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See also


MAGIC REALISM AND POSTMODERNISM:
DECENTERING PRIVILEGED CENTERS

Because the term "magic" or "magical realism" has persisted for over half a century, and yet is not entirely current, it is useful to trace its origins and use briefly before situating the mode with regard to postmodernism. Most commentators agree that it originated with the
German art critic Franz Roh, who in 1925 coined the word to, and here I am quoting the *Oxford Dictionary of Art*, "describe the aspect of *Neue Sachlichkeit* characterized by sharp-focus detail ... in later criticism the term has been used to cover various types of painting in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism but which because of paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions convey a feeling of unreality, infusing the ordinary with a sense of mystery." *ii Mutatis mutandis*, I will take the same definition to apply to the literary movement of the same name. *iii* From the example the *Oxford Dictionary of Art* offers, viz. the paintings of the Belgian René Magritte, the relevance of the term to Surrealism and its environment can be deduced. It is also in this environment, and more specifically with Miguel Angel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier, who both frequented Surrealist circles, *iv* that Jean Franco, in her *An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature*, *v* situates the emergence of that particular Latin-American prose most commentators include under the rubric of magic realism. Both Asturias and Carpentier discussed the idea of magic realism in their own works, linking it explicitly to Surrealism, Asturias using the very word "réalisme magique" in a 1962 interview in *Les Lettres Françaises*, while Alejo Carpentier chose to rechristen it in his influential essay "De lo real maravilloso americano," originally prefacing *El reino de este mundo*, and collected in his 1967 volume *Tientos y diferencias*. *vi* It should immediately be stated, though, that even before it was generally applied to Latin American literature the term had already been used with regard to particular tendencies or movements in German-Austrian and Flemish literature. *vii* In fact, although also in Spanish the term was already firmly established well before the 1960's, as Brotherston, referring to earlier publications by Angel Flores and Luis
Leal, noted in 1977,\textsuperscript{viii} Franco in her 1969 \textit{Introduction} apparently still found it necessary to apologize for her use of it by a note stating that "this term has recently been coined to categorize novels which use myth and legend" (p. 374), and in her slightly earlier \textbf{The Modern Culture of Latin America} (1967) she had not used the term.\textsuperscript{ix} However, in her 1973 \textit{Spanish American Literature since Independence} she freely and unreservedly uses Carpentier's "real maravilloso," at least if I am to go by the 1987 edition of the Spanish translation of that book.\textsuperscript{x} So does Cedomil Goic in his 1972 \textit{Historia de la novela hispanoamericana}, though he prefers the term "superrealismo" for the entire tendency to which he sees Carpentier's "real maravilloso" forming only a part.\textsuperscript{xi} In the intervening years, of course, the appearance of Gabriel García Márquez's \textit{Cien años de soledad} (1967), with in its wake the worldwide attention given to the so-called Latin-American \textit{boom}, much of which fits the category we are here concerned with, had ensured the international literary-critical success of the term "magic realism" also in non-Spanish critical writing, though still with almost exclusive reference to contemporary Spanish American fiction.\textsuperscript{xii}

Like magic realism, the term "postmodernism," though even now it may seem new to some, goes back several decades, as has been amply illustrated by Michael Köhler and Hans Bertens in their survey articles of 1977 and 1986 respectively.\textsuperscript{xiii} Again like magic realism, the term "postmodernism" has gained wide recognition and acceptance only since the 1960s, and particularly so in the 80s in which it has come to stand for a general movement in the arts, and even in forms of behavior and daily life.\textsuperscript{xiv} From a literary-critical perspective, particularly with regard to prose -- the genre which has figured most prominently in
recent literary discussions of postmodernism — the term primarily stands for a combination of those technically innovative qualities most highly regarded by contemporary critical movements such as post-structuralism. Drawing on discussions by Douwe Fokkema, Allen Thiher, Linda Hutcheon, Brian McHale, Ihab Hassan, David Lodge, Alan Wilde, and others, and simplifying matters a great deal, I would argue that the following features are generally regarded as marking postmodernism:

- self-reflexiveness
- metafiction
- eclecticism
- redundancy
- multiplicity
- discontinuity
- intertextuality
- parody
- the dissolution of character and narrative instance
- the erasure of boundaries
- the destabilization of the reader.

Most commentators seem to agree that the very term "postmodernism" originated in the 1930s in Latin America, with the critic Federico de Onís, and was re-invented or re-used, covering different fields and carrying different meanings, throughout the 40s and 50s both in Europe and the United States. Yet, most commentators would also agree that in its present meaning and with its present scope the term gained acceptance primarily with reference to American, i.e. U.S., prose fiction.

In the period in which "postmodernism" and "magic realism" gained their present meanings, then, their use was restricted, respectively, to North- and South-American prose developments. Only recently, and primarily since the early 80s, have these terms allowed for spillage into other linguistic or geographical areas. However, I think few would deny that since they have started doing so they have come to divide not just the New, but also the "Old" World between them. They now seem almost the only shorthands available to categorize contemporary developments in western fiction. Increasingly, though, it has proved difficult to distinguish the categories covered by these terms clearly.
"Postmodernism" has been undeniably the more successful term in spreading to cover developments in other technically highly sophisticated western literatures. Often, this has not happened without considerable hesitation, as witnessed to by the ongoing discussion with regard to the French *nouveau roman* and *nouveau nouveau roman*. Still, Günter Grass, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Angela Carter, John Banville, and Michel Tournier, as well as Dutch authors Willem Brakman and Louis Ferron, all of whom during the 60s and 70s were considered sometimes highly idiosyncratic authors, or representatives of purely national movements or tendencies, during the 80s have increasingly come to be annexed by postmodernism. Indeed, on the basis of the catalog of features I listed before, such inclusion seems fully warranted. Yet, judging from the definition I quoted at the beginning of this essay, it would be hard to deny that much of the work of many of these authors might just as easily be categorized as magic realist. This, in fact, is what has been happening. Richard Todd, in an essay called "Convention and Innovation in British Fiction 1981-1984: The Contemporaneity of Magic Realism," discusses Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, and D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*. He sees these novels as challenging, in a magic realist way, both the earlier modes of historical and documentary realism prevalent in post-War British fiction and the more conventional forms of romance. At the same time, though, he sees these novels as achieving their magic realist program by way of the very same techniques usually singled out as marking postmodernism. Geert Lernout, in an essay on "Postmodernist fiction in Canada," claims that "what is postmodern in the rest of the world used to be called magic realist in South America and still goes by that name in Canada." His list of Canadian magic realists
includes Robert Kroetsch, Jack Hodgins, Timothy Findley, and Rudy Wiebe, all of whom he considers to be writing in a tradition that would also include Borges, Grass, Nabokov, Rushdie, and Calvino, but that would exclude Beckett, Robbe-Grillet and Ricardou. All these authors are postmodernists, he concludes, but "maybe we do need a more specific term for the first kind of postmodernist works than 'metafiction' or 'surriction,' and 'magic realism' may in the end not be all that bad."

It would seem, then, as if in international critical parlance a consensus is emerging in which a hierarchical relation is established between postmodernism and magic realism, whereby the latter comes to denote a particular strain of the contemporary movement covered by the former. Such, for instance, is already the attitude taken by two late 80s survey works on postmodern writing: Brian McHale's Postmodernist Fiction (1987) and Linda Hutcheon's A Poetics of Postmodernism (1988).

Looking at it from the other side, from that of Spanish American literature, a similar development can be deduced from a recent article by Julio Ortega on "Postmodernism in Latin America," in which he considers the work of a number of authors that until recently would have been discussed almost exclusively within a magic realist framework.Obviously, to anyone even minimally acquainted with the narrative pyrotechnics of a García Márquez, a Cortázar, a Fuentes, a Donoso, or the early Vargas Llosa, this possibility must have suggested itself immediately from the catalog of features I listed earlier as distinguishing postmodernism. If magic realism, then, at present seems firmly established as part of postmodernism, the question remains as to what part it plays in this larger current or movement, and where and why.
Carlos Fuentes, in an article in which he describes how he came to write about Mexico the way he does, says that one of the first things he learned --from Octavio Paz--, is that "there were no privileged centers of culture, race, politics."\textsuperscript{xx} It is precisely the notion of the ex-centric, in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place "other" than "the" or "a" center, that to me seems an essential feature of that strain of postmodernism we call magic realism. In literary-critical terms, this ex-centricity can in first instance be described as a voluntary act of breaking away from the discourse perceived as central to the line of technical experimentation starting with realism and running via naturalism and modernism to the kind of postmodernism Lernout assigned to his second group of authors, the "metafictionists" or "surfictionists" à la Beckett, Robbe-Grillet or Ricardou. Even though these various movements may have thought of themselves as critical or subversive of one another, and of the respective societies they stemmed from, their issuing from "privileged centers" made their discourse suspect to those marginalized -- geographically, socially, economically -- by these same societies. To write ex-centrically, then, or from the margin, implies dis-placing this discourse. My argument would be that magic realist writing achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the "centr"-al line and then using these not, as is the case with these central movements, "realistically," i.e. 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. Magic realism thus reveals itself as a ruse to invade and take over dominant discourse(s). It is a way of access to the main body of
"western" literature for authors not sharing in, or not writing from the perspective of, the privileged centers of this literature for reasons of language, class, race, or gender, and still wanting to escape epigonism with all that mode would entail in terms of adopting the views of the hegemonic forces together with their discourse. Alternatively, it is a means for writers coming from the privileged centers of literature to dissociate themselves from the concomitant discourses of power, and to speak on behalf of the ex-centric and unprivileged (with the risk of being judged "patronising" by those on whose behalf such writers seek to speak).

That magic realism implicitly proposes this decentering, and that it does so also in other literatures than Spanish American ones, I will try and illustrate with regard to some recent English language novels that all single out some "privileged center" as embodied in traditional literary discourse, and then, via postmodernist and magic realist means, "dis-place" it. I will deal in some detail with John Coetzee's Foe (1986), and then briefly touch upon John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969), Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981), and Angela Carter's Nights at the Circus (1984).

Foe, in typical Postmodern fashion, is a re-write of an English "classic": Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. In the autobiographical tale of its protagonist, Robinson Crusoe literally is the story of white male western colonialism, and thus serves an important symbolic function in the West's cultural conception of itself and its world: it is the epic of that hero of middle class ideology, homo economicus. Coetzee's novel is not told from the perspective of Robinson Crusoe, but from that of Susan Barton, a woman shipwrecked on Crusoe's island. She tells Crusoe's story to the hack writer and journalist Foe, hoping to sell
it. He is only moderately interested in her story of a morose, surly, and inept old man, uneasily and uncomfortably living on his island with an unruly and disgruntled slave. He is more interested in Susan's own past, and especially in her sexual experiences. Of course, we know that Robinson Crusoe as we now have it presents us with a totally different Crusoe and Friday, and makes no mention of a woman. As Susan's story, in Coetzee's text, is the authentic or true version of Defoe's later fiction, we have to conclude that, from the perspective of Coetzee's novel, the English author removed Susan from the story, and re-imagined Crusoe and Friday for commercial purposes, thus adapting it to the ideological horizon of expectations of his public.

Looking at it from the opposite end, of course, the question is why Coetzee added Susan Barton to the classic story, and why he had her give her view of Crusoe, Friday and Foe. Here, a passage from the end of part three of Foe can prove helpful. Friday is, literally, dumb: his tongue has been cut out. As Susan realizes that Friday's story is central to whatever happened on the island, she agrees to Foe's proposal that she teach Friday to write. Her efforts remain largely unrewarded. Still, at the end of part three Friday is able to write a whole page of "o"s. Foe comments that next day she has to teach him the "a". This passage can be explained in two ways. First, the "o" can be read as zero. Friday is thus made out to be functionally illiterate in eighteenth-century English society. Alternatively, the "o" can be read as the Greek omega, and thus as a very pointed comment on the civilisation he has found himself landed in. As far as he is concerned, this civilisation is a "reverse" one, starting at things from the wrong end. Wittingly or unwittingly, Friday is condemned to remain outside the pale of white civilisation in which, as Michel Foucault has argued,
language is power. And *Robinson Crusoe*, as intimated earlier, is a linguistic codification of the complex of metanarratives legitimizing western middle class society in its own view. Now we can also understand the symbolism of Friday's cut-out tongue: the civilisation that Crusoe embodies literally reduces all that do not speak its discourse to silence. To learn to write starting with the "a" or alpha of Foe's alphabet would then mean for Friday to also adopt the discourse, and the corresponding world view, of white colonial civilisation. *Mutatis mutandis* the same thing holds for Susan Barton. She, of course, is not illiterate. Both orally and in writing, she can tell her own story, and she does so in *Foe*. Yet, history -- in first instance literary history, but by implication also history in general -- has written her out of the story. Thus, she fares even worse than Friday who, in the story sanctioned by history, was at least allowed to linger on as a minor character. Now we can also turn our attention to the title of the book. "Foe" means "adversary," or even "enemy," and it is clear that the implied author of the fiction that will result from Susan Barton's true story (always in the context of *Foe*, of course), viz. *Robinson Crusoe*, is both her and Friday's enemy, according to the dictates of a society that evaluated human beings in terms of their economic value, and for which blacks, indians, or members of any other race were useful as slaves, but for which women held no economic interest whatever.

Irony, of course, has it that "Foe" is the real name of the author we know as "Defoe," and that he was one of the first purely commercial writers in English literary history. If *Robinson Crusoe*, then, turns out to be an ideological re-write of a very different and much more untractable reality, the name "Defoe" turns out to be fully as much an
idological re-write, itself an objective correlative for the commercial ideology of capitalism. By opting for the real name of the writer of Robinson Crusoe as the title for his own re-write, Coetzee indicates that he is not so much concerned with the figure of "Robinson Crusoe" but rather with the eponymous book as linguistic codification of a particular privileged center's world view. Obviously, it cannot be a coincidence that it is a white male South African, of Afrikaner stock, that writes both woman and the negro back into this story. His Foe is a linguistic reaction to the likewise linguistic codification of an ideology that lies at the very basis of his own country's origins and way of life. From his own wilfully ex-centric vantage point, he invades, subverts, and corrects that codification, and hence its underlying ideology. To now circle back to my original argument: the only way for Coetzee to write woman, and via her the negro, back into the classic story is by means of magic realist devices. Especially the fourth and last section of Foe is revealing in this respect: as the privileged center discourse leaves no room for a "realistic" insertion of those that history -- always speaking the language of the victors and rulers -- has denied a voice, such act of recuperation can only happen by magic or fantastic or un-realistic means.

Similar arguments could be developed with regard to the other three novels I wish to analyze briefly. The French Lieutenant's Woman situates itself in the context of nineteenth-century English realism. As Fowles himself has stated, the novel is a partial re-write of Hardy's A Pair of Blue Eyes, and takes as its starting point what was marginal and ex-centric to the nineteenth-century English novel: sexuality, and particularly female sexuality. \textsuperscript{xxvi} The book appeals to the realist tradition in its form, style, and tone, but at the same
time undermines that tradition in the way it handles its characters, and by its metafictional use of the narrator's voice. In combination with the multiple endings to the novel, these elements face the reader with his own freedom as reader, complementary to the freedom the female protagonist -- the "French Lieutenant's Woman" from the title -- claims for herself, and which is totally opposite to the determinism implicit in Hardy's already almost naturalistic view. xxvii Important to my argument is that the multiple endings, upon which the effect of the book to a large extent hinges, are accounted for in a magic realist way, via the intervention of Fowles's "foppish impresario." xxviii This impresario -- obviously a double for Fowles himself -- is present throughout the novel as observer and metafictional commentator. When in the penultimate chapter the story has reached a "realistic" happy end in line with the meliorative intentions of many English and American (William Dean Howells, for instance) realists, the impresario appears and puts back the hands of his watch, and thereby also the narrative time of the novel. This allows for an alternative ending, highlighting the existentialist freedom-theme of the novel, and forcing the reader to make his own decision as to which ending he prefers, facing him with his own freedom.

Rushdie's Midnight's Children both invokes and subverts the typically English tradition of the colonial novel as written by Kipling or Forster (however divergent in other respects these two authors may be). In this tradition the white man's view of the land, and of its inhabitants, holdss a central position. Colonial nature and society thus assume the role of the "other," the exotic, the strange. At variance with this tradition, in Rushdie's novel the focus lies with the Indians themselves, and with their views of their country and
society. From this perspective, the exotic becomes something the West has projected upon India. Here it is the Westerner that becomes "other." Magic, which in the colonial novel often functions as the sign of the other-ness of non-Western society and civilisation, with Rushdie becomes daily reality, and hence magic realism in the sense of Carpentier's "real maravilloso": indigenous magic. All together, the children born in India at the very moment the country gained its independence from England, communicating with each other in such a magic realist way, literally give voice to an entire subcontinent; a proper voice this time, as the subjects of their own story, and not as the objects of an English colonial novel.

Finally, we notice something similar with Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*. In the first few lines of this novel the Greek myth of Leda and the swan is alluded to. Indirectly, the rape of Leda by Zeus engendered the oldest western work of literature known to us: Homer's *Iliad*. Throughout the book, this myth, in the various guises it received in the course of literary history, is referred to again and again. At the end of *Nights at the Circus*, though, in contrast to the original myth, the woman in the guise of a "swan" will gently -- though passionately -- make love to the male protagonist. The outcome of this act remains to be seen, but we may speculate that it will be very different from what happened "the other time": whereas Homer founded a male line in western literature, Carter offers us a re-write of Homer that re-defines the future of humanity from a feminist ideology. And once again, such a re-write only proves possible with the help of magic realist means: the female protagonist, "Fevvers," is a "bird," not just metaphorically but also literally. And the novel is replete with magic realism in its numerous manipulations of time, place, scenery, and
character. To give just one example: during a visit to his palace in St. Petersburg, the Grand Duke shows Fevvers his collection of toy eggs containing all sorts of miniatures. Fevvers is invited to choose one egg as a present, obviously in return for sexual favors. She is tempted to choose a miniature train, but the Duke tells her the next egg is meant for her. This egg contains a gilded, but empty cage. Fevvers, who has been trying to keep the Duke from physically engaging her by instead caressing his male member, realizes (p. 192) she is about to be trapped:

The bitter knowledge she'd been fooled spurred Fevvers into action. She dropped the toy train on the Isfahan runner—mercifully, it landed on its wheels— as, with a grunt and whistle of expelled breath, the Grand Duke ejaculated.

In those few seconds of his lapse of consciousness, Fevvers ran helter-skelter down the platform, opened the door of the first-class compartment and clambered aboard.

"Look what a mess he's made of your dress, the pig," said Lizzie.

Obviously, it is not a coincidence that the three novels I have briefly discussed here argue the emancipation of those categories—women and non-Western peoples—that were also central to Foe. It is precisely these categories that were traditionally excluded from the "privileged centers" of culture, race, and gender, and therefore from the operative discourses of power. Not for nothing Carter refers to feminism in terms of "decolonization."
If we account for magic realism's function within postmodernism along these lines, this might also furnish us with a possible explanation for the pioneering role of Spanish American literature in this mode. During the period under consideration Latin America was perhaps the continent most ex-centric to the "privileged centers" of power. At the same time, though, it was nominally independent enough early enough to utter its "other"-ness in the way I have suggested above. Or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that precisely the discrepancy between its nominal independence and its continuing cultural dependence exacerbated the feeling of ex-centricity of many Latin American authors, and thus alerted them to the problematics of centers and margins in literature, and hence to the possibilities of magic realism, at an earlier stage than authors from other continents or countries, or from other groups, races, or genders. Still, these would follow soon enough, as often as not specifically appealing to Latin American examples, as Rushdie does to García Márquez.

This brings me to a final point. García Márquez himself frequently mentioned Faulkner as his example. The Southerner Faulkner is undoubtedly one of the most ex-centric, in the sense we have here given to that word, of American authors. Of late, of course, Faulkner has been claimed for postmodernism. Should we now also start calling him a magic realist? The very fact that this notion probably strikes most of us as extravagant still might well say more about the resistance of American scholarship to applying this particular term to American literature than about that literature itself. And this regardless of the fact that John Barth, many of whose texts would surely qualify as magic realist, has expressed unreserved admiration for Borges, and for a number of Latin American magic realist authors. In "The Literature of
Replenishment" he proclaims Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* his supreme example of postmodernism: "the synthesis of straightforwardness and artifice, realism and magic and myth, ..."; yet this article, and its equally famous predecessor "The Literature of Exhaustion," are invariably only adduced to buttress the use of the term Postmodern. The reason why U.S. scholarship seems most resistant to applying the term magic realism to its own literary products is perhaps that the United States has been the most "privileged center" of all in our post-War world. The preference U.S. scholarship shows for the term "postmodernism" emphasizes to an almost extravagant degree the technical side of literary achievements, at the same time often insisting on the play-character of the text. Of course, this is one way of de-fusing the possible political repercussions or implications of contemporary texts. Ironically, marxist and neo-humanitarian critics, inside and outside the U.S., here find a common ground to decry postmodernism: for its supposed lack of ethical or materialist concern. However, by stubbornly restricting the term to a geographically limited segment of literature and by moreover exclusively fixating upon one aspect of this literature these critics fail to see that the really significant resistance within the international postmodern movement is being put up by magic realism. In their blindness, in fact, they fall victim to the same kind of "privileged center" ideology that they claim to combat: a rare case of bad faith indeed!

To my mind, then, the cutting edge of postmodernism is magic realism. As Douwe Fokkema remarks, the postmodernist device of "permutation" -- which he circumscribes as "permutation of possible and impossible, relevant and irrelevant, true and false, reality and
parody, metaphor and literal meaning" -- is "probably the most subversive one with regard to earlier conventions."\(^{xxxiv}\) Significantly, it is also this device that is central to the definition of magic realism I quoted at the very beginning of this article. And obviously, I would see the subversion being worked here as not just reflecting upon earlier conventions, but also upon the metanarratives or ideologies these conventions uphold. In this, I feel supported by most of the critics I have hitherto had occasion to mention. Todd sees the three magic realist novels he discusses, Nights at the Circus, Rushdie's Shame, and D.M. Thomas's The White Hotel, as respectively putting forth a feminist program, and showing up the ill effects of political and psychological repression. Linda Hutcheon, in her A Poetics of Postmodernism, devotes an entire chapter to "Decentering the postmodern: the ex-centric," claiming that "the theory and practice of postmodern art has shown ways of making the different, the off-center, into the vehicle for aesthetic and even political consciousness-raising" (p. 73). And in her more recent The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction, she insists at length upon the ex-centricity of Canadian literature, stating that "[Canada's] history is one of defining itself against centres," and linking the Canadian experience to that of repressed "minorities," approvingly quoting Susan Swan's The Biggest Modern Woman of the World (1983) as saying that "to be from the Canadas is to feel as women feel -- cut off from the base of power".\(^{xxxv}\) For her too, "the ex-centrics, be they Canadians, women, or both, ... subvert the authority of language," and -- echoing Angela Carter -- "not surprisingly, language has been called the major issue in the general history of colonisation, whether in terms of gender or nationality" (p. 7). Speaking of magic realism as
"an internalized challenge to realism offered by Latin American fiction," she argues that "this kind of realism was less a rejection of the realist conventions than a contamination of them with fantasy and with the conventions of an oral story-telling tradition" (p. 208). As Canadian heirs to Gabriel García Márquez she mentions Robert Kroetsch, Susan Swan, Jack Hodgins, and Michael Ondaatje. Elsewhere I have argued a similarly "subversive" case for Timothy Findley, xxxvi and, shifting from Canada to Europe, and particularly to Ireland, for John Banville and Desmond Hogan. xxxvii Even earlier, Wendy Faris had linked magical realism, postmodernism, and emergent literatures in a paper she presented at the 1985 ICLA Conference in Paris. xxxviii Unfortunately, the proceedings of that conference remain unpublished.

Elsewhere too, I have also argued for the aesthetic consciousness-raising function of all of postmodernism; xxxix here, obviously, I would specifically argue for the political consciousness-raising powers of magic realism within postmodernism. With Julio Ortega, I discover in the great novels of Rulfo, Arguedas, García Márquez, Cabrera Infante, Fuentes and Lezama Lima, a Latin American groundtone [that] reveals itself as an artistic and cultural practice that re-shapes the traditional models and the need for innovation into new, unique, and powerful articulations of historical necessities, into penetrating statements of critical and political convictions. These novels have their roots in the common scene of international Postmodernism, while at the same time confronting it with its own needs, problematizing it, and parodying it. They likewise go beyond existing definitions and frameworks by
giving their postmodernity an even more critical accentuation, voicing yet new aesthetic needs and social revindications.\textsuperscript{xii}

From the list of authors Ortega offers, and to which many other names could be added, foremost among them I think that of the Vargas Llosa of \textit{La Casa Verde} (1965), \textit{Conversación en La catedral} (1969), and \textit{La Guerra del Fin del Mundo} (1981), it is clear that this Latin American groundtone of an artistic and cultural practice voicing aesthetic needs and social revindications, is also a magic realist one. And this groundtone, it seems to me, is also there in magic realist works by non-Latin American writers.

In order to come full circle, and thus to briefly swing back to my opening remarks: magic realism, as I have now discussed it, in its artistic and cultural-political practice clearly is continuing in the tracks of its earliest progenitor, Surrealism. As such it also marks the return, in the discussion about postmodernism, of that "half" which Helmut Lethen still relatively recently regretted as having been excluded from earlier theoretical discussions of this phenomenon by Anglo-American critics, viz. the heritage of the continental European avant-garde as complementary to that of (predominantly) Anglo-American Modernism,\textsuperscript{xii} and in which the exclusive attention given to the latter is in itself an indication of "privileged center" discourse. In this respect, then, merely to talk of magic realism in relation to postmodernism is to contribute to decentering that privileged discourse.

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iii. The clearest discussion of the precise nature of magic realism in literature is probably to be found in Amaryll Chanady's _Magic Realism and the Fantastical: Resolved versus Unresolved Antinomy_, New York and London: Garland, 1985.

iv. See Joaquin Soler Serrano's interview with Alejo Carpentier in _Escritores a fondo_, Colección documenta, Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1986, in which the latter (p. 156) remarks upon his friendship with Robert Desnos, the surrealist poet who in his works combined dream and reality, and where he states that (p. 163) "a través del movimiento surrealista empecé a ver América. Veía que los surrealistas buscaban en su vida diaria elementos maravillosos que conseguían muy difícilmente, y en ocasiones haciendo trampa, muy a menudo reuniendo elementos diversos para crear una realidad maravillosa prefabricada. Y allí, en París, me di cuenta de que todos esos elementos maravillosos los teníamos realmente en América, y empecé a cobrar conciencia de América Latina y del fenómeno barroco." Finally, Carpentier's _Tientos y_
diferencias, Montevideo: Arca, in an appendix contains two previously unpublished texts by Desnos.


vi. See in this respect also Donald L. Shaw, Nueva narrativa hispanoamericana, Madrid: Cátedra, 1981, pp. 18-19.


xii. In this respect the date of appearance - 1972 - of José Donoso's _Historia personal del "boom"_, Barcelona: Anagrama, is instructive.


xxiii. Of course, it can be explained in many more ways -- as the editors of the present volume kindly pointed out to me, Susan might
here be trying to teach Friday to write the body in a feminine mode. Obviously, the explanations I focus upon are those that fit my line of argument -- though I think that to interpret the passage here analyzed along the lines suggested by Paris and Zamora might well go to strengthen my own conclusions.


xxvii. See D'haen, Text to Reader, pp. 25-42.

xxviii. It would take me too far to argue the point in detail, but the idea of magical manipulation of time and plot is central to all of Fowles's work; see also Malcolm Bradbury, "The Novelist as Impresario: John Fowles and his Magus," in Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel, London: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 256-71.

xxix. For a comparable approach, but from a scholarly stance, see Edward Said's celebrated, but also much debated, Orientalism, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978; for a discussion of Rushdie's work from a "Saidian" perspective, see Aleid Fokkema, "Indianness and Englishness:

xxx. And this not just in English literature. See e.g. the Dutch author Louis Couperus's powerful De stille kracht (1900), translated by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos as The Hidden Force, London: Jonathan Cape, 1922, and recently (1985) re-issued, revised and edited, and with an introduction and notes, by E.M. Beekman, in the latter's superb twelve-volume series of Dutch colonial literature classics, the Library of the Indies, published by the University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.

xxxi. Of course, there may have been other reasons as well —such as strong indigenous narrative traditions, next to narratives of discovery and exploration, all of which to a greater or lesser extent stressed the strangeness, the wonder, of the Latin American reality.


xxxvii. Theo D'haen, "Irish Regionalism, Magic Realism and Postmodernism," paper delivered at the 1990 meeting of the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature in Kyoto, and to be published in the proceedings; also in Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens, eds, *British Postmodern Fiction*, Postmodern Studies 7,
xxxviii. "Replenishment from the Peripheries: Magical Realism, Emergent Literatures, and Postmodernism"; cf. for instance the following passage: "In any case, a strong replenishing impulse seems to come from the outer edges of western literature toward the center rather than the other way around. A postmodern poetics may now demand a geographical as well as a conceptual decentering of literary culture, a recognition of the force of marginality as an ideological and an aesthetic phenomenon," (typescript p. 3).

xxxix. See Text to Reader.
