

NOT JUST A FANTASY:
CONVERGENCE OF THE MAGICALLY REAL AND SOCIOPOLITICAL UNREST
IN THE WORKS OF ALLENDE, CARPENTIER AND GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

By

KATHERINE MARIE SOMMER

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

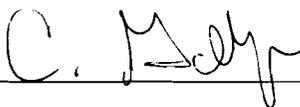
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
With Honors in

English

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

MAY 2009

Approved by:

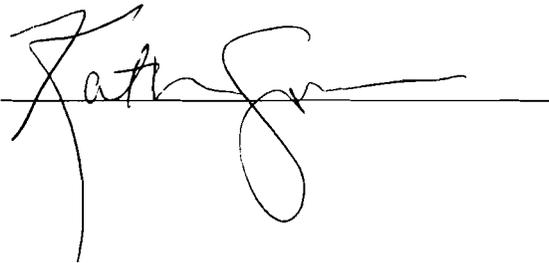


Carlos Gallego
Department of English

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen S. Jones", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathleen" and the last name "Jones" clearly legible.

Abstract

This thesis is the examination of three magical realism texts – *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of Spirits*, and *The Kingdom of this World* – and how the respective authors use magical elements to create broader commentaries on the politics and societies in Latin America. I will both examine how each author manipulates the genre in his or her specific manner and demonstrate that magical moments in the novels, particularly those that could be construed as an escape from reality, do not in fact render the novels escapist or fantastical, but rather suggest instances of deepest meaning. Using both my own literary analysis and close reading of the texts and supporting literary criticism, I ultimately wish to portray that magical realism provides a more appropriate lens on which to view the Latin American “reality,” as fluid as that may be, which traditional, Eurocentric means could not convey as effectively.

Introduction

In the introduction to his Nobel Lecture, “The Solitude of Latin America,” Gabriel García Márquez references the accounts of the Magellan expedition’s encounter with what is now South America, described as “a strictly accurate account that nonetheless resembles a venture into fantasy” (“Solitude”). Thus, from the very beginning of cultural contact between Europe and Latin America, magic and reality, fantasy and fact have been interwoven in the region’s literary expression. Magical realism, the genre that has come to embody much of Latin American literature, is a complicated one, and its broad range and wide variations by author, text, and location often make it difficult to discuss, much less concretely define. Shannin Schroeder, in *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas*, discusses the difficulty of the genre’s definition, especially in the various terms used – “magical realism,” “lo real maravilloso,” “marvelous realism” and others – as well as the tendency to define it using common and oversimplified terms (5). Are the various terms used to name this genre equal and interchangeable? Can the genre be as simple as the juxtaposition between what is magical and what is not? Does one, finite definition of magical realism even exist? Is the casting of the genre as “magical” at all a signal of the reader or commentator’s ethnocentrism? For my intents and purposes, I am not going to spend much time on definitions. Rather, my focus is what the magic is, what it is used for, and where it appears in three famous examples of the magical realism genre: Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), Isabel Allende’s *La casa de los espíritus* (*The House of Spirits*), and Alejo Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*).¹ I intend to analyze the moments in which magic and political unrest intersect within the novels and show that magic is used not as an escape from reality, despite possibly appearing as such, but rather as an examination of it.

¹ From this point forward, I will refer to the discussed texts solely by their English translations.

As aforementioned, I will not devote much time or space to definitions, but will only briefly attempt to define magical realism as it relates to each individual text. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the genre as “any artistic or esp. literary style in which realistic techniques such as naturalistic detail, narrative, etc., are similarly combined with surreal or dreamlike elements” (“magical realism”). Such a definition is fairly all-encompassing, and each work presents a variation on said style. Again quoting García Márquez’s Nobel lecture, he states, “Our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable,” and describes “the interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own” (“Solitude”). Thus, I would define his particular use of magical realism as the antithesis to these inadequate means of expression, an unconventional and unique (non-Eurocentric) means of expression used to better convey the true Latin American (or more narrowly, Colombian) reality. Isabel Allende’s brand of magical realism, to use the wording of Patricia Hart in her essay, could be described as “magical feminism” or magical realism employed in a femino-centric work (30). Although quite similar to García Márquez’s work in many respects, Allende’s female characters differ in that they possess magical powers that the male personages often cannot attain, appreciate, or understand. Finally, Carpentier’s novel is sometimes considered not as strict magical realism, but rather “*lo real maravilloso*,”² the last words of his introduction to the novel. Carpentier himself, in “On the Marvelous Real in America,” describes the phenomenon as follows:

The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an

² Trans: the marvelous real.

exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state. To begin with, the phenomenon of the marvelous presupposes faith. (Zamora and Faris 85)

Such definitions are only cursory, but important to note when considering how magic functions in each novel. Because each author possesses a distinct style within the genre, I will discuss each as a separate entity, rather than combining all three for comparison.

The Transposition of Reality in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

As García Márquez explains in his Nobel lecture and exemplifies in his work, the line between what is real and what is magical in Latin America's history and literary expression is often a blurry one. To illustrate this point, he cites the "outsized reality" of political dictators, military regimes, ethnocide and massacre that mar Latin American history ("Solitude"). The real history, more so than monstrous creatures of explorers' accounts, is often more unbelievable. D.P. Gallagher concurs in an essay on García Márquez, saying, "there can be no continental agreement on what is real and what is fantastic in a continent where it is possible for a palaeolithic community to reside at an hour or two's flight from a vast, modern city" (116). In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, García Márquez establishes an alternative reality which juxtaposes fantastical elements with equally mind-boggling "realities," and even inverts them; the truth becomes fantasy, and the fantasy becomes truth.

The very first sentence of the novel presents this inversion of reality. "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (García Márquez 1). The sentence provides the introduction to several important and recurring themes – magical discovery and awe (the ice), the political strife to come, even the character of Aureliano. The sentence's focus is not that

Aureliano is presumably about to die, but rather the day when he discovered ice. The ice, an everyday object and common natural phenomenon, is described later on in the chapter as “a miracle” and “the great invention of our time” (19). We also learn later that Aureliano survives the firing squad, which surely seems more miraculous than mere ice. Stephen M. Hart explains the paradox as such: “occurrences seen as supernatural in the First World... are presented as natural from a Third World perspective, while occurrences seen as normal in the First World (magnets, science, *ice*...) are presented as supernatural from the point of view of an inhabitant of the Caribbean” (116, emphasis added). From the very first sentence, García Márquez encourages his reader to suspend his/her expectations and visions of what is real and what is miraculous, allowing a better immersion in the world he has created.

Furthermore, this incident marks the first juxtaposition of political unrest and the miraculous in the novel, in which the miraculous element could be seen as an escape from a harsh, politicized reality. Obviously, the event could be seen as Aureliano simply trying to mentally escape from his imminent death by conjuring a pleasant memory from the past, but why this particular memory? The memory of ice may not be so innocent; instead, it may be a precursor for all the outside influences (e.g. the Banana Company) that will eventually corrupt and destroy Macondo and its inhabitants. Immediately after the mention of ice, García Márquez describes the town of Macondo as it was, “a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs” (1). This description, with its use of pleasant adjectives like “clear,” “white,” and “prehistoric,” carries a connotation of a bucolic, untainted setting. Ice is brought to Macondo by the gypsies, the first outsiders to come to the town, bringing scientific inventions

like the magnet and magnifying glass.³ They themselves are the precursors of the outside world that corrupts Macondo. The ice, in turn, foreshadows the arrival of science, firearms, wars, and the very predicament that Aureliano finds himself in; the memory is not an escape from reality, it is the catalyst of it.

The ice is only the beginning of the juxtaposition between the magical and political; I will discuss two more notable events in the novel, the first being the ascension of Remedios the Beauty. On what seems like a completely uneventful day, while folding sheets in the garden, Remedios suddenly begins to rise and ascends to heaven amidst the flapping sheets, never to be seen again. García Márquez writes, “[Úrsula] watched Remedios the Beauty waving goodbye in the midst of the flapping sheets...they were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest-flying birds of memory could reach her” (255). In the context of the novel, the event is indeed seen as miraculous, but believable at the same time. “Most people believed in the miracle and they even lighted candles and celebrated novenas” (255). As notable as this event is, it happens within the length of a single paragraph. Furthermore, the magic of the event is grounded (no pun intended) by the details – the wind, the flapping sheets, the trembling of Amaranta’s lace petticoats – which “provide empirical legitimacy to a miraculous event” (S. Hart 116).

Perhaps what makes Remedios’ ascension even more noteworthy is the jarring shift in tone and plot that ensue. García Márquez writes, “Perhaps there might have been talk of nothing else for a long time if the barbarous extermination of the Aurelianos had not replaced amazement with horror” (255). The remainder of the chapter is concerned with the violent murders of the

³ It is worth noting that gypsies bring science to Macondo, contradictory to the more typical movement of scientific discovery from the European or Western mainstream towards the margins of society. Macondo, thus, is twice removed from the Eurocentric tradition, both in its complete isolation from the civilized world and its secondhand knowledge being mediated by a marginalized social group; once again, the reader’s typical vision of reality is challenged.

seventeen Aurelianos, the sons of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, the appearance of Mr. Brown in the first automobile, again signaling the advancement of outside forces upon Macondo, and the transfer of power from locals to “dictatorial foreigners” and from the previous policemen to “hired assassins with machetes” (256). Here is an example of the inversion of the real and fantastical. Remedios’ ascension is miraculous, but still within the realm of possibility. When the town accepts it as truth, the reader in turn must accept it and move forward in the novel. I would argue that, in the context of the novel, the “real” events that follow are more difficult to believe than levitation. A child is hacked to pieces by a police officer’s machete for spilling a soft drink on him (257). One of the Aurelianos is killed by being shot and subsequently knocked into a tub of boiling lard (258). The novel seemingly raises the question, if such atrocities are more outlandish than levitation in a literary setting, why are they more acceptable in reality? Thus, a critique is created by the combination of magical and political elements.

Aside from the actual events, the language used in the description of Remedios’ ascension also shifts in the rest of the chapter. García Márquez uses light, airy language in the ascension, “the environment of beetles and dahlias,” the “mercy of the light” (255). Subsequently, the language becomes that of death and gore; the brutal deaths of several Aurelianos are described in detail. For instance, “The whole town saw the decapitated man pass by as a group of men carried him to his house, with a woman dragging the head along by its hair” (257). The people of Macondo lighting candles for the miracle of Remedios is a religious, if not superstitious image, but the slaughter of the Aurelianos is barbaric. Interestingly enough, it is this section that is also infused with the language and science of progress: the automobile, the Banana Company, and so on. The paradox is that the supposed progress and modernity that is

coming to Macondo also brings death and destruction; progress, in this sense, is actually a regression.

Once again, the magical element in this section carries with it a suggestion of escape. After all, it seems that Remedios the Beauty's ascension occurs just in time for her to escape the earthly violence and murder of her relatives. However, I would argue that is not really the case. Remedios' ascension should not be taken as an escape, but rather as a means of examination of the following events. Remedios the Beauty, especially in terms of the language used to describe her, is more than reminiscent of the old Macondo. García Márquez writes, "Remedios the Beauty was the only one who was immune to the banana plague. She was becalmed in a magnificent adolescence, more and more impenetrable to formality, more and more indifferent to malice and suspicion, happy in her own world of simple realities" (248). She possesses the same simple, unadulterated beauty of the Macondo described on the first pages of the novel. In this sense, she is symbolic of pre-colonial Macondo; her disappearance into the heavens marks the same forever disappearance of that Macondo, beyond the "highest flying birds of memory" (255). The town is not able to escape violence, as is evident by the coming of the dictatorial foreigners and subsequent killing. The vanishing of its symbol of purity marks its now inevitable decline and corruption. García Márquez's obvious critique and anguish about the violent forces that enter Macondo are made that much more poignant by placing them directly after the loss of Remedios.

Arguably the most important event of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the Banana Company massacre is not only the climax of the novel, but also the literary expression of true, historical events. After the Banana Company workers strike for better working conditions and sabotage the plantations, they are summoned to gather in Macondo under the ruse of reaching an

agreement and ending the conflict. Instead, while waiting at the train station, the army opens fire on the more than 3,000 workers and kills them all, with the exception of José Arcadio Segundo, the lone survivor (García Márquez 328). The bodies are then loaded onto the train and dumped into the sea, and again with the exception of José Arcadio Segundo, there is no public recollection of a massacre ever happening: “The woman measured [José Arcadio] with a pitying look. ‘There haven’t been any dead here,’ she said. ‘Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo’” (331).

As mentioned, García Márquez bases the novel’s events on historical fact, the United Fruit Company strike of 1928 in Colombia. Interestingly enough, there are many different accounts of the actual events and different opinions on how well the García Márquez version measures up to historical fact. Gene Bell-Villada, in his essay “Banana Strike and Military Massacre,” states plainly, “The banana company chapters in García Márquez’s book adhere quite closely to the actual facts of the great strike of 1928” (133). He details the events leading up to the strike as follows: up to three years before the actual strike, labor unions began organizing and preparing a list of demands. The demands, including clean living spaces, establishment of hospitals for workers, and days off, were presented to management on October 6, 1928. According to Bell-Villada, United Fruit Company manager Thomas Bradshaw pretended to be absent from the town in order to avoid negotiations with the labor unions. As a result of the lack of negotiations, about 32,000 workers went on strike (133). The government responded with a military occupation of the area, which was followed by an assembly of workers in a plaza in the town of Ciénaga; the army gave them five minutes to disperse, and when they did not the crowd was fired upon. Bell-Villada cites witness accounts of bodies being loaded into trucks headed towards the sea (134). According to the account given by Bell-Villada, García Márquez presents

an almost exact historical replica of actual events in his novel, down to the scream “Ay, mi madre,” or “Aaagh, mother” in the English translation, right before the army opens fire (136). The essay cites a couple instances in which Márquez “magically elaborate[s]” (135), but such a faithful account does not seem magical at all. In fact, I would argue that if Bell-Villada is correct, this episode is out of place within the novel, in that it actually contradicts the other political moments by being so historically faithful. While other instances, like the slaughter of the seventeen Aurelianos, seem exemplary of an “oversized reality,” this particular essay seems to deny this episode’s oversized-ness. Bell-Villada writes, “Of the figures being debated with regard to casualties, the novelist seems simply to have chosen the highest of them all” (136). In other words, García Márquez does not magically inflate the episode, he’s simply rounding up.

However, there are radically different accounts of the event. For instance, in his essay “Fiction as History,” Eduardo Posada-Carbo cites a television interview in which García Márquez himself claimed only a handful of people died in the United Fruit Company strike (Posada-Carbo 395), and said, “I decided on 3,000 dead because that filled the dimension of the book I was writing” (396). Posada-Carbo does acknowledge that the strike resulted in both oppression and blood shed for the United Fruit company workers, but also cites Herrera Soto in establishing the range of casualties between 47 and 2,000, more than a handful and nowhere near the 3,000 in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (404). The novel, according to this particular essay, has become accepted as historical fact, and is often backed by critics and historians as such, Bell-Villada being the obvious example. Both essays cite other works, witness accounts, and García Márquez. As such, it seems almost impossible to say which one is correct or even close to the “real” story.

The question is, does the number of casualties actually matter? Is it relevant to an analysis of the novel? I would argue that it is important, to an extent. Posada-Carbo speculates that “the exact number of casualties will probably never be known” (404), so the number might be a moot point. However, I would then ask, why are so many essays dedicated to that very topic? Why do historians and critics go back and forth about how well García Márquez adheres to historical fact? In essence, this event and the controversy about it point to the fluidity of reality that García Márquez is working to establish. As previously mentioned, he frequently inverts fantasy and reality, undermining his reader’s definitions of what is “real.” I put real in quotation marks, because the many different accounts and critiques of the United Fruit Company massacre and the novel’s interpretation of it show that there is no one real history; the importance lies not in what actually happened, but the interpretations of it. Furthermore, the Banana Company itself assumes the power of creating its own reality. D.P. Gallagher writes, “the authorities deny [the massacre]... for the government and for the Americans reality is something then that you can cavalierly fabricate at your own convenience” (116). Thus, we must ask ourselves who actually holds the power to decide what is real and what is not. The Banana Company assumes the right to warp reality into a fantasy; fantasy becomes history, and history becomes myth. According to Gallagher, “Years later it is possible to read in school textbooks in Colombia that there never even was a banana company at all” (116). Thus, García Márquez’s version of the massacre is no less valid because of his exaggeration of events. It instead becomes a perfect example of the Latin America that García Márquez describes in his Nobel lecture, a combination of existent and mythic reality.

As with Remedios the Beauty’s ascension and the murder of the Aurelianos, García Márquez juxtaposes the Banana Company massacre with an obviously fantastical event: the four

year, eleven month, and two day flood. It begins with a “torrential cloudburst” when José Arcadio Segundo is still on the train with the 3,000 massacre victims (García Márquez 330). He jumps off and walks through the rain to town, and by the time he arrives the atrocities of the day have been forgotten, the beginning of the collective forgetfulness that comes with the rain. According to Wood, “the evil banana company *can conjure up* a four-year flood to erase the traces of its massacre” (39, emphasis added). Hence the Banana Company is now “all powerful” (Gallagher 117), not only able to dominate history but nature as well. If their massacre of the workers wasn’t critique enough, García Márquez uses the Banana Company’s seemingly unlimited power in order to portray them, the literary version of the United Fruit Company, as an unstoppable, devastating force, destroying Macondo with their power and leaving nothing but ruins. Once again, the magic that follows the historical does not provide an escape for either party. “Macondo was in ruins. In the swampy streets there were the remains of furniture, animal skeletons covered with red lilies, the last memories of the hordes of newcomers who had fled Macondo as wildly as they had arrived” (García Márquez 356). The Banana Company is forced to halt activity by the very storm that they created. Furthermore, the magical flood of the story and the collective forgetfulness it brings seems to reflect the real lack of historical information about the United Fruit Company massacre. In his essay, Posada-Carbo claims that the “conspiracy of silence” after the event “does not stand up to even a cursory examination of events” (410), but the lack of concrete historical fact that is confirmed by Posada-Carbo just a few pages earlier seems, at the very least, to be a conspiracy of forgetfulness.

Magical Feminism⁴ in *The House of Spirits*

Moving away from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Isabel Allende's *The House of Spirits* offers a different blend of magic and the political, though possibly with similar outcomes. There are definite parallels with García Márquez's novel, including a base in a multigenerational family saga, the circular narrative style (in each novel, we find that what we have just read is written by a character within the novel, Melquíades and Alba), the presence of a strong matriarchal character (Úrsula and Clara), and so on. Where Allende's novel begins to differ is in its femino-centrism, so much so that Hart defines it as magical feminism, or "magical realism employed in a femino-centric work, or one that is especially insightful into the status or condition of women" (30). While García Márquez uses instances of magic to blur the line between reality and fantasy, Allende's novel is not immersed in magic. In fact, magic is almost sparse in the novel, and in moments of political unrest it falls away even more sharply.

Naturally in a magical feminism work, one of the most important points to note is the relationship between magic and gender within the novel. As soon as the first chapter, a connection is established between female characters and magic, a quality that distinguishes them from men throughout the novel. According to Foreman's essay on "History and the Magically Real," female magic like Clara's predictions "is a commodity that men wish to privatize and control" (294). Magic is regarded dubiously and even distastefully by the male characters in the book. Even Clara's father "anticipat[ed] the damage to his political career that could be caused by having a bewitched child in the family" (Allende 9). Thus, a separation is created between Clara's world of spirits and the masculine world of politics. In the end, it is the masculine world that falls into chaos and violence, while the spiritual world remains unharmed (if perhaps a little neglected by the author). This distinction could be feminist commentary on Allende's part; even

⁴ Term introduced by Patricia Hart in *Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende*.

as magic disappears towards the end of the novel and women, especially Alba, become more involved in the masculine political scene, her inherent magic as a woman roots her in innocence and benevolence. In fact, all the female characters in the novel are regarded in a sympathetic light. By contrast, Esteban Trueba is often hateful and cruel and Esteban García is a completely unsympathetic and malevolent character. Male characters that are sympathetic, like Pedro Tercero García, The Poet, and Jaime, embody traditionally female characteristics. They're romantic, sentimental, and gentle, aligning themselves more with the feminine characters than their fellow masculine ones. Allende establishes this dichotomy between feminine and masculine, magical and political to create both a political commentary and critique the politics of gender. For the remainder of my discussion of *The House of Spirits*, I will analyze specific examples of magic within the book and how they provide a lens for questions of politics, gender, and escape from the real.

Just as the memory of ice begins *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by preparing us for an inversion of the fantastical and the real, Rosa the Beautiful and her green hair open *The House of Spirits* with a decidedly fantastical touch, immediately establishing the novel as a magical realism text. Allende writes, "Only a fool could have failed to spot that apparition, who caused a stir wherever she went, and tied up traffic, with her incredible green hair, which framed her face like a fantastic hat" (21). Rosa causes a stir, yes, but her green hair is only regarded as remarkable for its addition to her extraordinary beauty. Rosa turns out to be a fleeting and relatively unimportant character in the context of the novel, since she dies by the end of her own chapter. However, her death is the catalyst for future relationships, namely between Clara and Esteban Trueba, and our introduction to Clara's clairvoyance. Furthermore, Rosa and her green hair establish an early connection between magical qualities and the novel's female characters.

Esteban Trueba, upon viewing her, is “bewitched,” calling her an “angel” and “apparition” and describing “her fairy-tale manner, and her special way of moving as if she were flying” (21).

Thus, the woman is established as magical and the man as magic’s antithesis. Furthermore, the green hair is a hereditary trait; Alba is born with “greenish locks of hair” (223). Magic becomes a hereditary trait, passed on down through the family’s women. Interestingly enough, Alba’s hair is only green-*ish*, instead of the obvious hue of her predecessor’s hair. This could be a hint at the slow disappearance of magic and spirits as the novel progresses. Perhaps this is overreaching. Aside from being the first fantastical element in the novel and establishing a connection between magic and women, Rosa’s green hair does not appear to have any real political significance.

Instead of ruminating over green hair, I would point to a much more significant and prolonged presence of magic – Clara’s ability to predict the future and the spirits that surround her. Her magicality is established in the first chapter as well, with the prediction of her sister’s death: “Clara announced that there would soon be another death in the del Valle family. ‘But it will be by mistake,’ she added” (Allende 23). Several chapters later, she predicts the next disaster: “‘There’s going to be an earthquake!’ Clara announced, daily growing paler and more agitated” (136). Interestingly enough, though Clara is able to predict the future, she cannot change it. Even though she predicts the events, she is not only unable to stop the events themselves, but also fails to even protect those involved. For instance, in her prediction of the earthquake, it is wholly believable that she would be unable to stop it; however, she cannot prevent Esteban Trueba from being severely injured or even foresee that Blanca is not in the house. Her powers of clairvoyance are essentially powerless. “It is as if the text would remind us that magic has very little power in the matters of real importance in this harsh business called mortality” (P. Hart 42). Furthermore, she is not the only woman in the book to make future

predictions. Férula also curses the future of her brother, Esteban Trueba: ““You will always be alone! Your body and soul will shrivel up and you’ll die like an old dog”” (Allende 114). Much like Clara’s predictions, it partly comes true; Esteban does noticeably (at least to himself) physically shrink as he ages. However, perhaps the most damning part of the curse, that he will die alone like a dog, does not. He dies in Alba’s arms, rendering the curse of his sister ineffectual and untrue.

Perhaps this and the many other instances of predictions made by Clara and the other women of the novel can be summed up as such: “As in practically every crucial moment in Clara’s life, clairvoyance is of no real help to her” (P. Hart 41). This rather harsh evaluation of Clara’s powers is examined by Hart as a form of determinism. She cites the example of Clara naming her male children. ““The twins will be called Jaime and Nicolás, respectively,’ she added...her decision was inflexible” (Allende 99). The language used does not suggest that Clara wants to name her children as such, but that they *will* be named Jaime and Nicolás; it is not her decision so much as a determined fact that she is powerless to change (much like the other, more disastrous events she predicts throughout the novel). Regardless of the magnitude of her prophecies, Clara does not actively work to change the future. Hart, in turn, suggests that Clara’s passive clairvoyance forms a lens through which to examine the very nature of the Chilean coup. “One of the most important questions political scientists ask even today is whether or not the [Chilean coup of 1973] was inevitable, given the circumstances” (P. Hart 45). Once again, it is the women who are able to foresee the political upheaval. Luisa tells Esteban Trueba, “Terrible times lie ahead. There will be so many dead they will be impossible to count” (Allende 309), but Trueba denies it long afterward: “A long time would have to pass... before I understood that the soldier had told the truth [about Jaime’s death]... only then did I begin to speak of tyranny”

(320). Despite the continued accuracy of female predictions, their clairvoyance again proves ineffectual. They are unable to change the future. Alba, though able to see the dictator's true colors long before her grandfather, becomes a victim, while her grandfather is spared at least physical abuse. The coup and its opposition actually assume their own gender roles. There are no mentions of any important female character on the side of the coup; all of the perpetrators are men, and their actions (use of military force, torture, murder) are all extremely violent and hyper-masculine. Even the male victims of the military coup are feminized. In an incredibly graphic image, Jaime's testicles are "burned with an imported cigarette" (315). Such an image carries a connotation of castration, the emasculation of a man on the side of the President. Despite the contrast between the female/feminized characters and the malevolence of the hyper-masculine characters, the benevolent characters are not granted a reprieve from the violence. Their magical abilities do not offer them, or their beliefs, any protection. The country, no matter who acts on behalf of it, is doomed to fall to a terrorizing regime.

Female clairvoyance does continue into the later parts of the novel. However, the frequency of such predictions noticeably decreases with the death of Clara. Even though Alba is able to see the truth about the dictatorial political regime, unlike Clara she actually acts upon it. She fights for justice alongside her male counterparts, particularly Miguel, with whom she camps out in a university building in support of striking workers. She eventually has to leave because of severe menstrual bleeding, a solely female affair that compromises her strength. However, as she is carried out she speaks to the male policemen in "the authoritarian tone her grandfather employed with everyone he considered beneath his social station" (Allende 276). She embodies a new, active breed of feminism, a noticeable shift from Clara's passivity. Alba's power comes not from her ability to predict the future, but from her actions and reactions to her present situation.

Hart writes, “If clairvoyance is a metaphor for female passivity, then it is essential that this magic diminish gradually and finally be replaced by something better in Alba’s generation, when she and women like Ana Díaz begin to accept responsibility for the world in which they live” (53). In the past, clairvoyance allowed Clara an escape from responsibility; she is defined by her ability to predict, instead of by her propensity to act. Even her name, meaning “clear”, shows that her character is defined by her own clairvoyance. Alba rejects the escape of inaction, and instead concerns herself with the political climate at hand. The shift from spirits and predictions is “not simply introduced for fun and then abandoned arbitrarily” (53); it is a conscious feminist progression. Furthermore, her actions in the last chapters of the book refute determinism entirely. As I previously mentioned, Esteban Trueba is cursed by his own sister to die alone like a dog; it is Alba who changes his fate. She says, “He did not die like a dog, as he feared he would, but peacefully, in my arms” (Allende 359). Her actions defy the prophecies and curses of past generations of women; instead, she embodies the possibility of peace, reconciliation, and redemption. Despite all of his actions throughout the novel, most of them far from noble, Trueba is redeemed and escapes a cursed death. The image of Alba holding him in her arms as he dies not only reconciles a difference in genders, but a difference in political beliefs. Alba’s actions thus present the new powers of feminism: the ability to intervene in “fate” for peace and reconciliation, instead of passively accepting whatever future comes.

As aforementioned, the magical elements of *The House of Spirits* give way almost completely to realism by the end of the novel. Thus, aside from the metaphor of female passivity in the political coup, the intersection between magic and politics is much less pronounced than in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Instead of floods of biblical proportions and boys being born with pig tails, Allende grounds her novel in a harshly real, often graphic ending. According to

the essay “History and the Magically Real,” “the stronger the historical moment, the more distant the magical – as if to counter the threat of history becoming “merely” enchanted and so subsumed” (Foreman 295). Indeed, Allende’s novel does read as a transparent allegory of actual Chilean history. She does not even pretend to attach fictional identities to characters like the Poet, the President, representing the real life Pablo Neruda and Salvador Allende, respectively (295). While García Márquez often exaggerates realities and uses magic as a device for magnification, Allende “eclipses magic with political realities” (294). Even if the magic that surrounds political events in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not a means of escape, Allende blatantly refuses her reader any sort of escape from the real. Magic is kept at a distance; if anything, Allende shows reality to be far more outrageous. Magical elements are shown to be either benign (e.g. green hair) or ineffectual (e.g. clairvoyance), and by the end they are supplanted by rape, torture, murder, and stories almost too horrific to be believable. Instead, Allende identifies a different breed of magic that emerges from the politics of her novel – the rewriting of reality itself by an oppressive political regime. She writes,

With a stroke of the pen the military changed world history, erasing every incident, ideology and historical figure of which the regime disapproved. They adjusted the maps because there was no reason why the North should be placed on top, so far away from their beloved fatherland, when it could be placed on the bottom, where it would appear in a more favorable light (325).

It is in this portrayal that Allende compares with García Márquez; she presents an inverted and malleable reality, in which the real becomes illusory and magic is acceptable, even mundane. She works to develop a means of expression tailored specifically for Latin America, instead of using a foreign means of expression that cannot fully captivate Chile’s story or the “South

American reality: the confluence of races and cultures of the whole world superimposed on the indigenous culture, in a violent climate.” (Foreman 286)

The Marvelous Real in *The Kingdom of this World*

Predating both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The House of Spirits*, *The Kingdom of this World* is often considered to be a different breed of magical realism entirely. Carpentier himself defines it as a tale of *lo real maravilloso*, famously ending the introduction to his novel with the question, “But what is the history of all the Americas but a chronicle of the real marvelous?”⁵ (198). Unlike García Márquez and Allende, Carpentier was not a native of the country he writes about, but rather writes from the perspective of a European-educated foreigner. Therefore, it is not only interesting to discuss the intersections of magic, or rather, the marvelous, in his work, but also how the very working of magic could be influenced by ethnocentrism.

Before examining specific magical examples in the novel, I would like to look a bit more at Carpentier’s prologue. He writes, “After feeling the in no way false enchantment of this Haitian earth... I was moved to compare this marvelous reality I’d just been living with the exhaustingly vain attempts to arouse the marvelous that characterize certain European literatures” (Carpentier 195). There is evident disdain in his mention of European literature, in comparison with the awe he apparently feels of the “enchantment” of Haiti. But for whom is the Haitian reality actually marvelous? Would a Haitian native consider their own reality marvelous, or can it be so only for an outsider? It raises the question of what constitutes the marvelous, defined by Oxford English Dictionary as “able to incite wonder or astonishment”, or “prodigious or extravagantly improbable” (“marvelous”). While Allende incorporates her magic in the most quotidian fashion, and García Márquez makes magic seem more real than historical fact,

⁵ Translation by Alfred MacAdam.

Carpentier's "very search for the 'magic' of Latin America defines his perspective as European... it is, of course, only from the other side that alterity and difference can be discerned" (Marsh, "The 'Racial' Other"). While examining important moments of magic within the novel, I will attempt also to examine the ethnocentrism of Carpentier, who is writing from the position of Other.

One of the earliest and most notable magical elements in the novel is the comparison and combination of human and animal. Carpentier writes, "At times the talk was of extraordinary animals that had had human offspring. And of men whom certain spells turned into animals. Women had been raped by huge felines, and at night, had substituted roars for words" (16). Later, a slave, after being whipped, has "buttocks...zebra striped with scars" (20). There are several possible readings of such occurrences; first, they can be read as a sort of lycanthropy, "The kind of witchcraft which was supposed to consist in the assumption by human beings of the form and nature of wolves" ("lycanthropy"). The description of this phenomenon establishes the slave culture that Carpentier develops, which is rooted in magic, witchcraft, and metamorphosis. It could also establish a connection between the slave culture and nature as a whole, while developing a dichotomy with the animosity shown towards domesticated animals, specifically dogs. Dogs are associated with their masters, also the slaves' masters, who often use the dogs against the slaves. The dogs are instruments of the masters' cruelty, and the slaves' hatred of the animals translates into the greater hatred of the cruel, colonial environment. A more negative reading of the man/beast is the animalization of the slaves; they are not fully human, they are not even as valuable as the dogs: "it would have been foolish to run the risk of losing a couple of good mastiffs whom Macandal⁶ might have tried to silence with his machete" (17). Furthermore,

⁶ Spelling according to the Harriet de Onís translation of *The Kingdom of this World*, though most of my secondary sources spell it 'Mackandal'.

the zebra stripe scars on the slaves are products of violence at the hand of their masters; their animalization is not only a product of their culture, but literally imprinted upon them by colonizing forces. Carpentier is obviously developing a critique of the colonial system, and does in no way seem to regard the slaves as inferior because of their animalization. In fact, I would argue that reading the lycanthropy of the early chapters as dehumanization of the “savage,” native Haitians is not the result of an ethnocentric author so much as an ethnocentric reading. Carpentier seems in awe of these transformations and other displays of magic. He writes, “[Maman Loi] ran to the kitchen, sinking her arms in a pot full of boiling oil...when she took her arms from the oil they showed no sign of blister or burn” (16). The subsequent differing reactions between Macandal and Ti Noël are possibly just as notable as the phenomenon itself. The former reacts with “complete calm” while the latter “did his best to hide his amazement” (16). Perhaps this is one of the first instances of discrepancies between what is seen and what is assumed to be possible or real. As in later momentous instances, the phenomenon of the burning oil seems to be undermined by Ti Noël’s amazement, which seemingly is reflective of the author’s own awe. In his eyes, this event is marvelous, but does not amaze or perplex Macandal in the slightest; he remains perfectly calm. In his dual assessment of the event, Carpentier solidifies his Other-ness, perhaps even recognizing it in his contrast with Macandal’s (i.e. the native Haitian’s) lack of reaction. Furthermore, Maman Loi is immediately identified as a witch. Her “unnatural” abilities apparently put her beyond the realm of the traditionally understood human being. If she is able to perform such feats, than she can’t be human; she must be a witch. Again, Carpentier seems to be undermining *lo real maravilloso*, justifying her actions only by assigning her a superhuman role. Perhaps this event is an example of the Haitian culture according to Carpentier, but because the phenomenon is explained away as witchcraft, it loses

some of its validity as the simultaneous real and marvelous and does become a rather dehumanizing moment.

The execution of Macandal, and the differing opinions on the actual outcome of the execution, forms one of the novel's best examples of the marvelous becoming real. After being captured for inspiring a slave revolt and poisoning both the colonists and their livestock, Macandal is to be put to death. Until this point he has allegedly been seen in many different animal forms in order to evade capture; of his execution Carpentier writes:

The bonds fell off and the body of the Negro [Macandal] rose in the air, flying overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves. A single cry filled the square: 'Macandal saved!' Pandemonium followed...the noise and screaming and uproar were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry (36).

The novel presents two different versions of events; the slaves believe that Macandal has remained in the Kingdom of this World, while the slave owner de Mézy "commented with his devout wife on the Negroes' lack of feelings at the torture of one of their own" (37). Which one is the reader to believe? The episode seemingly refutes magic as an escape, but in a different way than in Allende and García Márquez's works. In the latter, the reader is not presented with an alternative to believing in the magical elements; in order to proceed through *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, we must accept what is being told, whether it challenges our presumed ideas about what constitutes "reality" or not. In contrast, Carpentier appears to undermine *lo real maravilloso* by immediately following Macandal's escape with what appears to be the "true" version. According to Frederick de Armas' essay on "Metamorphosis as Revolt," the different versions of Macandal's faith indicate "a certain incompatibility between author and character..."

Carpentier rejects[s] their vision as illusory... not because it is untrustworthy, but because it is an alternate world-view” (312). In actuality, the majority of the witnesses believe in Macandal’s escape; only a few European witnesses see his death (de Armas 312), and yet their version is upheld while the majority opinion is dismissed. I would argue that this episode points to Carpentier’s ethnocentrism, and perhaps even his own recognition of ethnocentrism in himself. As a foreign (and Europe-educated) writer, it is impossible to completely align himself with a world to which he does not belong.

Furthermore, this episode calls into question the whole idea of escape, much in the same way as the ascension of Remedios the Beauty in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The escape of Macandal may not be as significant in itself as its implications for the greater Haitian and colonial community. Before the execution, Macandal is a hero for the slaves, fighting against the colonialist oppression: “[Macandal] had proclaimed the crusade of extermination, chosen as he was to wipe out the whites and create a great empire of free Negroes in Santo Domingo” (Carpentier 25). He becomes more a symbol than a man; his very human-ness is shown to be fluid, as he morphs shape and being with little difficulty. Thus, his literal escape from death is not as important as the greater faith in his escape. He continues to be a symbol of freedom and escape from colonial oppression, as well as the triumph of magic. At the same time, by simultaneously denying his actual escape, Carpentier is doing more than portraying alternate realities. He develops two different versions of truth that are incompatible, and thus delineates the world of slaves and slave-owners as incompatible as well. Furthermore, by portraying Macandal’s rather graphic death at the hands of the slave owners, Carpentier is preventing their own escape from culpability for their oppression of the Haitian peoples. Much like the ascension

of Remedios, the ascension of a figure symbolic of the native culture makes the contrast to the culture of oppression that follows that much greater.

The novel culminates with the transformation of Ti Noël in the final chapter. In the previous chapter he learns to shape-shift in order to escape the human world and all its sufferings, but does not find personal satisfaction in the animal societies he joins: “he willed himself to be a stallion... but he had to run off as fast as he could from a mulatto who tried to lasso him and geld him with a kitchen knife. He turned himself into a wasp, but he soon tired of the monotonous geometry of wax constructions” (Carpentier 144). Finally, he transforms himself into a goose, because of his expressed admiration for the orderliness of their society: “Geese were orderly beings, with principles and systems, whose existence denied all superiority of individual over individual of the same species” (146), obviously contrasting their society with the failings of human society. However, the geese reject him, making him finally realize that his attempts at metamorphosis were self-serving, in contrast with Macandal, who metamorphosed to serve the greater community (148). As de Armas describes it, “Macandal’s student realizes the significance of the marvelous. It does not serve to flee and oppressive environment, but transformation is a weapon with which to combat present injustice and bring his people closer to the world of ‘ought’” (314). His statement completely denies the use of metamorphosis as a means of escape. Instead, it is a means of achieving political justice. Perhaps *The Kingdom of this World* is still ruled by oppressive colonial forces, and perhaps transformation is an “unrealizable project” in which “the black man’s real, historical status as victim will continue” (Mikics 385). However, the final metamorphosis confirms that this world cannot be fully dominated by colonialist forces, despite what the historical version of events may be. Magic, as Carpentier writes in his introduction, presupposes faith, and without such faith the colonial slave-

owners will never be able to understand nor conquer the alternate reality of the Haitians. Thus, metamorphosis “as a metaphor for revolt becomes a liberating impulse” (de Armas 316).

Whether literal metamorphosis is possible is not the real issue; as long as faith in such events exists, Macandal and Ti Noël will continue to exist in *The Kingdom of this World*.

Conclusions

Magical realism is a genre far too varied and complex to encapsulate in one essay.

Although *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The House of Spirits*, and *the Kingdom of this World* all share the distinction of being among the most prominent and innovative magical realist texts, they cannot be fully representative of an entire genre. Even in these novels alone, the nuances of such a complicated style are obvious; the “marvelous real” of Carpentier is in no way equivalent to García Márquez or Allende’s workings of the magical. Additional reading of magical realism authors, such as Jorge Luis Borges or Laura Esquivel, serves to further complicate and expand the definition, usages, and critical implications of magical realism. However, no matter what texts are examined, magical realism is far from merely fantastical or escapist. Magic is carefully juxtaposed with political realities, and even for the characters does not provide an escape.

Rather, it provides a lens onto the Latin American social and political climate that may not find adequate expression through traditional, Eurocentric means. It calls into question the very nature of reality, what is believable and what is not. In short, magical realism cannot be purely fantastical, because it does not allow us as readers a reprieve what we consider to be real or possible, but rather forces us to examine, perhaps from a different viewpoint, our perceptions of reality and truth that much more closely.

Works Cited

- Allende, Isabel. The House of the Spirits. Trans. Magda Bogin. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.
- Bell-Villada, Gene. "Banana Strike and Military Massacre." Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude": A Casebook. Ed. Gene Bell-Villada. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 127-137.
- Carpentier, Alejo. "Prologue: The Kingdom of this World." The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays. Ed. Ilan Stevens. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 194-198.
- Carpentier, Alejo. The Kingdom of this World. Trans. Harriet De Onís. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957.
- De Armas, Frederick. "Metamorphosis as Revolt: Cervantes' 'Persiles y Sigismunda' and Carpentier's 'El reino de este mundo.'" Hispanic Review 49, no. 3. (Summer 1981): 297-316. University of Pennsylvania Press. JSTOR. University of Arizona Library, Tucson, AZ. 28 April 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/473024>>.
- Foreman, P. Gabrielle. "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call." Zamora and Faris 285-301.
- Gallager, D.P. "Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia, 1928-)." McMurray 113-128.
- García Márquez, Gabriel. One Hundred Years of Solitude. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970.
- García Márquez, Gabriel. "The Solitude of Latin America." Nobel Lecture, Stockholm. 8 Dec. 1982. 28 April 2009 <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marqu ez-lecture.html>.
- Hart, Patricia. Narrative Magic in the Fiction of Isabel Allende. London: Associated University Presses, 1989.
- Hart, Stephen M. "Magical Realism in the Americas: Politicised Ghosts in 'One Hundred Years of Solitude,' 'The House of the Spirits,' and 'Beloved.'" Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies 9, no. 2. (December 2003): 115-123.
- "lycanthropy." The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd edition 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 6 April 2009 <<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/cgi/entry/50137246>>.
- "magical realism, *n*." The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd edition 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 12 March 2009 <<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/cgi/entry/00299431>>.

Marsh, Rod. "The 'Racial' Other: Alejo Carpentier, 'El reino de este mundo.'" University of Cambridge, 1998. 28 April 2009 <<http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/Spanish/SP5/race/Carpentier.htm>>.

"marvelous, *adj.* and *n.*" The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd edition 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 27 March 2009 <<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/cgi/entry/00302679>>.

McMurray, George, ed. Critical Essays on Gabriel García Márquez. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co, 1987.

Mikics, David. "Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and the Caribbean Writer." Zamora and Faris 384-385.

Posada-Carbo, Eduardo. "Fiction as History: The 'bananeras' and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." Journal of Latin American Studies 30, no. 2. (May 1998): 395-414. Cambridge University Press. JSTOR. University of Arizona Library. 28 April 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/158531>>.

Schroeder, Shannin. Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004.

Wood, Michael. "Review of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." McMurray 36-40.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris, eds. Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.