are noticeably Christian, yet changed in ways that include Native views.

As Coyote and the four elders travel the pages of King's novel trying to fix the world, they propel the trickster dialogue while also showing the trickster discourse hiding behind Western myths: "fixing the world involves fixing our myths" (Matchie and Larson 157). Therefore, fixing the world is also about realizing the trickster hidden in history and myth.

The presence of the trickster is something the reader can recognize before opening the book. The title of the book alludes to the mercurial nature of treaties, and, as Patricia Linton states, "it is a coded reminder of a history of appropriation and the instability of European intentions" (217). The title is in reference to a common metaphor used in

treaties signed between Native Americans and the Federal Government. As Jane Flick states, the title calls to mind treaties like the Fort Carlton Treaty, signed in 1876 (158-59). The title highlights the understanding that nothing is as binding as it seems. There is a reminder in the title that one should remember the tricks that were played on the people in the past: “As long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn’t mean anything. It was a metaphor. Eli knew that. Every Indian on the reserve knew that. Treaties were hardly sacred documents. They were contracts, and no one signed a contract for eternity” (King, *Green Grass* 296). This passage comes after Eli tells Sifton (the man who is constructing the dam on Eli’s reservation) that he will block the progression of the dam as long as the grass is green and the waters run. Linton believes that Eli’s use of the statement shows his awareness that the government can change the rules at any point (thus dislocating him), that he intends to stay, and that he understands his battle against relocation echoes the larger historical displacement of Native Americans from their land (Linton 218). I will also suggest that Eli’s use of the metaphor shows his understanding that the treaty that was supposed to protect Native land was only a trick: “The title phrase resonates throughout the narrative as a code for betrayal, but betrayal compounded so many times that it has become predictable” (Linton 218). In this sense, the phrase, as well as the title, becomes analogous to the betrayal dealt to the Indians by the federal government. The title serves as a reminder of how the government works as a trickster. The metaphor is a tricky way of saying, “sometimes water stops running and grass turns yellow.”

In Eli’s story, King juxtapositions the metaphor “as long as the grass is green and the water runs” with the construction of the dam that blocks the water into the Blackfoot

reservation (which stopped the water and most likely killed the grass). In the article “Noah Meets Old Coyote, or Singing in the Rain,” Laura E. Donaldson sees the placement of dams on Native reservations as a modern genocide:

Indeed, the Stands Alone house, built log by log with his mother’s hands, represents not only his maternal and cultural heritage but also the only hope of stopping perhaps the most effective technology yet developed for the genocidal annihilation of Native cultures. One need only think of the Tennessee Valley Authority which, with one flick of a switch, closed the sluice gates of the Tellico Dam and buried the ancient heart of Cherokee culture to realize the irreplaceable losses engineered by this technology.

(39)

At the end of the novel an earthquake destroys the dam, freeing the river: “Below, in the valley, the water rolled on as it had for eternity” (King, *Green Grass* 455). The image of moving water is connected to the Green Grass metaphor discussed earlier. The destruction of the dam allows the Native people to reclaim the land that is theirs; it stops the genocidal annihilation that Donaldson discusses.

Of course, Coyote had his hand in the destruction of the dam. As the Earthquake rumbles, the one that destroys the foundation of the dam, the four elders ask Coyote: “‘You haven’t been dancing again, Coyote?’ said Ishmael. / ‘Just a little,’ says Coyote. / ‘You haven’t been singing again, Coyote?’ / ‘Just a little,’ says Coyote. / ‘Oh, boy,’ said Hawkeye. ‘Here we go again’” (450). Coyote’s implication in destroying the dam is something that happens on the mythic level. What I mean by this is that it perpetuates the mythic understanding of the trickster figure Coyote: “The tricksters really can affect the

ordinary world by intervening, but they cannot control their interventions in order to make particular things happen, only to add new circumstances to the mix” (Linton 222). While Coyote’s intervention into the story destroys the dam (thus a positive outcome), the intervention is also negative seeing that it claims Eli’s life.

The dam is also destroyed on what I call a historical level. In the historical realm, three cars that have disappeared throughout the novel sail through the dam: the Nissan, the Pinto, and the Karmann-Ghia (which are allusions to Columbus’ three ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria). I call this a historical level because King is essentially rewriting the history of Columbus’s landing; it is a “washing away of Columbus’s colonial heritage” (Donaldson 40). The arrival of the three cars (Columbus’s ships) does not destroy the Native people, but they do help destroy the Western construction that trespasses on the Native American’s land: “It was comical at first, the two men trying to find their footing, the cars smashing into the dam, the lake curling over the top. But beneath the power and the motion there was a more ominous sound of things giving way, of things falling apart” (King, *Green Grass* 454). As the earthquake gains force, the damn collapses and sends the cars tumbling “over the edge of the world” (King, *Green Grass* 454). The ensuing water that floods the Native land is a rebirth of the people, of the land, and most notably the colonial impact of Columbus’s ship—the cars restore freedom, they do not retract it.

Another way history and myth interact is found in each of the stories told by the four elders. The four elders (incarnations of creation myths) start their stories in the mythic realm: they fall from the sky. This starting point serves as a way for King to introduce the Native American “Earth Diver Stories:” “And I decided I’d work with the

‘Earth Diver Stories,’ and so in each of those sections you have this archetypal woman who does come out of the sky, winds up, you know, somehow, in a body of water, and the whole process begins from there. It was kind of nice, too, because it gave me a chance to talk about a more Native sense of the creation of the world within the novel” (King, “Peter Gzowski” 71). Although these stories start in the mythic presentation of the Native American creation stories, they eventually move into the historical realm: each of the four stories end with imprisonment in Fort Marion. At the start of the novel, Alberta gives a fairly accurate description of Fort Marion when she tries to teach her class Native American history. In 1874, the U.S. Army began a campaign aimed at forcing the southern Plains tribes onto reservations. After a destructive pursuit of the tribes, a pursuit that led to the burning of homes, destruction of food supplies, and the killing of horses, the tribes were forced to surrender. After the tribes surrendered, the Army separated seventy-two individuals they thought to be dangerous. They took these individuals to Fort Marion and restrained them in shackles. Once in Fort Marion, Richard Pratt concocted a way to keep the Indians from being bored; he allowed them to paint. Twenty-six of the Indians began to create paintings that would later be known as the Plains Indian Ledger Art. Of these seventy-two Indians, none escaped. Although one Indian, Gray Beard, attempted to jump out of the train on the way to Fort Marion, he was instantly shot and killed (despite the fact his hands and legs were chained). Only one of these seventy-one Indians was a woman (King, *Green Grass* 16-18). An interesting interaction that takes place during Alberta’s lecture on Fort Marion is that a majority of the students are either asleep, partaking in their own conversation, or taking notes in hopes to ace the test. Fittingly enough, the students are uninterested in the lesson and the

only one who shows full interest does so, presumably, because she wants to do well on the test. Here is a subtle example of how Native history falls on deaf ears. Although these students might have been lackadaisical had Alberta been lecturing on American history, the point is that King does not give us that insight. Instead, the reader only sees how they react to the introduction of Native history.

Here is the trick of Alberta's lecture: nobody escaped and there was only one woman at Fort Marion. Although the historical records show this to be true, the trickster discourse changes the validity of this understanding. The four elders, who are each captured and placed in Fort Marion at the end of their narrative, are really women who are perceived as being male. Therefore, the imprisonment of the four women changes the understanding of Fort Marion. In order to escape Fort Marion, each of the elders must assume a guise that not only makes them appear male, but also one that belongs to the Western canon of understanding:

The ease with which First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman...merge into the personas of the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye...demonstrates the indigenous people's ability to use whatever is necessary to survive. The original woman magically slips into the four characters' personas after she has been captured and taken as prisoner to Fort Marion so that she can escape from her prison, which was something no real Indian was able to do. [...]

[They] come in looking like [themselves] and exit looking like someone else. (Gomez-Vega 15)

In doing this, King rewrites history by allowing for the possibility of escape; it is an escape that takes place through mimicry, where the four Indians adapt Western, male roles. Because the women have assimilated themselves into a recognizable Western role, and they can be found in the books the soldiers carry, they are not Indians; which means, that no Indians really did escape. The interesting paradox points out that to be free means to be camouflaged within the system. Essentially, they trick the guards by embodying and literally personifying the guards' culture.

Historically, the one Indian who tried to escape was shot and killed. This shows two things: the Indians were kept captive through violence and only one prisoner out of seventy-two was unhappy enough to try to escape—they were allowed to create art and were so pleased they did not want to leave. Fittingly enough, this is what happens when Ahdamn (First Woman/Lone Ranger's companion) enters Fort Marion; he becomes a famous painter and does not want to leave (King, *Green Grass* 106). At the same time King is rewriting the historical incident by allowing for the possibility of what did not happen (escape), he is also pointing out the inherent flaws in looking at the situation from strictly a historical sense. Instead of saying nobody escaped, it would be more fitting to say something like, "they did not try to escape because they would be instantly killed." Through the inclusion of myth (the four elders), King changes the preconceived notion of history. Although the situation is still noticeably the same story Alberta tells, in the sense it is historically congruent, the presence of mythic figures alters the outcome.

Escape is their means of alteration. The four elders escape by becoming what the guards see as acceptable in the Western books. Of course the Indians are not really literary figures. Instead, they just adapt this guise to avoid imprisonment. Because there

is a preconceived notion of what is “Western,” these tricksters are able to manipulate the notion of identity. The notion of authenticity is a running idea in King’s novel. The problem with Indians is that everyone has a picture of what they look like—sometimes literally. King discusses this issue in a collection of essays entitled *The Truth About Stories*: “In the end, there is no reason for the Indian to be real. The Indian simply has to exist in our imaginations. But for those of us who are Indians, this disjunction between reality and imagination is akin to life and death. For to be seen as ‘real,’ for people to ‘imagine’ us as Indians, we must be ‘authentic’” (54). Authenticity is a tricky issue (no pun intended). Authenticity comes with the pre-imposed understanding of what something is or is represented by. Portland, Charlie’s dad, cannot get a job acting as an Indian because he does not have an Indian nose. In order to make a career for himself, he has to wear a fake nose to become more “authentic” looking; authenticity is a struggle and eventually a surrender that Portland deals with all his life. In an interview with Peter Gzowski, King points out, “Victor Mature, I think played Indians. Anthony Quinn played Indians. Everybody gets to play Indians except Indians” (76).

In Hollywood, Native Americans like Portland have to surrender to the “authentic” image of an Indian; in order to make a living Portland has to become the representation of what Hollywood sees as an Indian. In the realm of trickster discourse, King alters the Native American surrender to this idea by having the four elders alter the ending of a John Wayne movie. In their ending, the Indians win. This new version of the movie shows Charlie his father’s (Portland’s) struggle against “authenticity” and allows for a place where Portland wins; he does not have to surrender (Gomez-Vega 11). King

rewrites popular myth and history by creating a field where the Indians beat the cowboys. This is done, of course, by playing a trick on the original recording of the movie.

In Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, Western historical and Native/Christian mythical understanding of life converge. They become connected through the discourse of the trickster. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, the trickster is seen in Native American mythology as well as the historical understanding. As the title reminds, history, to the native people, is a history of betrayal, tricks that impose on Native Americans a Western notion of truth: "What the transcendent characters demonstrate in their own stories is that history can be revisited, endings can be rewritten, the letter does not have to be the law. Contrariness is the trickster norm" (Linton 229). History is revisited in the presence of myth. Although mythic encounters alter the perception of historical understanding, the mythic alteration does not completely change the history. The history is still recognizable, just resituated in a way that looks from the Native perspective. In this sense, myth and history are present together. Through his interaction with history, King creates space for the mythic perspective. History is re-created to include alternate stories, alternate perspectives, and alternate versions of the truth. Ultimately, as I think I said in chapter two, "there are no truths, only stories" (King, *Green Grass, Running Water* 432).

A classmate once told me that magical realism is a professional way to not say anything at all; it is a cop-out, a way to not show conviction. Because magical realism relies on the underhanded "re-writing" of historical prejudice and dismisses the option to openly confront, magical realism can be said to lack assertion. Yet I feel this is one of the powers of magical realism; it does not separate history from cultural mythology and

place mythology as “other,” and thus the author as “other.” Instead, magical realist authors assert their knowledge of historical prejudice while seemingly glancing over it. In this dismissal of conviction, the understanding that historical record has been prejudice is felt; there is no need to state it. Magical realism works within the confines of Western historical ideals, placing this historical framework before the reader. Once the history is displayed, magical realism interweaves mythology, which in turn changes the understanding of history. Through this change, history becomes united with a mythology that has been largely left out. Magical realism is a field that allows for the hybrid combination of history and myth to exist and create a new form of discourse: one that accepts both as stories. In this connection, the disregarded history of marginalized people emerges. Furthermore, the myth/history concoction questions the validity of history by showing how history is another form of story. Through the alteration of history, magical realism changes the signifier of past understanding; the mixture becomes a hybrid version of the original. Magical realist authors adhere to the realist writer’s aims of describing reality as a familiar place that can be compared to the understanding of the external world. Yet, unlike realist fiction, magical realism also subverts the notion of realism by stretching the reader’s understanding of reality: “Magical realism relies upon realism but only so that it can stretch what is acceptable as real to its limits” (Bowers 22). In the end, the historical presence of the novel becomes a new way of seeing the past, a way that can be called—if one really wanted to—mythistory.

CHAPTER 5

THE DISJOINTED MIRROR:

CONCLUSIONS

I want to come back full circle, shed the linear progression that has formed this discussion thus far, and revisit the image of the mirror from the introduction. At the start of this thesis I discussed how Wendy Faris compares magical realism to a double sided mirror that reflects magic and real in separate but connected directions. I hope that by now, the image is clear to see: magic and real both co-existing and reflecting from one another. Yet instead of reflecting just magic and real, magical realism reflects images against images, so that the expansion is endless and in all directions. Magical realism does not just work from the single reflection of magic and real, but the multi-reflection of a system of binaries. Three of these binaries I have discussed throughout this thesis (oral and written techniques, reality and fiction, and myth and history), but more are present. They exist against each other's reflection, but not in a competition for presence. Instead, magical realism reflects binaries against one another only to have these oppositions become entangled: language becomes oral literature, the past becomes mythistory, and fiction becomes meta-reality. I call the last mixture meta-reality because the authors use

metafiction as a reality of the text. In other words, the fictional reality is part of the written technique.

This “disjointed mirror” alters the reflection by copying the image and pushing it in opposite ways. Through this distortion, one can see where magical realism gets its power. The mode works off hybridity, combining two forms of thinking into a third way of seeing. While accepting the views of the dominant discourse, magical realist authors transform the understanding of these views and create a new way of looking at them. Homi K. Bhabha, in his article “Signs Taken for Wonder,” sees hybridity as a way for marginalized discourse to disrupt the dominant understanding by changing the unification of the dominant culture’s ideas. Bhabha uses the example of a group of Hindoo people who accept the English Bible, but refuse to take the sacrament because they are vegetarians. They believe that God, rather than European missionaries, gave the Bible to them. Thus, they cut England out of the equation (145-46). In doing this, the people accept the religion that has been imposed on them, but they change the understanding of the signifier. Once moved from the European understanding of God, and transformed into a “vegetarian Bible,” the meaning of the book has slipped from the original creation. The people, by mixing their culture with the dominant culture, find a way to create a new understanding. The Bible is no longer English, yet it is also not Hindoo; it is a hybrid understanding of religion. Hybridity is a way to work within the confines of dominant culture, using a form of mimicry to subvert the unified understanding that dominant culture provides: “Hybridity is a *problematic* of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority—its rules of

recognition” (Bhabha 156). Not only does magical realism demonstrate how stories create reality (through textualization), but it also finds a way to incorporate cultural mythology that is absent from the Western understanding of life. Ultimately, magical realism works with this hybrid issue to create a way to function within the system it is trying to work against.

Because magical realism relies displays a Western understanding of life, it has often been ridiculed for its lack of conviction. Yet, what I am trying to show with my discussion on the unification of binaries is that magical realism creates a third, hybrid space that allows for Western ideas, but also integrates a non-Western understanding of life. Maggie Bowers discusses this problem with magical realism when she says, “In Brennan’s opinion, both Rushdie and García Márquez are removed from the actual material difficulties of living with the after-effects of colonialism, and are protected from poverty and prejudice by virtue of their education and social status. [...] They appear to be ‘citizens of the world,’ influenced by Western ideology and ideas of globalization” (124). Yet magical realism uses a form of mimicry that burrows into the system of discourse by appearing to be of the same field, only then to reveal the hybridity of existence, where everything is a mixture and re-creation of the previous understanding. Most notably, magical realism clings to the understanding of realism, while also allowing for a re-imagination of how realism depicts reality. There is an interesting paradox in hybridity, one that I think is the basis of arguments like the one Bowers discusses against magical realism. Because hybridity accepts the colonizer’s understanding of life, thus re-enforcing their colonization, it also re-creates this understanding to allow for cultural independence. In this re-creation, the colonized decenter the colonizer’s understanding

of their language; it both alienates the colonizer from this new understanding, while also giving the colonizer a basis of understanding.

Although magical realism emerges from a Western understanding, it is not strictly Western; it is a hybrid. Magical realism recreates the understanding of opposition: reality becomes magically real. The process is not only looking in a mirror that reflects both ways, but also looking in a mirror that disjoins the perception of the looker and creates fragmentation of old oppositions to create the possibility of new understandings. By disjoining the Western understanding of reality, magical realism is able to achieve a dislocation of power that both accepts Western ideas and does not make the acceptance foreign or “other” to Western discourse. Saying that magical realism re-enforces Western ideas is failing to consider the nature in which it works. The mode works within the system, using the tools of the dominant, in order to both allow and dismiss the dominant culture’s understanding. While the Western reader might understand the Western parts of the novel, a full understanding can only be found in discovering the myths and cultural ideas that these authors express. How many Western readers truly understand all of Rushdie’s work without looking into his culture?

The magically real space of the novel can be seen as a way to provide the reader with escape. Because it allows for the possibility of magic and often juxtaposes humorous situations against violent actions, it would seem like the perfect mode for escape (Bowers 125). Yet, one must consider the aims of placing magic and reality together. The aims are to allow for a new understanding of reality; this understanding is not an escape from reality, but a visit deeper into it. Many magical realist authors, such as Márquez, dismiss the term magical realism because they are writing about their reality.

Yet, this dismissal is in line with the spirit of magical realism: the magic is true and part of the novel. Perhaps the Western understanding of the term “magic” makes the mode seem like a form of escapist literature. Magic is often associated with magicians, people who make a living by tricking people into believing they can really float. In this sense, magic is a synonym for tricks. But the “magic” in magical realism has a different meaning. Magical realism does not attempt to trick the readers into believing something that is not real, but instead allows a way to look at reality that incorporates those instances, those circumstances, that are completely unexplainable and bizarre.

Anyone who believes in some form of chaos theory would find that, in fact, magical realism does depict a more realistic reality. If a sphere represents each person, a bubble of personal space, and each day this person interacts with many other bubbles in a seemingly random way, then the possibility of repeating the same day would almost be impossible. The idea can be related to the fact that if a person sheds flakes of skin daily, then eventually the person will grow a new “skin”; if a person re-grows skin daily, then the person is constantly becoming someone new. If life is always moving, then there are cases where unexplainable instances happen. Magical realism brings the novels to life, not just through textualization, but through the active, unknown presence of magic. Not anything is justified, after all; there are limits to the rules of acceptance. Magical realism works off subtleties and an understanding of the limits of reality.

The rules of reality that magical realist authors blur are also the rules of realist fiction. Because realism adheres to the “realistic” depiction of life, they are confined to representing only one understanding of reality. Yet, magical realist authors “wage war of totality’ by using magical realist devices to disrupt fixed categories of truth, reality,

and history. Their multiple-perspectived texts and the disruption of categories create a space beyond authoritative discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (Bowers 82). This is where magical realism’s reaction against realist fiction really comes into play. By distorting the notion of language and the notion that language is truth to life, magical realism questions language’s role in life and what literature is really trying to capture. Further, novels like *Green Grass, Running Water* question the understanding of truth in general. For King, stories are reality and, therefore, depicting reality is really in telling a story. Magical realism also disrupts the prior understanding of history. In this disruption, the past becomes something that includes the excluded. Magical realism creates a hybrid of the mythical, circular perception of story and Western linear perception. In this combination, magical realism reacts against the understanding of linear sequence. The mode also questions the prior understanding of reality through the displacement of history and inclusion of myth. What I mean by this is that the starting point, the reality of the novel’s understanding of the past, becomes a mixture of unheard and known histories. Ultimately, magical realism achieves this reaction against realist fiction by including in the novels a form of oral discourse. While the novel is not strictly oral, and often magical realist novels have little “oral presence,” it still includes the power of words, the presence of primitive superstition, and the repetition of stories.

Magical realism has come a long way since it was first associated with Latin America. Although the myth that magical realism is a strictly Latin American phenomenon still exists, there has been a growing understanding that magical realism has expanded from the South American jungles. I picked texts for my thesis that helped show this movement. In doing so, I felt the need to use texts that are still connected and

similar, even though the texts might come from different cultures or genres. Although the novels might differ in the way the authors utilize magical realism, and thus the outcome of using magical realism, all three texts present characters living on the margins. Both King and Silko show the struggle to find one's self within dominant culture while remembering not to forget cultural heritage. Similarly, Jones shows this same struggle in a child's life by having Polly dismiss and forget her own personal history (or childhood) in order to become part of the "adult world."

Although the three novels help show the expansion of magical realism from Latin America, I also realize that not all the texts I picked are commonly cited as magical realist novels. *Fire and Hemlock*, because it is a children's book, might not be normally seen as a magical realist novel; children's literature has different aims and methods than other fiction. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that Jones's book is reacting against the notion of childhood and using tools of magical realism to achieve this goal. *Ceremony* is another text that might not be normally cited as a magical realist text. I picked the text because it captures the spirit of magical realism. The novel is concerned with connection and inclusion, and creates a world where opposition is united. Through this "spirit," the novel achieves many of the aims of magical realism.

Not only am I concerned with displacing the understanding of magical realism as Latin American, but I also wanted to show the hybridity issue to be a positive force behind magical realism instead of a negative force. Through the disjointed mirror, magical realism reflects images that re-create the understanding of reality, truth, fiction, and language. Oppositions are in play constantly, not just in the telling (oral and literate), but in the fictional space. This is what gives the novel movement and life; there is a

constant push and pull between what the reader knows and what the reader reads.

Through this push and pull, the reader is shifted into a third space where a hybrid of oppositions rests. In this third space, the reader is presented the abundance of possibilities. Life is not just black and white, but instead, life is a grey slate that allows for new understanding of reality, truth, and fiction.

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