

A Hybrid Discourse: From Latin American Magic Realism to the British Postcolonial Postmodern Novel

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to theoretically trace the evolution of Latin American magic realism, of the early 20th century, into the British postcolonial postmodern novel, of the late 20th century. In many contemporary British novels, postmodern narrative strategies and postcolonial subject matter are amalgamated within magic realist frameworks. Through this blending, these novels contribute to the enrichment of both the postmodern and the postcolonial discourses by eliminating the hierarchy between conventional binary oppositions, such as between reality and magic, 'us' and 'them,' and the West and the East. A unique recontextualization in itself, postcolonial postmodern fabulation enables opening up a hybrid discourse in which alternative representations of (post)colonial experiences can be articulated, as well as valued. Yet the fact that the roots of this discourse lie in Latin American magic realism is almost always overlooked. To this end, this study clarifies the close links among these various literary and cultural perspectives to suggest that the resulting discourse, which is essentially hybrid, bridges the postcolonial and the postmodern.

Keywords: Magic Realism, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, Fabulation, The Novel

Melez Bir Söylem: Latin Amerikan Büyülü Gerçekçiliğinden İngiliz Sömürgecilik Sonrası Dönem Postmodern Romanına

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, erken 20. yüzyıl Latin Amerikan büyülü gerçekçiliğinin, geç 20. yüzyıl İngiliz sömürgecilik sonrası dönem postmodern romanına nasıl dönüştüğünü kuramsal olarak incelemektir. Birçok çağdaş İngiliz romanında postmodern yazım yöntemleri ve sömürgecilik sonrası dönem konuları büyülü gerçekçilik çerçevesinde bir araya getirilmektedir. Bu harmanlama sonucu, bu romanlar, gerçek ve gerçek ötesi, 'biz' ve 'onlar,' ve Batı ve Doğu gibi geleneksel ikilemlerde kaçınılmaz olarak var olan hiyerarşik düşünceyi yıkarak hem postmodern hem de sömürgecilik sonrası dönem söylemlerinin zenginleşmesine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Kendi başına eşsiz olan bu yeni çerçeve, sömürgecilik dönemi ve sonrası deneyimlerinin ifade edilebileceği ve değer görebileceği alternatif temsillerin ortaya konabilmesi için melez bir söylem oluşturulmasını mümkün kılmaktadır. Ancak bu söylemin köklerinin Latin Amerikan büyülü gerçekçiliğine dayanır olması sıklıkla gözden kaçan bir unsurdur. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, bu çalışma çeşitli edebi ve kültürel bakış açılarının arasındaki yakın bağlantıları tartışmayı ve ortaya çıkan ve özünde melez olan bu yeni söylemin sömürgecilik sonrası dönem ve postmodernizm arasında bir köprü oluşturduğunu ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Büyülü Gerçekçilik, Sömürgecilik Sonrası Dönem, Postmodernizm, Roman

Coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in the mid-1920s, the term magic realism was primarily used to refer to the newly emerging post-expressionistic art forms of the time. According to this preliminary approach, magic realism described a new sense of objectivity in painting, one in which objects were depicted with "photographic naturalism," but due to the use of "paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions," they also conveyed "a feeling of unreality, infusing the ordinary with a sense of mystery" (Chivers, Osborne and Farr, 1998; 305). For Roh, this was a celebration of the mundane, a reawakening of "an insatiable love for terrestrial things and a delight in their fragmented and limited nature" (1995; 17), as artists were torn between their devotion to the world of dreams and their adherence to the world of reality. In an art-historical context, therefore, magic realism channeled previously distinct opposites, the magical and the

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real, into the same framework, and signaled a redefined version of reality and challenged realistic conventions.

It was not until the end of the 1940s that Alejo Carpentier, and the mid-1950s that Angel Flores reappropriated the term to describe the Latin American movement which was based on the mingling of the mundane and the fantastic in literature. For Carpentier, magic realism was a genuinely Latin American movement, because its material was derived from things that had occurred in Latin America, or from characteristics of a uniquely Latin American history, geography, demography, and politics. Using ‘the marvelous real’ as a synonym for magic realism, Carpentier claimed that the marvelous real was “encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace” (1995; 104). Thus Carpentier not only discredited Franz Roh’s observation that magic realism was gradually becoming a worldwide phenomenon in all fields of art, but also territorialized the practice of the term, limiting it to Latin America. His limitation was a direct result of the belief that

the emergence of magical realism coincides with a Latin American yearning for true independence, also in the cultural realm, in the 1920s. Though politically independent since the early nineteenth century, Latin America had in reality remained largely dependent upon Europe and the United States, also in matters of culture, and of literature in particular. (D’haen, 1997; 290).

Therefore according to Carpentier’s conception, magic realism becomes a means by which the hegemony of the United States over Latin America could be resisted.

In contrast, however, Flores recognized the universality of magic realism and regarded it as a “rediscovery”, for most of the characteristics of magic realism could be found in the works of various 19th century authors as well, such as in Kafka or “to some extent in Poe and Melville” (1995; 111). Thus the novelty rested solely on the new ways in which realism and fantasy were being amalgamated. In Irene Guenther’s argument, the subject matter was not what made this art so different; “rather, it was the fastidious depiction of familiar objects, the new way of seeing and rendering the everyday, thereby creating a new world view that inspired the style” (1995; 36). Although Flores, too, acknowledged Roh’s efforts in coining the term, he has claimed the movement to start with the publication of Jorge Luis Borges’s *A Universal History of Infamy* in 1935. For Flores, Borges has been the “pathfinder and moving spirit” for magic realism and Kafka’s impact on Borges has been the most profound (1995; 113). What Kafka and Borges had in common, in Flores’s view, was their shared “preoccupation with style and also the same transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal (1995; 114). Therefore, in Flores’s perspective, every practitioner of magic realism had to follow Borges, which also suggested that he/she had to indirectly follow Kafka.

As such, from its outset, magic realism evolved in two different strands. The first strand regarded magic realism as a new literary creation; it was defined by Carpentier, and regarded unique to Latin America. The second strand suggested that magic realism was only a new way of naming what had already existed until then under other titles; it was outlined by Flores, and was believed to be a continuation of the style of Borges, which was in turn a continuation of the style of Kafka.

Many critics debate over the effects of Borges and Kafka on magic realism, and Luis Leal regards Flores’s emphasis limiting, for “in the magical realist texts [...], the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it *is* an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence – admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism” (Zamora and Faris, 1995; 3). In the case of Kafka and the *Metamorphosis*, for example, the protagonist’s

transformation into a cockroach is neither an ordinary matter nor accepted. Defining what magic realism is by way of discussing what it is not, Leal strongly argues that it is not a follow up on Borges, either. As in many of his stories in the *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, Borges creates unknown settings and imaginary worlds. Yet in magic realism, as Leal points out, “the principal thing is not the creation of imaginary worlds or beings but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances” (1995; 122). In this respect, and according to Leal’s interpretation, both Kafka and Borges tend to portray elements of fantasy rather than magic realism. In his words:

Unlike superrealism, magical realism does not use dream motifs; neither does it distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature or science fiction do; nor does it emphasize psychological analysis of characters, since it doesn’t try to find reasons for their actions or their inability to express themselves. [...] Magical realism is [...] an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles, in closed or open structures. (1995; 121).

In a different comparison of fantasy and magic realism, Theo D’haen argues that both have been born out of the same climate, that of “rationalism turning upon itself” (1997; 286). In other words, both fantasy and magic realism fall under the broader category of ‘fantastic literature,’ with only one difference in between them: in fantasy, the supernatural, or the magical component is foregrounded, whereas in magic realism, the realist component is foregrounded.

If magic realism is thus regarded as an integral part of, or an extension to the fantastic, however, it becomes a ‘supplement’ to the fantastic mode of writing. In the view of Homi Bhabha, the ‘supplementary’ comes “after the original, or in addition to it,” therefore introducing a “secondariness into the structure of the original” (1990; 305). For Bhabha, this provides an advantage because, then, a supplement hints at possible shortcomings of an original, and intends to fill in on those shortcomings. Viewed from this perspective, magic realism may be regarded as hinting at the possible deficiencies in the Western mode of fantastic writing, which eliminates alternative representations of the magical with a highlighted realist component, and as marking, therefore, in D’Haen’s words, “a profound crisis of the West’s cultural order from the inside” (1997; 285). This argument may in turn be associated with Latin American magic realist writers’, especially Carpentier’s, claim that what is named as magical is actually very real within Latin America.

To further clarify magic realism as a separate mode of writing, it is characterized by the interweaving of realism in representing everyday events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as material derived from local myth and fairy tales. In magic realist texts, the reader is offered “two systems of possibility,” in Suzanne Baker’s words, “one that aligns with European rationality and another which is incompatible with a conventional Western world-view” (1993). For this reason, she believes that magic realist texts create a “dual spatiality,” a space in which “alternative realities and different perceptions of the world can be conceived” (1993). Thus, no matter how much fantasy is involved in a magic realist novel, the story still remains reality-oriented. The author does not create unreal worlds which help the reader to hide from everyday realities; on the contrary, “the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts” (Leal, 1995; 121). Moreover, the author does not feel obliged to justify the mystery of the events. The stories remain unexplained but accepted, and plots are logically conceived. In other words, the juxtaposition of the real and the magical is unproblematic in magic realist works.

By this treatment, magic realism not only crosses the boundaries of two separate literary discourses, the realistic and the fantastic, but also aims to disrupt realist conventions, as well as to challenge the assumptions of literary realism which is based on the idea of objective representations of empirical reality. It is in this theoretical context that magic realism, then, is considered as one of the postmodern devices widely used by postmodern postcolonial writers. In other words, magic realism serves as a textual strategy of, or what Zamora and Faris call “purpose of political and cultural disruption” (1995; 3) in their novels. As a result of their in-depth analysis, Zamora and Faris derive the conclusion that

an essential difference between realism and magic realism involves the intentionality implicit in the conventions of the two modes. [...] Realism intends its version of the world as a singular version, as an objective (hence universal) representation of natural and social realities, [...] realism functions ideologically and hegemonically. Magical realism also functions ideologically but [...] less hegemonically, for its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation. (1995; 3).

In line with this argument, too, magic realism opens up a “dual spatiality” (Baker, 1993) through which alternative realities can be represented.

Similarly, the reason why magic realism evolved in Latin America can be explained by the need to formulate an alternative perception of reality in fictional texts, and by the desire to disrupt previously established but critically disputed realist conventions. Durix fervently claims that Latin American authors of the time were rebelling against “a vision of Latin America entirely conditioned by the European point of view. They were seeking for an alternative language which might better correspond to their own perceptions. The native element in their societies provided an alternative to this Eurocentric vision” (1998; 109). They were actually trying to put forth an alternative not only to Eurocentric but also to North American discourses, which were the dominant discourses at the time. Gerald Martin states that “a Latin American writer, regardless of his or her politics, is always pulled in two directions and thereby learns to balance different realities and different orders of experience” (1989; 127). As such, all Latin American writers are regarded, by Martin, to be “from the periphery and all narratives, inevitably, bear the imprint of this origin in their structure” (1989; 127). In this context, then, Latin American magic realist fictions problematize the imposition of a non-native world-view from the outside and aim to fight back such an imposition. Accordingly, instead of Borges, who was claimed by some critics as the forerunner of magic realism, the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which is a retelling of the history of Macondo and its inhabitants from a native point of view, is believed to truly set the prototype of this approach in its political reverberations. In this respect, magic realism overtly becomes “a literature of resistance. This resistance almost invariably is channeled into *historical* novels, all of which come down to re-writings of official ‘history’” (D’haen, 1997; 289).

Like Marquez, Carpentier, too, undertook the task of rewriting the history of Latin America from a non-European and non-American point of view. In his novel *The Kingdom of this World*, published in 1949, for example, he narrates the Haitian revolution from an alternative perspective in a rearranged chronological order. Therefore Carpentier’s magic realist novel challenges the idea of an objective and unchangeable history, as well as reality. Thus, from the beginning, magic realism has been built on the idea of challenging traditional literary conventions and Eurocentric paradigms, as well as on the opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ It was due to this nature of

magic realism that Carpentier had limited its use to Latin America, as opposed to Flores's expanded application of the term.

Apart from Carpentier and Marquez, other prominent Latin American authors who have experimented with magic realism, and who are thus associated with the magic realist *El Boom*, are Isabel Allende of Chile (*The House of Spirits, Eva Luna*), Miguel Angel Asturias of Guatemala (*Men of Maize, Mulata*), Manuel Puig (*The Kiss of the Spider Woman, Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*) and Jullio Cortazar of Argentina (*All the Fires the Fire, 62: A Model Kit*), Carlos Fuentes of Mexico (*Christopher Unborn, Distant Relations*) and Mario Vargas Llosa of Peru (*The Green House, The Storyteller*). Doris Sommer suggests that these novels "themselves show a distinct family resemblance, enough in fact to produce a checklist of Boom characteristics. These include a demotion, or defusion, of authorial control and tireless formal experimentation, all it seems directed towards demolishing the straight line of traditional narrative" (1990; 71). Hence by returning to native lore and folk magic, all of the 'Boom writers' tried to assert the idea that what was called 'magical' by the West was actually a 'realistic' representation for them; it was 'their' reality. In Durix's point of view, this assertion corresponds to "a literal rendering of the impression felt by many Third-World people whose reality is imposed from the outside and who thus need to invert or deconstruct it in order to substitute their own vision" (1998; 134). This also explains why magic realism was soon taken up by non-Latin authors, especially by postcolonial authors who are specifically critical of the British Empire.

José David Saldivar discusses the magic realist movement in four chronological categories, Roh's coining the term as the first phase and Carpentier's elaborations on the concept as the second. Accordingly, Flores's publication of "Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction" marks the third phase, "the period of postmodern magic realism" which continued through the 1960s and 1970s (1991; 523) and, of which Marquez is the most significant figure. For Saldivar, the last phase of magic realism is associated with "a diverse group of postcontemporary United States writers of color" and is thought to be expanding yet "in postmodernist and often signifying ways" (1991; 522, 524). The notable examples of this phase are claimed to be Artura Islas's *The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior, China Men*, and *Tripmaster Monkey*, and Alberto Rios's *The Iguana Killer*. Other American authors who have frequently been included in magic realist 'lists' or 'chronologies' are Toni Morrison (*Song of Solomon, Beloved*), Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*), Louise Eldrich (*The Beet Queen, Grandmother's Pigeon, Tracks*), Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes were Watching God*), and Leslie Marmon Silko (*Ceremony*).

These authors are also cited as representatives of minority literatures which brings Bhabha's notion of the 'supplementary' into discussion once again. For him, it is within the 'supplementary' channels of literature that minority discourses emerge and also merge with the culture of the nation (1990; 305). Since these writers are considered to be predominantly postmodern at the same time, their incorporation of magic realism into their works signals the expansion of the magic realist approach from a postmodern perspective. Thus, magic realism comes to be regarded as one of the distinctive postmodern devices in their novels.

From the academic critical perspective, the third period of postmodern magic realism coincides with Robert Scholes' popularization of the use of the term 'fabulation' in the place of magic realism for its contemporary use, and overtly marks the relationship between magic realism and postmodernism. Similar to the primary definition of magic realism, fabulation, as Scholes argues, "tends away from direct representation of the surface reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (1980; 3). In Scholes' words,

fabulation [...] means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality. Modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes [...] its inability to reach all the way to the real but continues to look toward reality. It aims at telling such truths as fiction may legitimately tell in ways which are appropriately fictional. (1980; 8).

Scholes also emphasizes the characteristics of fabulation that are not necessarily existent in magic realism, such as aiming at a sense of pleasure in form (1980; 2), putting the highest premium on art and joy (1980; 3) and yet retaining some didactic quality of traditional fables (1980; 3), and managing a revival of romance with a minimal amount of allegorizing (1980; 25). More significantly, Scholes emphasizes the element of history as an indispensable characteristic of fabulation and regards Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as the prototype. Scholes also draws similarities between Marquez's work and John Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor*, John Fowles's *French Lieutenant's Woman*, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Robert Coover's *Public Burning* (1980; 209). This association once again emphasizes the postmodern nature of fabulation, as these novelists are primarily studied as postmodern. In Scholes's interpretation, what Barth, Fowles, Pynchon, and Coover have established through their use of fabulation is challenging the idea that "an innocent history, a collection of facts and deeds, is itself a myth" (1980; 207), an assertion that also holds true for Latin American magic realists.

In this respect, the special and significant feature of fabulation becomes a "turning back toward the stuff of history itself and reinvigorating it with an imagination tempered by a decade and more of fictional experimentation" (Scholes, 1980; 4). At this point in his discussion, Scholes turns to Borges, as did many of the critics of magic realism. For Scholes, the fabulative movement flourished from the strength of masters like Borges, similar to how Flores regarded magic realism to evolve from the Borgesian perspective. In Scholes's argument, however, Borges and his view of reality was misunderstood and he should have been treated as "a kind of fallibilist in fiction," instead of a formalist (1980; 9). For Scholes believes that

our fictions are real enough in themselves, but, as signs pointing to any world outside the fiction or the dream, they have no factual status. [...] We may think about reality all we please, but we shall never reach it in thought. [...] Reality is too subtle for realism to catch it. It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, by fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come. (1980; 7, 13).

Precisely at this stage Scholes also refers to such fictional experimentation within the context of experimental fabulation as metafiction and by doing so, plunges into a more expansive debate.

Contrary to Scholes who uses the term metafiction as a synonym only for experimental fabulation, the distinguished postmodern critic Patricia Waugh claims that metafiction is, like magic realism, an elastic term which includes a variety of fictions and thus fabulation can only be regarded as one of its three main categories. In her words:

There are those novels at the one end of the spectrum which take fictionality as a theme to be explored. [...] At the center of this spectrum are those texts that manifest the symptoms of formal or ontological insecurity but allow their deconstructions to be finally recontextualized or 'naturalized' and given a total interpretation. [...] Finally, at the furthest extreme (which would include 'fabulation') can be placed those fictions that, in rejecting realism more thoroughly, posit the world as a fabrication of competing semiotic systems which never correspond to material conditions. (1984; 18-19).

However, by assuming that fabulation is the type of metafiction in which realism is more thoroughly rejected, Patricia Waugh seems to contradict Robert Scholes's proposition of the use of ethically controlled fantasy along with reality. Yet the contradiction can be claimed to arise not from a mere disagreement between the two approaches but from the new form realism has taken in the postmodern world and the new fictional skills it requires. Whether writing under the title of magic realism, fabulation or metafiction, Waugh argues that;

the novelist [...] has acknowledged the fact that this 'reality' is no longer the one mediated by nineteenth-century novelists and experienced by nineteenth-century readers. Indeed [...] far from 'dying,' the novel has reached a mature recognition of its existence as writing, which can only ensure its continued viability in and relevance to a contemporary world which is similarly beginning to gain awareness of precisely how its values and practices are constructed and legitimized. (1984; 19).

By claiming that 'the novel is far from dying,' Waugh is making a clear reference to the late 1960s' debate about the death of the novel as a genre. This debate is associated with John Barth, whose early seminal article, "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1968), has been misinterpreted to suggest that the novel was dying. On the contrary, however, already in 1968 Barth was acknowledging the changing trends in the genre and suggesting the 'used-upness' of certain forms, such as the realistic novel or the conventional approach to realism. According to Barth, the traditional role of the "omniscient author of older fiction, [...] the idea of the controlling artist" (1984; 64) had lost its validity, and the author whom Barth believed to best illustrate the 'new' artist was Borges. For Barth, "novels which imitate the form of the novel, by an author who imitates the role of the author" (1984; 72) mark the recent course of the novel genre. In this respect, he regards Borges to be a pioneer as Borges presents the world to be a dream, a creation which is fictive, such as in his *Labyrinths*. In Borges's writing, in James E. Irby's words, "the world is a book and the book is a world, and both are labyrinthine and enclose enigmas designed to be understood and participated in by man" (1981; 19).

In his consecutive articles, "The Literature of Replenishment" (1979) and "Postmodernism Revisited" (1988), John Barth questions postmodernism and the so-called category of postmodern writers. In "The Literature of Replenishment," he not only names Borges as one of the outstanding postmodernists - who was classified by Leal as a fantasist, by D'Haen as a surrealist, and by Scholes as a fabulist - but also personally rejects becoming a member of any 'literary club' that would not include Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1984; 195) - who has been previously referred to as the pioneer magic realist along Carpentier's strand. Parallel to what Barth also discusses in "Postmodernism Revisited," the main dilemma arises - also at this point - out of the tendency to categorize works of fiction. As has been argued previously, the boundaries between magic realism, fabulation, and metafiction become so blurred that treating them separately is almost impossible. Similarly, Barth says that he, as an author, was first labelled as a 'Provincial American Existentialist,' then as a 'Black Humorist,' later as a 'Fabulist,' and finally in the 1970s as a 'Postmodernist' (1995; 117-8). He complains about the arbitrary nature of categories and regards categorization as a tragic human tendency. In this regard, and based on Barth's personal experience, what is once labelled as a magic realist novel may soon be transferred to the category of fabulation and eventually into postmodernism. Although the new trends in the novel genre are acknowledged in each case, the boundaries in between remain blurred.

In the light of these multiple yet overlapping approaches employed by novelists and critics, it can be argued that magic realism and fabulation, which may indeed be used synonymously, become an inseparable aspect of the postmodern problematic of the contemporary literary agenda. Contemporary British novelists (such as Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri) conjoin certain

elements of magic realism, fabulation and postmodernism so as to create a new discourse which is essentially postcolonial. By amalgamating magic and realism in depicting everyday life, and embroidering their stories with native myths and folklore, they make use of magic realism. Their application of magic realism resembles both Carpentier's and Flores's strands, in the sense that they are portraying a literary resistance (suggested through Carpentier's strand), and also postmodern tendencies (similar to Flores's idea revolving around Borges). By combining entertainment with didacticism, by reviving romance, and by reinvigorating history, they make use of fabulation. Finally, by experimenting with the novel as a form using metafictional techniques, and subverting its conventional structure from within those conventions and exposing its fictionality, they become postmodernists. Therefore such novelists signal a celebration of "the crossing of boundaries and the blurring of genre distinctions" which has clearly "opened up new possibilities for representing the past" (Nünning, 1997; 218).

As such, it can be argued that any form of metafictional/fabulative/magic realist writing does not reject realism in its totality but opposes the ways in which reality has been regarded as objective and absolute. In Raymond Federman's argument, this kind of writing is referred to as 'surfiction,' a term he uses synonymously with postmodern fiction, "not because it imitates reality, but because it exposes the fictionality of reality" (1993; 37), and because any kind of reality can only exist in its fictionalized version through the language it is embedded in. For Federman,

the only fiction that still means something today is the kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction beyond its own limitations; the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it; the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's intelligence and imagination rather than man's distorted view of reality; the kind of fiction that reveals man's playful irrationality rather than his righteous rationality. (1993; 37).

In this perspective, the strongest opposition is thrust upon the language of the traditional novel and similarly upon the conventions of realism which are no longer an adequate medium through which the postmodern stance can be experienced. As postmodern novelists, therefore, metafictional/fabulative/magic realist authors set out on a quest to create an artefact in which they can question the relationship between reality and fiction, and to explore a theory of fiction by means of practising the writing of fiction. The metafictional/fabulative/magic realist novel, as the outcome of this quest, becomes self-conscious and self-reflexive. As Linda Hutcheon claims, "a self-reflexive text suggests that perhaps narrative does not derive its authority from any reality it represents, but from the cultural conventions that define both narrative and the construct we call reality" (1993; 35-6). Similarly, in *Critifiction*, Raymond Federman argues that,

much of contemporary fiction does not relate the reader directly to the external world (reality), nor does it provide the reader with a sense of lived experience (truth), instead contemporary fiction dwells on the circumstances of its own possibilities, on the conventions of the narrative, and on the openness of language to multiple meanings, contradictions, paradoxes, and irony. (1993; 2).

In this regard, self-reflexivity displays the novel's own process of writing instead of reflecting the world, and provides the means to question representations of reality, as well as the cultural conventions on which that reality builds up. In the point of view of Federman, "the self-reflexive text [...] is one that explicitly concerns itself with the process of narration, with writing, with composition, and in so doing unveils the mechanism of its own making" (1993; 18). By unveiling their own mechanism and questioning their own construction, self-reflexive texts "not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (Waugh, 1984; 2). The novelist, having, thus,

realized the impossibility of describing an objective world, aims at representing and playing with the discourses of that world instead, usually from a critical perspective.

Hence, the dilemma of representing or appropriating reality in fictional texts is not the only difficulty that the metafictionist has to overcome. The artefact created by the metafictionist is inevitably constructed by means of language and yet the idea that language corresponds to a meaningful, unified, and objective world is no longer reliable either. Hutcheon claims that “the narrating writer has only language to work with” but through postmodernism, “the humanist faith in the power of language” is turned in on itself and it is acknowledged that language has many “uses - and abuses” (1990; 183). For Hutcheon, postmodernism has foregrounded “the way we talk and write within certain social, historical, and institutional (thus political and economic) frameworks,” therefore creating an awareness in ‘discourses’ (1990; 184). The same interest in language is underlined by Patricia Waugh in relation to metafiction. According to her, “language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own meanings. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention” (1984; 3). Likewise Scholes emphasizes the contradiction between language and reality and the relationship between them, arguing that this is central to fabulative fiction (1980; 9). Moreover, the same argument is also elaborated by Scott Simpkins with regards to the magic realist approach to language. According to Simpkins, a recurring element in numerous magic realist texts, which therefore serves as a unifying characteristic, “is an awareness of the ineluctable lack in communication, a condition which prevents the merger of the signifier and the signified” (1995; 148). For Simpkins, the link between magic realist texts and the postmodern is very clearly established; “magical texts are one way of supplementing not only the failures of the modern text, but also the inadequacies of what is now called the postmodern condition” (1995; 151). Simpkins’ argument directly coincides with Bhabha’s proposition of the ‘supplementary’ giving a sense of ‘secondariness’ to the original (1990; 305). As such, postcolonial magic realist texts supplement both their modern predecessors and their postmodern contemporaries.

In the light of this argument, Waugh’s suggestion that ‘meta’ terms are a requirement for questioning the relationship between the arbitrary systems of language and the world they correspond to is shared by postmodernists, fabulators, and magic realists alike. ‘Meta’ terms are, thus, required in such works of fiction for the purpose of exploring the relationship between the world inside and outside fiction. In Brian McHale’s point of view, metanarratives may actually prove useful and therefore should not be abandoned, “so long as we ‘turn them down’ from metanarratives to ‘little narratives’” (1988; 551) In this respect, the way in which language is used is the characteristic of magic realist and fabulative works of fiction, which marks them also as metafictional and postmodern. Over the years, metafiction has come to be associated with the postmodern novel itself; however, equally significant is the fact that not all postmodern novels may be entirely metafictional in their narrative strategies in terms of their formal and textual playfulness. Therefore it can be claimed, for clarity’s sake, that metafiction may be more experimentally oriented in its play with language than postmodern fiction which may foreground thematization of its linguistic play instead. Since the distinction between them remains rather blurred, therefore, they may be used coterminously.

Seen in this light, the distinctive features of metafiction can be found at the level of narrative manipulation of conventions. When critics highlight examples of metafiction, they cite self-conscious addresses to the reader, self-reflexive strategies of writing, playfulness, subversive use of parody of the old conventions, intertextual references, frame-breaks, fabulative elements, multiple discourses and discontinuous structures, and, more significantly, characters who are

aware of their fictional status. Raymond Federman emphasizes the changing nature of fictional characters and refers to them as ‘word-beings’:

The people of fiction, the fictitious beings will no longer be called characters, well-made characters who carry with them a fixed personality, a stable set of social and psychological attributes [...]. These surfictional characters will be as changable, as volatile, as irrational, as nameless, as unnamable, as playful, as unpredictable, as fraudulent and frivolous as the discourse that makes them. This does not mean, however, that they will be mere puppets. On the contrary, their being will be more complex, more genuine, more authentic, more true to life in fact, because [...] they will not appear to be what they are: imitations of real people; they will be what they are: word-beings. (1993; 44).

Using these techniques, the postmodern novel subverts the conventional strategies of fictional representations. As Linda Hutcheon argues in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, “postmodern representational practices that refuse to stay neatly within accepted conventions and traditions and that deploy hybrid forms and seemingly mutually contradictory strategies frustrate critical attempts to systematize them, to order them with an eye to control and mastery – that is, to totalize” (1993; 37). In her view, postmodern fiction tries to engage the reader in a self-critical re-evaluation process:

In challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative, postmodern fiction does not, however, disconnect itself from history or the world. It foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the processes by which we represent ourselves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we make sense of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We can try to avoid fixing our notion of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural. We can also study how representation legitimizes and privileges certain kinds of knowledge. (1993; 53-4)

The postmodern preoccupation with representation is a direct result of the ontological character of the postmodern novel, which is reflected through its concern with the making of autonomous worlds (McHale, 1987; 10). According to McHale, postmodern novels replace the questions about how a world may be known, with questions like ‘What is a world?’ What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? (1987; 10). Thus, the postmodern concern is not epistemological, that which studies knowledge and understanding, but ontological, focusing on the nature of being and existence. As McHale further argues, “if literary-historical ‘objects’ such as postmodernism are constructed, not given or found, then the issue of how such objects are constructed [...] becomes crucial” (1992; 3). In this respect, postmodern texts

deny the possibility of a clearly sustainable distinction between history and fiction, by highlighting the fact that we can only ever know history through various forms of representation or narrative. In this sense, all history is a kind of literature. [...] The link between the text and the world is reforged in postmodernism, not by an effacement of the text in the interests of a return to the real, but by an intensification of textuality such that it becomes coextensive with the real. Once the real has been rendered into discourse, there is no longer any gap to be leapt between the text and the world. (Connor, 1990; 127).

Similarly Lyotard characterizes the postmodern as “that which searches for new representations [...] in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable” (1984; 82), which

can also be argued to reside in magic realism's paradoxical stance. As Federman also argues, "the traditional realistic novel was a representation of the same. Surfiction," by which he refers to postmodern fiction in general, "will be a presentation of difference – a liberation of what is different" (1993; 38). Experiencing the limits and reacting against totalizations through these liberated new ways in which reality is re/presented, magic realism becomes firmly rooted in postmodernism. Geert Lernout goes even further to claim 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" (1988; 129). In a sense, Lernout claims postmodernism to have evolved out of magic realism altogether, which would be too far-fetched a claim to find any acceptance from critical postmodern circles.

Nevertheless, if magic realism is so firmly established as part of postmodernism, "the question remains," as D'haen argues, "as to what part it plays in this larger current or movement, and where and why" (1995; 194). In order to explore the specificity of postmodern culture, the postmodern novel converts what it regards as "the negative values of outworn literary conventions into the basis of a potentially constructive social criticism" (Waugh, 1984; 11). This idea of constructive social criticism is made possible through magic realist novels, and therefore, through postmodern fabulation. As Durix posits,

what many magic realistic works have in common is [...] social protest. Such novels often evoke the process of liberation of oppressed communities. The scope of these books largely transcends the individual fate of a few characters in order to constitute an imaginary re-telling of a whole nation through several decades. (Durix, 1998; 116)

It is in line with this argument that the use of magic realism and fabulation is believed to flourish in the troubled areas of the world and that novelists who use this approach were initially existing on and writing from the borders. Hutcheon claims that

it is not just the relation to history that brings the two posts [the postmodern and the postcolonial] together; there is also a strong shared concern with the notion of marginalization, with the state of what we could call ex-centricity. In granting value to (what the center calls) the margin or the Other, the post-modern challenges any hegemonic force that presumes centrality, even as it acknowledges that it cannot privilege the margin without acknowledging the power of the center. (1991; 170)

Hutcheon's understanding of the 'ex-centric' does not only refer to the margins of the previous colonial order, or only to the authors of the previously colonized nations. In this context, any notion of 'marginalization' is defined as ex-centricity. Likewise magic realism is ex-centric because it is still believed to "operate from the margins, if not geographical, then social, economic, and political" (D'haen, 1997; 289). It has by now become the "preferred mode for all postcolonial writing, including writers not just from former European colonies, but also from ethnic minorities in the United States and elsewhere, and women" (D'haen, 1997; 289).

Amaryll Chanady claims that the starting point and main aim of Latin American magic realism was

to reject the hierarchical dichotomy between civilization and barbarism – the European metropolis imbued with centuries of culture, and the New World ex-colonies evolving on a lower plane of cultural refinement – by demonstrating the acceptability of Latin American literature in its present state of evolution within the universal canon. (1995; 128)

From its outset, therefore, magic realism involved social and political overtones underlying the narrative and aimed at subverting conventional binary oppositions, between 'us' and 'them,' between the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized.' In Chanady's point of view, "the argumentative

model of Flores' plea for international recognition," as opposed to Carpentier's territorialization of magic realism, "resembles in certain respects that of discourses produced by colonial writers in their demand for independence" (1995; 133). To this end, hegemonic - and colonial - discourses were challenged and subverted through magic realism in Latin American fiction. It is not surprising, therefore, that a critical tool as powerful as magic realism was soon taken up by the British postcolonial writers. Just like their Latin American predecessors, British postcolonial novelists employ magic realism in terms of its unique narrative power to invoke their sense of reality as opposed to that of the mainstream British narrative tradition. This is how they personify the magic realist impulse suggested by Franz Roh, as early as in the 1920s: "We recognize this world, although now – not only because we have emerged from a dream – we look on it with new eyes" (1995; 17).

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