Postmodern literature

Postmodern literature is literature characterized by reliance on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, paradox, and the unreliable narrator; and often is (though not exclusively) defined as a style or a trend which emerged in the post–World War II era. Postmodern works are seen as a response against dogmatic following of Enlightenment thinking and Modernist approaches to literature.[1]

Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, tends to resist definition or classification as a "movement". Indeed, the convergence of postmodern literature with various modes of critical theory, particularly reader-response and deconstructionist approaches, and the subversions of the implicit contract between author, text and reader by which its works are often characterised, have led to pre-modern fictions such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) and Laurence Sterne's eighteenth-century satire *Tristram Shandy* being retrospectively considered by some as early examples of postmodern literature.[2][3]

While there is little consensus on the precise characteristics, scope, and importance of postmodern literature, as is often the case with artistic movements, postmodern literature is commonly defined in relation to a precursor. In particular, postmodern writers are seen as reacting against the precepts of modernism, and they often operate as literary "*bricoleurs*", parodying forms and styles associated with modernist (and other) writers and artists. Postmodern works also tend to celebrate chance over craft, and further employ metafiction to undermine the text's authority or authenticity. Another characteristic of postmodern literature is the questioning of distinctions between high and low culture through the use of pastiche, the combination of subjects and genres not previously deemed fit for literature.[4]

Background

Notable influences

Playwrights who worked in the late 19th and early 20th century whose thought and work would serve as an influence on the aesthetic of postmodernism include Swedish dramatist August Strindberg, the Italian author Luigi Pirandello, and the German playwright and theorist Bertolt Brecht. In the 1910s, artists associated with Dadaism celebrated chance, parody, playfulness, and challenged the authority of the artist.[*clarification needed*] Tristan Tzara claimed in "How to Make a Dadaist Poem" that to create a Dadaist poem one had only to put random words in a hat and pull them out one by one. Another way Dadaism influenced postmodern literature was in the development of collage, specifically collages using elements from advertisement or illustrations from popular novels (the collages of Max Ernst, for example). Artists associated with Surrealism, which developed from Dadaism, continued experimentations with chance and parody while celebrating the flow of the subconscious mind. André Breton, the founder of Surrealism, suggested that automatism and the description of dreams should play a greater role in the creation of literature. He used automatism to create his novel *Nadja* and used photographs to replace description as a parody of the overly-descriptive novelists he often criticized.[*citation needed*] Surrealist René Magritte's experiments with signification are used as examples by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Foucault also uses examples from Jorge Luis Borges, an important direct influence on many postmodernist fiction writers.[*citation needed*] He is occasionally listed as a postmodernist, although he started writing in the 1920s. The influence of his experiments with metafiction and magic realism was not fully realized in the Anglo-American world until the postmodern period. Ultimately, this is seen as the highest stratification of criticism among scholars.[5]

Other early 20th-century novels such as Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* (1910) and *Locus Solus* (1914), and Giorgio de Chirico's *Hebdomeros* (1929) have also been identified as important "postmodern precursor[s]".[6][7]

Comparisons with modernist literature

Both modern and postmodern literature represent a break from 19th century realism. In character development, both modern and postmodern literature explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the "stream of consciousness" styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, or explorative poems like *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot. In addition, both modern and postmodern literature explore fragmentariness in narrative- and character-construction. *The Waste Land* is often cited as a means of distinguishing modern and postmodern literature.[*citation needed*] The poem is fragmentary and employs pastiche like much postmodern literature, but the speaker in *The Waste Land* says, "these fragments I have shored against my ruins". Modernist literature sees fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis, or Freudian internal conflict, a problem that must be solved, and the artist is often cited as the one to solve it. Postmodernists, however, often demonstrate that this chaos is insurmountable; the artist is impotent, and the only recourse against "ruin" is to play within the chaos. Playfulness is present in many modernist works (Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, for example) and they may seem very similar to postmodern works, but with postmodernism playfulness becomes central and the actual achievement of order and meaning becomes unlikely.[5] Gertrude Stein's playful experiment with metafiction and genre in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) has been interpreted as postmodern.[8]

Shift to postmodernism

As with all stylistic eras, no definite dates exist for the rise and fall of postmodernism's popularity. 1941, the year in which Irish novelist James Joyce and English novelist Virginia Woolf both died, is sometimes used as a rough boundary for postmodernism's start. Irish novelist Flann O'Brien completed *The Third Policeman* in 1939. It was rejected for publication and remained supposedly lost until published posthumously in 1967. A revised version called *The Dalkey Archive* was published before the original in 1964, two years before O'Brien died. Notwithstanding its dilatory appearance, the literary theorist Keith Hopper[9] regards *The Third Policeman* as one of the first of that genre they call the postmodern novel.

The prefix "post", however, does not necessarily imply a new era. Rather, it could also indicate a reaction against modernism in the wake of the Second World War (with its disrespect for human rights, just confirmed in the Geneva Convention, through the rape of Nanking, the Bataan Death March, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holocaust, the bombing of Dresden, the fire-bombing of Tokyo, and Japanese American internment). It could also imply a reaction to significant post-war events: the beginning of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, postcolonialism (Postcolonial literature), and the rise of the personal computer (Cyberpunk fiction and Hypertext fiction).[10][11][12]

Some further argue that the beginning of postmodern literature could be marked by significant publications or literary events. For example, some mark the beginning of postmodernism with the first publication of John Hawkes' *The Cannibal* in 1949, the first performance of *En attendant Godot* in 1953 (*Waiting for Godot*, 1955), the first publication of *Howl* in 1956 or of *Naked Lunch* in 1959.[*citation needed*] For others the beginning is marked by moments in critical theory: Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play" lecture in 1966 or as late as Ihab Hassan's usage in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* in 1971. Brian McHale

details his main thesis on this shift, although many postmodern works have developed out of modernism, modernism is characterised by an epistemological dominant while postmodernism works are primarily concerned with questions of ontology.[13]

Post-war developments and transition figures

Though postmodernist literature does not include everything written in the postmodern period, several post-war developments in literature (such as the Theatre of the Absurd, the Beat Generation, and Magic Realism) have significant similarities. These developments are occasionally collectively labeled "postmodern"; more commonly, some key figures (Samuel Beckett, William S. Burroughs, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez) are cited as significant contributors to the postmodern aesthetic.[*citation needed*]

The work of Jarry, the Surrealists, Antonin Artaud, Luigi Pirandello and so on also influenced the work of playwrights from the Theatre of the Absurd. The term "Theatre of the Absurd" was coined by Martin Esslin to describe a tendency in theatre in the 1950s; he related it to Albert Camus's concept of the absurd. The plays of the Theatre of the Absurd parallel postmodern fiction in many ways. For example, *The Bald Soprano* by Eugène Ionesco is essentially a series of clichés taken from a language textbook. One of the most important figures to be categorized as both Absurdist and Postmodern is Samuel Beckett.[*citation needed*] The work of Samuel Beckett is often seen as marking the shift from modernism to postmodernism in literature. He had close ties with modernism because of his friendship with James Joyce; however, his work helped shape the development of literature away from modernism. Joyce, one of the exemplars of modernism, celebrated the possibility of language; Beckett had a revelation in 1945 that, in order to escape the shadow of Joyce, he must focus on the poverty of language and man as a failure. His later work, likewise, featured characters stuck in inescapable situations attempting impotently to communicate whose only recourse is to play, to make the best of what they have. As Hans-Peter Wagner says, "Mostly concerned with what he saw as impossibilities in fiction (identity of characters; reliable consciousness; the reliability of language itself; and the rubrication of literature in genres) Beckett's experiments with narrative form and with the disintegration of narration and character in fiction and drama won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. His works published after 1969 are mostly meta-literary attempts that must be read in light of his own theories and previous works and the attempt to deconstruct literary forms and genres.[...] Beckett's last text published during his lifetime, *Stirrings Still* (1988), breaks down the barriers between drama, fiction, and poetry, with texts of the collection being almost entirely composed of echoes and reiterations of his previous work [...] He was definitely one of the fathers of the postmodern movement in fiction which has continued undermining the ideas of logical coherence in narration, formal plot, regular time sequence, and psychologically explained characters."[14]

The "Beat generation" was the youth of America during the materialistic 1950s; Jack Kerouac, who coined the term, developed ideas of automatism into what he called "spontaneous prose" to create a maximalistic, multi-novel epic called the Duluoz Legend in the mold of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. More broadly, "Beat Generation" often includes several groups of post-war American writers from the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, the San Francisco Renaissance, and so on. These writers have occasionally also been referred to as the "Postmoderns" (see especially references by Charles Olson and the Grove anthologies edited by Donald Allen). Though this is now a less common usage of "postmodern", references to these writers as "postmodernists" still appear and many writers associated with this group (John Ashbery, Richard Brautigan, Gilbert Sorrentino, and so on) appear often on lists of postmodern writers. One writer associated with the Beat Generation who appears most often on lists of postmodern writers is William S. Burroughs. Burroughs published *Naked Lunch* in Paris in 1959 and in

America in 1961; this is considered by some the first truly postmodern novel because it is fragmentary, with no central narrative arc; it employs pastiche to fold in elements from popular genres such as detective fiction and science fiction; it's full of parody, paradox, and playfulness; and, according to some accounts, friends Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg edited the book guided by chance. He is also noted, along with Brion Gysin, for the creation of the "cut-up" technique, a technique (similar to Tzara's "Dadaist Poem") in which words and phrases are cut from a newspaper or other publication and rearranged to form a new message. This is the technique he used to create novels such as *Nova Express* and *The Ticket That Exploded*.

Magic Realism is a technique popular among Latin American writers (and can also be considered its own genre) in which supernatural elements are treated as mundane (a famous example being the practical-minded and ultimately dismissive treatment of an apparently angelic figure in Gabriel García Márquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"). Though the technique has its roots in traditional storytelling, it was a center piece of the Latin American "boom", a movement coterminous with postmodernism. Some of the major figures of the "Boom" and practitioners of Magic Realism (Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar etc.) are sometimes listed as postmodernists. This labeling, however, is not without its problems. In Spanish-speaking Latin America, *modernismo* and *posmodernismo* refer to early 20th-century literary movements that have no direct relationship to *modernism* and *postmodernism* in English. Finding it anachronistic, Octavio Paz has argued that postmodernism is an imported grand récit that is incompatible with the cultural production of Latin America.

Along with Beckett and Borges, a commonly cited transitional figure is Vladimir Nabokov; like Beckett and Borges, Nabokov started publishing before the beginning of postmodernity (1926 in Russian, 1941 in English). Though his most famous novel, *Lolita* (1955), could be considered a modernist or a postmodernist novel, his later work (specifically *Pale Fire* in 1962 and *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* in 1969) are more clearly postmodern, see Brian McHale.[15]

Scope

American author and publisher Dave Eggers is one of several contemporary authors who represent the latest movement in post-modern literature which some have deemed post-postmodernism

Postmodernism in literature is not an organized movement with leaders or central figures; therefore, it is more difficult to say if it has ended or when it will end (compared to, say, declaring the end of modernism with the death of Joyce or Woolf). Arguably postmodernism peaked in the 1960s and 1970s with the publication of *Catch-22* in 1961, *Lost in the Funhouse* in 1968, *Slaughterhouse-Five* in 1969, and many others. Thomas Pynchon's 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow* is "often considered as *the* postmodern novel, redefining both postmodernism and the novel in general."[16]

Some declared the death of postmodernism in the 1980s with a new surge of realism represented and inspired by Raymond Carver. Tom Wolfe in his 1989 article "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast" called for a

new emphasis on realism in fiction to replace postmodernism.[17] With this new emphasis on realism in mind, some[who?] declared *White Noise* in 1985 or *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 to be the last great novels of the postmodern era.

A new generation of writers—such as David Foster Wallace, Giannina Braschi, Dave Eggers, Michael Chabon, Zadie Smith, Chuck Palahniuk, Jennifer Egan, Neil Gaiman, Richard Powers, Jonathan Lethem, Denvor Fernandez—and publications such as *McSweeney's*, *The Believer*, *Denvor Fernandez's Rebirths*, and the fiction pages of *The New Yorker*, herald either a new chapter of postmodernism or possibly post-postmodernism.[5][18]

Common themes and techniques

Several themes and techniques are indicative of writing in the postmodern era. These themes and techniques, discussed below, are often used together. For example, metafiction and pastiche are often used for irony. These are not used by all postmodernists, nor is this an exclusive list of features.

Irony, playfulness, black humor

Linda Hutcheon claimed postmodern fiction as a whole could be characterized by the ironic quote marks, that much of it can be taken as tongue-in-cheek. This irony, along with black humor and the general concept of "play" (related to Derrida's concept or the ideas advocated by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*) are among the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism. Though the idea of employing these in literature did not start with the postmodernists (the modernists were often playful and ironic), they became central features in many postmodern works. In fact, several novelists later to be labeled postmodern were first collectively labeled black humorists: John Barth, Joseph Heller, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut, Bruce Jay Friedman, etc. It's common for postmodernists to treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way: for example, the way Heller and Vonnegut address the events of World War II. The central concept of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is the irony of the now-idiomatic "catch-22", and the narrative is structured around a long series of similar ironies. Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* in particular provides prime examples of playfulness, often including silly wordplay, within a serious context. For example, it contains characters named Mike Fallopian and Stanley Koteks and a radio station called KCUF, while the novel as a whole has a serious subject and a complex structure.[5][19][20]

Intertextuality

Since postmodernism represents a decentered concept of the universe in which individual works are not isolated creations, much of the focus in the study of postmodern literature is on intertextuality: the relationship between one text (a novel for example) and another or one text within the interwoven fabric of literary history. Intertextuality in postmodern literature can be a reference or parallel to another literary work, an extended discussion of a work, or the adoption of a style. In postmodern literature this commonly manifests as references to fairy tales – as in works by Margaret Atwood, Donald Barthelme, and many others – or in references to popular genres such as sci-fi and detective fiction. An early 20th century example of intertextuality which influenced later postmodernists is "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" by Jorge Luis Borges, a story with significant references to *Don Quixote* which is also a good example of intertextuality with its references to Medieval romances. *Don Quixote* is a common reference with postmodernists, for example Kathy Acker's novel *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*. References to *Don Quixote* can also be seen in Paul Auster's post-modern detective story, *City of Glass*. Another example

of intertextuality in postmodernism is John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* which deals with Ebenezer Cooke's poem of the same name.[*citation needed*] Often intertextuality is more complicated than a single reference to another text. Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, for example, links Pinocchio to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Also, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* takes on the form of a detective novel and makes references to authors such as Aristotle, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Borges.[21][22][23] Some critics point to the use of intertextuality as an indication of postmodernism's lack of originality and reliance on clichés.

Pastiche

Related to postmodern intertextuality, pastiche means to combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements. In Postmodernist literature this can be an homage to or a parody of past styles. It can be seen as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society. It can be a combination of multiple genres to create a unique narrative or to comment on situations in postmodernity: for example, William S. Burroughs uses science fiction, detective fiction, westerns; Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales; Giannina Braschi mixes poetry, commercials, musical, manifesto, and drama; Umberto Eco uses detective fiction, fairy tales, and science fiction, Derek Pell relies on collage and noir detective, erotica, travel guides, and how-to manuals, and so on. Though *pastiche* commonly involves the mixing of genres, many other elements are also included (metafiction and temporal distortion are common in the broader pastiche of the postmodern novel). In Robert Coover's 1977 novel *The Public Burning*, Coover mixes historically inaccurate accounts of Richard Nixon interacting with historical figures and fictional characters such as Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker. Pastiche can instead involve a compositional technique, for example the cut-up technique employed by Burroughs. Another example is B. S. Johnson's 1969 novel *The Unfortunates*; it was released in a box with no binding so that readers could assemble it however they chose.[5][24][25]

Metafiction

Metafiction is essentially writing about writing or "foregrounding the apparatus", as it's typical of deconstructionist approaches,[26] making the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction apparent to the reader and generally disregards the necessity for "willing suspension of disbelief." For example, postmodern sensibility and metafiction dictate that works of parody should parody the idea of parody itself.[27][28][29]

Metafiction is often employed to undermine the authority of the author, for unexpected narrative shifts, to advance a story in a unique way, for emotional distance, or to comment on the act of storytelling. For example, Italo Calvino's 1979 novel *If on a winter's night a traveler* is about a reader attempting to read a novel of the same name. Kurt Vonnegut also commonly used this technique: the first chapter of his 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* is about the process of writing the novel and calls attention to his own presence throughout the novel. Though much of the novel has to do with Vonnegut's own experiences during the firebombing of Dresden, Vonnegut continually points out the artificiality of the central narrative arc which contains obviously fictional elements such as aliens and time travel. Similarly, Tim O'Brien's 1990 novel/story collection *The Things They Carried*, about one platoon's experiences during the Vietnam War, features a character named Tim O'Brien; though O'Brien was a Vietnam veteran, the book is a work of fiction and O'Brien calls into question the fictionality of the characters and incidents throughout the book. One story in the book, "How to Tell a True War Story", questions the nature of telling stories. Factual retellings of war stories, the narrator says, would be unbelievable, and heroic, moral war stories don't

capture the truth. Another example is David Foster Wallace's The Pale King, in which he claimed that the copyright page only claimed it was fiction for legal purposes, and that everything within the novel was non-fiction. He also employs a character in the novel named David Foster Wallace.

Fabulation

Fabulation is a term sometimes used interchangeably with metafiction and relates to pastiche and Magic Realism. It is a rejection of realism which embraces the notion that literature is a created work and not bound by notions of mimesis and verisimilitude. Thus, fabulation challenges some traditional notions of literature—the traditional structure of a novel or role of the narrator, for example—and integrates other traditional notions of storytelling, including fantastical elements, such as magic and myth, or elements from popular genres such as science fiction. By some accounts, the term was coined by Robert Scholes in his book *The Fabulators*. Strong examples of fabulation in contemporary literature are found in Giannina Braschi's "United States of Banana" and Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.[30]

Poioumena

Poioumenon (plural: poioumena; from Ancient Greek: ποιούμενον, "product") is a term coined by Alastair Fowler to refer to a specific type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation. According to Fowler, "the poioumenon is calculated to offer opportunities to explore the boundaries of fiction and reality—the limits of narrative truth."[31] In many cases, the book will be about the process of creating the book or includes a central metaphor for this process. Common examples of this are Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which is about the narrator's frustrated attempt to tell his own story. A significant postmodern example is Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), in which the narrator, Kinbote, claims he is writing an analysis of John Shade's long poem "Pale Fire", but the narrative of the relationship between Shade and Kinbote is presented in what is ostensibly the footnotes to the poem. Similarly, the self-conscious narrator in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* parallels the creation of his book to the creation of chutney and the creation of independent India. *Anagrams* (1970), by David R. Slavitt, describes a week in the life of a poet and his creation of a poem which, by the last couple of pages, proves remarkably prophetic. In *The Comforters*, Muriel Spark's protagonist hears the sound of a typewriter and voices that later may transform into the novel itself. Jan Křesadlo purports to be merely the translator of a "chrononaut's" handed down homeric Greek science fiction epic, the Astronautilia. Other postmodern examples of poioumena include Samuel Beckett's trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*); Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*; John Fowles's *Mantissa*; William Golding's *Paper Men*; and Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew*.[23][31][32][33][34]

Historiographic metafiction

Linda Hutcheon coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to refer to works that fictionalize actual historical events or figures; notable examples include *The General in His Labyrinth* by Gabriel García Márquez (about Simón Bolívar), *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes (about Gustave Flaubert), *Ragtime* by E. L. Doctorow (which features such historical figures as Harry Houdini, Henry Ford, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, Booker T. Washington, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung), and Rabih Alameddine's *Koolaids: The Art of War* which makes references to the Lebanese Civil War and various real life political figures. Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* also employs this concept; for example, a scene featuring George Washington smoking marijuana is included. John Fowles deals similarly with the Victorian Period in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* has been said to feature a

metafictional, "Janus-headed" outlook in the way the novel seeks to represent both *actual historical events* from World War Two while, at the same time, *problematizes* the very notion of doing exactly that.[35]

Temporal distortion

This is a common technique in modernist fiction: fragmentation and nonlinear narratives are central features in both modern and postmodern literature. Temporal distortion in postmodern fiction is used in a variety of ways, often for the sake of irony. Historiographic metafiction (see above) is an example of this. Distortions in time are central features in many of Kurt Vonnegut's nonlinear novels, the most famous of which is perhaps Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five* becoming "unstuck in time". In *Flight to Canada*, Ishmael Reed deals playfully with anachronisms, Abraham Lincoln using a telephone for example. Time may also overlap, repeat, or bifurcate into multiple possibilities. For example, in Robert Coover's "The Babysitter" from *Pricksongs & Descants*, the author presents multiple possible events occurring simultaneously—in one section the babysitter is murdered while in another section nothing happens and so on—yet no version of the story is favored as the correct version.[5]

Magic realism

Magic realism may be literary work marked by the use of still, sharply defined, smoothly painted images of figures and objects depicted in a surrealistic manner. The themes and subjects are often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic and with a certain dream-like quality. Some of the characteristic features of this kind of fiction are the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable. It has been applied, for instance, to the work of Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian who in 1935 published his *Historia universal de la infamia*, regarded by many as the first work of magic realism. Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez is also regarded as a notable exponent of this kind of fiction—especially his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The Cuban Alejo Carpentier is another described as a "magic realist". Postmodernists such as Salman Rushdie and Italo Calvino commonly use Magic Realism in their work.[5][23] A fusion of fabulism with magic realism is apparent in such early 21st-century American short stories as Kevin Brockmeier's "The Ceiling", Dan Chaon's "Big Me", Jacob M. Appel's "Exposure", and Elizabeth Graver's "The Mourning Door".[36]

Technoculture and hyperreality

Fredric Jameson called postmodernism the "cultural logic of late capitalism". "Late capitalism" implies that society has moved past the industrial age and into the information age. Likewise, Jean Baudrillard claimed postmodernity was defined by a shift into hyperreality in which simulations have replaced the real. In postmodernity people are inundated with information, technology has become a central focus in many lives, and our understanding of the real is mediated by simulations of the real. Many works of fiction have dealt with this aspect of postmodernity with characteristic irony and pastiche. For example, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* presents characters who are bombarded with a "white noise" of television, product brand names, and clichés. The cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and many others use science fiction techniques to address this postmodern, hyperreal information bombardment.[37][38][39]

Paranoia

Perhaps demonstrated most famously and effectively in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, the sense of paranoia, the belief that there's an ordering system behind the chaos of the world is another recurring postmodern theme. For the postmodernist, no ordering is extremely dependent upon the subject, so paranoia often straddles the line between delusion and brilliant insight. Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, long-considered a prototype of postmodern literature, presents a situation which may be "coincidence or conspiracy – or a cruel joke".[40] This often coincides with the theme of technoculture and hyperreality. For example, in *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut, the character Dwayne Hoover becomes violent when he's convinced that everyone else in the world is a robot and he is the only human.[5]

Maximalism

Dubbed maximalism by some critics, the sprawling canvas and fragmented narrative of such writers as Dave Eggers and David Foster Wallace has generated controversy on the "purpose" of a novel as narrative and the standards by which it should be judged. The postmodern position is that the style of a novel must be appropriate to what it depicts and represents, and points back to such examples in previous ages as *Gargantua* by François Rabelais and the *Odyssey* of Homer, which Nancy Felson hails as the exemplar of the polytropic audience and its engagement with a work.

Many modernist critics, notably B.R. Myers in his polemic *A Reader's Manifesto*, attack the maximalist novel as being disorganized, sterile and filled with language play for its own sake, empty of emotional commitment—and therefore empty of value as a novel. Yet there are counter-examples, such as Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* where postmodern narrative coexists with emotional commitment.[41][42]

Minimalism

Literary minimalism can be characterized as a focus on a surface description where readers are expected to take an active role in the creation of a story. The characters in minimalist stories and novels tend to be unexceptional. Generally, the short stories are "slice of life" stories. Minimalism, the opposite of maximalism, is a representation of only the most basic and necessary pieces, specific by economy with words. Minimalist authors hesitate to use adjectives, adverbs, or meaningless details. Instead of providing every minute detail, the author provides a general context and then allows the reader's imagination to shape the story. Among those categorized as postmodernist, literary minimalism is most commonly associated with Jon Fosse and especially Samuel Beckett.[43]

Fragmentation

Fragmentation is another important aspect of postmodern literature. Various elements, concerning plot, characters, themes, imagery and factual references are fragmented and dispersed throughout the entire work.[44] In general, there is an interrupted sequence of events, character development and action which can at first glance look modern. Fragmentation purports, however, to depict a metaphysically unfounded, chaotic universe. It can occur in language, sentence structure or grammar. In *Z213: Exit*, a fictional diary by Greek writer Dimitris Lyacos, one of the major exponents of fragmentation in postmodern literature,[45][46]an almost telegraphic style is adopted, devoid, in most part, of articles and conjunctions. The text is interspersed with lacunae and everyday language combines with poetry and biblical references leading

up to syntax disruption and distortion of grammar. A sense of alienation of character and world is created by a language medium invented to form a kind of intermittent syntax structure which complements the illustration of the main character's subconscious fears and paranoia in the course of his exploration of a seemingly chaotic world.[47]

Different perspectives

John Barth, the postmodernist novelist who talks often about the label "postmodern", wrote an influential essay in 1967 called "The Literature of Exhaustion" and in 1980 published "The Literature of Replenishment" in order to clarify the earlier essay. "Literature of Exhaustion" was about the need for a new era in literature after modernism had exhausted itself. In "Literature of Replenishment" Barth says,

My ideal Postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his 20th-century Modernist parents or his 19th-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his back. Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naiveté, he nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than such late-Modernist marvels as Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*... The ideal Postmodernist novel will somehow rise above the quarrel between realism and irrealism, formalism and "contentism," pure and committed literature, coterie fiction and junk fiction...[48]

Many of the well-known postmodern novels deal with World War II, one of the most famous of which being Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. Heller claimed his novel and many of the other American novels of the time had more to do with the state of the country after the war:

The antiwar and anti government feelings in the book belong to the period following World War II: the Korean War, the cold war of the Fifties. A general disintegration of belief took place then, and it affected *Catch-22* in that the form of the novel became almost disintegrated. *Catch-22* was a collage; if not in structure, then in the ideology of the novel itself ... Without being aware of it, I was part of a near-movement in fiction. While I was writing *Catch-22*, J. P. Donleavy was writing *The Ginger Man*, Jack Kerouac was writing *On the Road*, Ken Kesey was writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Thomas Pynchon was writing *V.*, and Kurt Vonnegut was writing *Cat's Cradle*. I don't think any one of us even knew any of the others. Certainly I didn't know them. Whatever forces were at work shaping a trend in art were affecting not just me, but all of us. The feelings of helplessness and persecution in *Catch-22* are very strong in *Cat's Cradle*.[49]

In his *Reflections on 'The Name of the Rose'*, the novelist and theorist Umberto Eco explains his idea of postmodernism as a kind of double-coding, and as a transhistorical phenomenon:

[P]ostmodernism ... [is] not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category – or better still a *Kunstwollen*, a way of operating. ... I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still there is a solution. He can say "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly it is no longer possible to talk innocently, he will nevertheless say what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence.[50]

Novelist David Foster Wallace in his 1990 essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" makes the connection between the rise of postmodernism and the rise of television with its tendency toward self-reference and the ironic juxtaposition of what's seen and what's said. This, he claims, explains the preponderance of pop culture references in postmodern literature:

It was in post-atomic America that pop influences on literature became something more than technical. About the time television first gasped and sucked air, mass popular U.S. culture seemed to become High-Art-viable as a collection of symbols and myth. The episcopate of this pop-reference movement were the post-Nabokovian Black Humorists, the Metafictionists and assorted franc-and latinophiles only later comprised by "postmodern." The erudite, sardonic fictions of the Black Humorists introduced a generation of new fiction writers who saw themselves as sort of avant-avant-garde, not only cosmopolitan and polyglot but also technologically literate, products of more than just one region, heritage, and theory, and citizens of a culture that said its most important stuff about itself via mass media. In this regard one thinks particularly of the Gaddis of *The Recognitions* and *JR*, the Barth of *The End of the Road* and *The Sot-Weed Factor*, and the Pynchon of *The Crying of Lot 49* ... Here's Robert Coover's 1966 *A Public Burning*, in which Eisenhower buggers Nixon on-air, and his 1968 *A Political Fable*, in which the Cat in the Hat runs for president.[51]

Hans-Peter Wagner offers this approach to defining postmodern literature:

Postmodernism ... can be used at least in two ways – firstly, to give a label to the period after 1968 (which would then encompass all forms of fiction, both innovative and traditional), and secondly, to describe the highly experimental literature produced by writers beginning with Lawrence Durrell and John Fowles in the 1960s and reaching to the breathless works of Martin Amis and the "Chemical (Scottish) Generation" of the fin-de-siècle. In what follows, the term 'postmodernist' is used for experimental authors (especially Durrell, Fowles, Carter, Brooke-Rose, Barnes, Ackroyd, and Martin Amis) while "post- modern" is applied to authors who have been less innovative.[52]

Magic realism

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Not to be confused with science fantasy.

Magical realism, **magic realism**, or **marvelous realism** is a genre of narrative fiction and, more broadly, art (literature, painting, film, theatre, etc.) that, while encompassing a range of subtly different concepts, expresses a primarily realistic view of the real world while also adding or revealing magical elements. It is sometimes called **fabulism**, in reference to the conventions of fables, myths, and allegory. "Magical realism", perhaps the most common term, often refers to fiction and literature in particular,[1]:1–5 with magic or the supernatural presented in an otherwise real-world or mundane setting.

The terms are broadly descriptive rather than critically rigorous. Matthew Strecher defines magic realism as "what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe".[2] Many writers are categorized as "magical realists", which confuses the term and its wide definition.[3] Magical realism is often associated with Latin American literature, particularly authors including genre founders Miguel Angel Asturias, Jorge Luis Borges, Elena Garro, Juan Rulfo, Rómulo

Gallegos, Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende. In English literature, its chief exponents include Salman Rushdie, Alice Hoffman, and Nick Joaquin.

Etymology

While the term *magical realism* first appeared in English in 1955,[1]:16 the term *Magischer Realismus,* translated as *magic realism,* was first used by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925[4] to refer to a painterly style also known as Neue Sachlichkeit (the New Objectivity),[5] an alternative to expressionism championed by fellow German museum director Gustav Hartlaub.[1]:9–11[6] Roh identified magic realism's accurate detail, smooth photographic clarity, and portrayal of the 'magical' nature of the rational world. It reflects the uncanniness of people and our modern technological environment.[1]:9–10 Roh believed that magic realism was related to, but distinct from, surrealism, due to magic realism's focus on the material object and the actual existence of things in the world, as opposed to surrealism's more cerebral, psychological and subconscious reality.[1]:12 Magic realism was later used to describe the uncanny realism by American painters such as Ivan Albright, Paul Cadmus, George Tooker and Viennese-born Henry Koerner, along other artists during the 1940s and 1950s. However, in contrast with its use in literature, magic realist art does not often include overtly fantastic or magical content, but rather looks at the mundane through a hyper-realistic and often mysterious lens.[7]

German magic realist paintings influenced the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, who has been called the first to apply magic realism to writing, aiming to capture the fantastic, mysterious nature of reality. In 1926 he founded the magic realist magazine *900.Novecento,* and his writings influenced Belgian magic realist writers Johan Daisne and Hubert Lampo.[1]:13–14

Roh's magic realism also influenced writers in Hispanic America, where it was translated as *realismo mágico* in 1927. Venezuelan writer Arturo Uslar-Pietri, who had known Bontempelli, wrote influential magic realist short stories in the 1930s and 40s that focused on the mystery and reality of how we live.[1]:14–15 Luis Leal attests that Pietri seemed to have been the first to adopt the term *realismo mágico* in Hispanic America in 1948.[8] There is evidence that Mexican writer Elena Garro used the same term to describe the works of E. T. A. Hoffmann but dismissed her own work as a part of the genre.[9] French-Russian Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who rejected Roh's magic realism as tiresome pretension, developed his related concept *lo real maravilloso,* or *marvelous realism,* in 1949.[1]:14 Maggie Ann Bowers writes that marvelous realist literature and art expresses "the seemingly opposed perspectives of a pragmatic, practical and tangible approach to reality and an acceptance of magic and superstition" within an environment of differing cultures.[1]:2–3

The term *magical realism,* as opposed to *magic realism,* first emerged in the 1955 essay "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" by critic Angel Flores in reference to writing that combines aspects of magic realism and marvelous realism. While Flores named Jorge Luis Borges as the first magical realist, he failed to acknowledge either Carpentier or Pietri for bringing Roh's magic realism to Latin America. Borges is often seen as a predecessor of magical realists, with only Flores considering him a true magical realist.[1]:16–18

After Flores's essay, there was a resurgence of interest in marvelous realism, which, after the Cuban revolution of 1959, led to the term *magical realism* being applied to a new type of literature known for matter-of-fact portrayal of magical events.[1]:18

Literature

Characteristics

The extent to which the characteristics below apply to a given magic realist text varies. Every text is different and employs a smattering of the qualities listed here. However, they accurately portray what one might expect from a magic realist text.

Fantastical elements

Magical realism portrays fantastical events in an otherwise realistic tone. It brings fables, folk tales, and myths into contemporary social relevance. Fantasy traits given to characters, such as levitation, telepathy, and telekinesis, help to encompass modern political realities that can be phantasmagorical.[10]

Real-world setting

The existence of fantasy elements in the real world provides the basis for magical realism. Writers do not invent new worlds but reveal the magical in this world, as was done by Gabriel García Márquez who wrote the seminal work of the style, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.[11] In the binary world of magical realism, the supernatural realm blends with the natural, familiar world.[12]

Authorial reticence

Authorial reticence is the "deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world".[13] The narrator is indifferent, a characteristic enhanced by this absence of explanation of fantastic events; the story proceeds with "logical precision" as if nothing extraordinary took place.[14][15] Magical events are presented as ordinary occurrences; therefore, the reader accepts the marvelous as normal and common.[16] Explaining the supernatural world or presenting it as extraordinary would immediately reduce its legitimacy relative to the natural world. The reader would consequently disregard the supernatural as false testimony.

Plenitude

In his essay "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real", Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier defined the baroque by a lack of emptiness, a departure from structure or rules, and an "extraordinary" abundance (plenitude) of disorienting detail (citing Mondrian as its opposite). From this angle, Carpentier views the baroque as a layering of elements, which translates easily into the post-colonial or transcultural Latin American atmosphere that he emphasizes in *The Kingdom of this World*.[17] "America, a continent of symbiosis, mutations... mestizaje, engenders the baroque",[18] made explicit by elaborate Aztec temples and associative Nahuatl poetry. These mixing ethnicities grow together with the American baroque; the space in between is where the "marvelous real" is seen. Marvelous: not meaning beautiful and pleasant, but extraordinary, strange, and excellent. Such a complex system of layering—encompassed in the Latin American "boom" novel, such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—aims towards "translating the scope of America".[19]

Hybridity

Magical realism plot lines characteristically employ hybrid multiple planes of reality that take place in "inharmonious arenas of such opposites as urban and rural, and Western and indigenous".[20][21]

Metafiction

Main article: Metafiction

This trait centers on the reader's role in literature. With its multiple realities and specific reference to the reader's world, it explores the impact fiction has on reality, reality on fiction and the reader's role in between; as such, it is well suited for drawing attention to social or political criticism. Furthermore, it is the tool paramount in the execution of a related and major magic realist phenomenon: textualization. This term defines two conditions—first, where a fictitious reader enters the story within a story while reading it, making us self-conscious of our status as readers—and secondly, where the textual world enters into the reader's (our) world. Good sense would negate this process but "magic" is the flexible convention that allows it.[22]

Heightened awareness of mystery

Something that most critics agree on is this major theme. Magic realist literature tends to read at an intensified level. Taking *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the reader must let go of preexisting ties to conventional exposition, plot advancement, linear time structure, scientific reason, etc., to strive for a state of heightened awareness of life's connectedness or hidden meanings. Luis Leal articulates this feeling as "to seize the mystery that breathes behind things",[23] and supports the claim by saying a writer must heighten his senses to the point of "estado limite" (translated as "limit state" or "extreme") in order to realize all levels of reality, most importantly that of mystery.[24]

Political critique

Magic realism contains an "implicit criticism of society, particularly the elite".[25] Especially with regard to Latin America, the style breaks from the inarguable discourse of "privileged centers of literature".[26] This is a mode primarily about and for "ex-centrics": the geographically, socially and economically marginalized. Therefore, magic realism's "alternative world" works to correct the reality of established viewpoints (like realism, naturalism, modernism). Magic realist texts, under this logic, are subversive texts, revolutionary against socially dominant forces. Alternatively, the socially dominant may implement magical realism to disassociate themselves from their "power discourse".[27] Theo D'haen calls this change in perspective "decentering".

In his review of Gabriel Garcia Márquez' novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Salman Rushdie argues that the formal experiment of magic realism allows political ideas to be expressed in ways which might not be possible through more established literary forms:[28]

"El realismo magical", magic realism, at least as practised by Márquez, is a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely "Third World" consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called "half-made" societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are somehow more garish and extreme than they ever get in the so-called "North", where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what's really going on.

In the works of Márquez, as in the world he describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun.[29]

Origins

Literary magic realism originated in Latin America. Writers often traveled between their home country and European cultural hubs, such as Paris or Berlin, and were influenced by the art movement of the time.[30][31] Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier and Venezuelan Arturo Uslar-Pietri, for example, were strongly influenced by European artistic movements, such as Surrealism, during their stays in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s.[1] One major event that linked painterly and literary magic realisms was the translation and publication of Franz Roh's book into Spanish by Spain's *Revista de Occidente* in 1927, headed by major literary figure José Ortega y Gasset. "Within a year, Magic Realism was being applied to the prose of European authors in the literary circles of Buenos Aires."[32] Jorge Luis Borges inspired and encouraged other Latin American writers in the development of magical realism – particularly with his first magical realist publication, *Historia universal de la infamia* in 1935.[14] Between 1940 and 1950, magical realism in Latin America reached its peak, with prominent writers appearing mainly in Argentina.[14]

The theoretical implications of visual art's magic realism greatly influenced European and Latin American literature. Italian Massimo Bontempelli, for instance, claimed that literature could be a means to create a collective consciousness by "opening new mythical and magical perspectives on reality", and used his writings to inspire an Italian nation governed by Fascism.[1] Pietri was closely associated with Roh's form of magic realism and knew Bontempelli in Paris. Rather than follow Carpentier's developing versions of "the (Latin) American marvelous real", Uslar-Pietri's writings emphasize "the mystery of human living amongst the reality of life". He believed magic realism was "a continuation of the **vanguardia** [or avant-garde] modernist experimental writings of Latin America".[1]

Major topics in criticism

Ambiguities in definition

The Mexican critic Luis Leal summed up the difficulty of defining magical realism by writing, "If you can explain it, then it's not magical realism."[33] He offers his own definition by writing, "Without thinking of the concept of magical realism, each writer gives expression to a reality he observes in the people. To me, magical realism is an attitude on the part of the characters in the novel toward the world," or toward nature.

Leal and Irene Guenther both quote Arturo Uslar-Pietri, who described "man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts. A poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a magical realism."[34] It is worth noting that Pietri, in presenting his term for this literary tendency, always kept its definition open by means of a language more lyrical and evocative than strictly critical, as in this 1948 statement. When academic critics attempted to define magical realism with scholarly exactitude, they discovered that it was more powerful than precise. Critics, frustrated by their inability to pin down the term's meaning, have urged its complete abandonment. Yet in Pietri's vague, ample usage, magical realism was wildly successful in summarizing for many readers their perception of much Latin American fiction; this fact suggests that the term has its uses, so long as it is not expected to function with the precision expected of technical, scholarly terminology.[*citation needed*]

Western and native worldviews

The critical perspective towards magical realism as a conflict between reality and abnormality stems from the Western reader's disassociation with mythology, a root of magical realism more easily understood by non-Western cultures.[30] Western confusion regarding magical realism is due to the "conception of the real" created in a magical realist text: rather than explain reality using natural or physical laws, as in typical Western texts, magical realist texts create a reality "in which the relation between incidents, characters, and setting could not be based upon or justified by their status within the physical world or their normal acceptance by bourgeois mentality".[35]

Guatemalan author William Spindler's article, "Magic realism: a typology",[36] suggests that there are three kinds of magic realism, which however are by no means incompatible: European "metaphysical" magic realism, with its sense of estrangement and the uncanny, exemplified by Kafka's fiction; "ontological" magical realism, characterized by "matter-of-factness" in relating "inexplicable" events; and "anthropological" magical realism, where a Native worldview is set side by side with the Western rational worldview.[37] Spindler's typology of magic realism has been criticized as "an act of categorization which seeks to define Magic Realism as a culturally specific project, by identifying for his readers those (non-modern) societies where myth and magic persist and where Magic Realism might be expected to occur. There are objections to this analysis. Western rationalism models may not actually describe Western modes of thinking and it is possible to conceive of instances where both orders of knowledge are simultaneously possible."[38]

Lo real maravilloso

Alejo Carpentier originated the term *lo real maravilloso* (roughly "the marvelous real") in the prologue to his novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1949); however, some debate whether he is truly a magical realist writer, or simply a precursor and source of inspiration. Maggie Bowers claims he is widely acknowledged as the originator of Latin American magical realism (as both a novelist and critic);[1] she describes Carpentier's conception as a kind of heightened reality where elements of the miraculous can appear while seeming natural and unforced. She suggests that by disassociating himself and his writings from Roh's painterly magic realism, Carpentier aimed to show how—by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, politics, myths, and beliefs—improbable and marvelous things are made possible.[1] Furthermore, Carpentier's meaning is that Latin America is a land filled with marvels, and that "writing about this land automatically produces a literature of marvelous reality".[39]

Alejo Carpentier

"The marvelous" may be easily confused with magical realism, as both modes introduce supernatural events without surprising the implied author. In both, these magical events are expected and accepted as everyday occurrences. However, the marvelous world is a unidimensional world. The implied author believes that anything can happen here, as the entire world is filled with supernatural beings and situations to begin with. Fairy tales are a good example of marvelous literature. The important idea in defining the marvelous is that readers understand that this fictional world is different from the world where they live. The "marvelous" one-dimensional world differs from the *bidimensional* world of magical realism, as in the latter, the supernatural realm blends with the natural, familiar world (arriving at the combination of *two* layers of reality: bidimensional).[12] While some use the terms magical realism and lo real maravilloso interchangeably, the key difference lies in the focus.[40]

Critic Luis Leal attests that Carpentier was an originating pillar of the magical realist style by implicitly referring to the latter's critical works, writing that "The existence of the marvelous real is what started magical realist literature, which some critics claim is *the* truly American literature".[41] It can consequently be drawn that Carpentier's "lo real maravilloso" is especially distinct from *magical realism* by the fact that the former applies specifically to *America*.[42] On that note, Lee A. Daniel categorizes critics of Carpentier into three groups: those that do not consider him a magical realist whatsoever (Ángel Flores), those that call him "a mágicorealista writer with no mention of his "lo real maravilloso" (Gómez Gil, Jean Franco, Carlos Fuentes)", and those that use the two terms interchangeably (Fernando Alegria, Luis Leal, Emir Rodriguez Monegal).[21]

Latin American exclusivity

Criticism that Latin America is the birthplace and cornerstone of all things magic realist is quite common. Ángel Flores does not deny that magical realism is an international commodity but articulates that it has a Hispanic birthplace, writing that "Magical realism is a continuation of the romantic realist tradition of Spanish language literature and its European counterparts."[43] Flores is not alone on this front; there is argument between those who see magical realism as a Latin American invention and those who see it as the global product of a postmodern world.[44] Irene Guenther concludes, "Conjecture aside, it is in Latin America that [magic realism] was primarily seized by literary criticism and was, through translation and literary appropriation, transformed."[45] Magic realism has taken on an internationalization: dozens of

non-Hispanic writers are categorized as such, and many believe that it truly *is* an international commodity.[46]

The Hispanic Origin Theory: If considering all citations given in this article, there are issues with Guenther's and other critic's "Hispanic origin theory" and conclusion. By admission of this article, the term "magical realism" first came into artistic usage in 1927 by German critic Franz Roh after the 1915 publication of Franz Kafka's novella "The Metamorphosis," both visual and literary representations and uses of magic realism, regardless of suffix nitpicking.[44] Russian author, Nikolai Gogol and his story "The Nose" (1835), is also a predecessor to the Hispanic origin theory. All this further called into question by Borges' critical standing as a true magical realist versus a predecessor to magic realism and how the dates of publications between Hispanic and European works compare. Magic realism has certainly enjoyed a "golden era" in the Hispanic communities. It cannot be denied that Hispanic communities, Argentina in particular, have supported great movements and talents in magic realism. One could validly suggest that the height of magic realism has been seen in Latin American countries, though, feminist readers might disagree. Virginia Woolf, Angela Carter, Toni Morrison and Charlotte Perkins Gilman being excellent critical challenges to this notion of Hispanic magic realism as a full and diversely aware aesthetic. Allende being a later contribution to this gender aware discourse. Frida Kahlo, of course, being important to this as well but also at a later date than Woolf and Gilman. This feminist mapping, however, is unnecessary in identifying a basic truth. Kafka and Gogol predate Borges. They may each have their own forms of magic realism, but they are each by the broader definition solidly within this article's given identification: "a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe...."[44]

This issue of feminist study in magic realism and its origination is an important discourse, as well. It should not be ignored. Given that magic realism, by nature of its craft, allows underrepresented and minority voices to be heard in more subtle and representational contexts, magic realism may be one of the better forms available to authors and artists who are expressing unpopular scenarios in socio-political contexts. Again, Woolf, Allende, Kahlo, Carter, Morrison and Gilman being excellent examples of diversity in gender and ethnicity in magic realism. To this end, Hispanic origin theory does not hold.

Gender diversity aside, magic realism's foundational beginnings are much more diverse and intricate than what the Hispanic origin theory would suggest as defined in this article. Early in the article, we read a broader definition: "[magic realism is] what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe..." This "too strange to believe" standard being relative to European aesthetics—i.e. Woolf's, Kafka's and Gogol's work. Later, we read another definition and seeming precedent to the Hispanic origin theory: "Magical realism is a continuation of the romantic realist tradition of Spanish language literature." This "continuation" is a subset of a broader magic realism definition and standard. The Hispanic "continuation" and "romantic realist tradition of Spanish language" subset certainly identifies why magic realism took root and further developed in Hispanic communities, but it does not set a precedent for ground zero origination or ownership purely in Hispanic cultures. Magic realism originated in Germany as much as it did in Latin American countries. Both can claim their more specific aesthetics, but to identify the broader term of magic realism as being Hispanic is merely a theory unsupported by the citations within this article. Perhaps it is time to identify each as its own as part of a broader and less biased umbrella.[44]

Magic realism is a continued craft in the many countries that have contributed to it in its earliest stages. Germany being first and Latin American countries being a close second. There are certainly differences in aesthetics between European and Hispanic magic realists, but they are both equally magic realists. For

this reason, the Hispanic magic realists should really have proper designation as such but not the overarching umbrella of the broader term as this article suggests.[47]

Postmodernism

Taking into account that, theoretically, magical realism was born in the 20th century, some have argued that connecting it to postmodernism is a logical next step. To further connect the two concepts, there are descriptive commonalities between the two that Belgian critic Theo D'haen addresses in his essay, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism". While authors such as Günter Grass, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Angela Carter, John Banville, Michel Tournier, Giannina Braschi, Willem Brakman and Louis Ferron might be widely considered postmodernist, they can "just as easily be categorized ... magic realist".[48] A list has been compiled of characteristics one might typically attribute to postmodernism, but which also could describe literary magic realism: "self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the dissolution of character and narrative instance, the erasure of boundaries, and the destabilization of the reader".[49] To further connect the two, magical realism and postmodernism share the themes of post-colonial discourse, in which jumps in time and focus cannot really be explained with scientific but rather with magical reasoning; textualization (of the reader); and metafiction.

Concerning attitude toward audience, the two have, some argue, a lot in common. Magical realist works do not seek to primarily satisfy a popular audience, but instead, a sophisticated audience that must be attuned to noticing textual "subtleties".[14] While the postmodern writer condemns escapist literature (like fantasy, crime, ghost fiction), he/she is inextricably related to it concerning readership. There are two modes in postmodern literature: one, commercially successful pop fiction, and the other, philosophy, better suited to intellectuals. A singular reading of the first mode will render a distorted or reductive understanding of the text. The fictitious reader—such as Aureliano from *100 Years of Solitude*—is the hostage used to express the writer's anxiety on this issue of who is reading the work and to what ends, and of how the writer is forever reliant upon the needs and desires of readers (the market).[50] The magic realist writer with difficulty must reach a balance between saleability and intellectual integrity. Wendy Faris, talking about magic realism as a contemporary phenomenon that leaves modernism for postmodernism, says, "Magic realist fictions do seem more youthful and popular than their modernist predecessors, in that they often (though not always) cater with unidirectional story lines to our basic desire to hear what happens next. Thus they may be more clearly designed for the entertainment of readers."[51]

Comparison with related genres

When attempting to define what something *is*, it is often helpful to define what something is *not*. It is also important to note that many literary critics attempt to classify novels and literary works in only one genre, such as "romantic" or "naturalist", not always taking into account that many works fall into multiple categories.[14] Much discussion is cited from Maggie Ann Bowers' book *Magic(al) Realism*, wherein she attempts to delimit the terms magic realism and magical realism by examining the relationships with other genres such as realism, surrealism, fantastic literature, science fiction and its African version, the Animist Realism.

Realism

Realism is an attempt to create a depiction of actual life; a novel does not simply rely on what it presents but *how* it presents it. In this way, a realist narrative acts as framework by which the reader constructs a world using the raw materials of life. Understanding both realism and magical realism within the realm of a narrative mode is key to understanding both terms. Magical realism "relies upon the presentation of real, imagined or magical elements as if they were real. It relies upon realism, but only so that it can stretch what is acceptable as real to its limits".[52]

As a simple point of comparison, Roh's differentiation between expressionism and post-expressionism as described in *German Art in the 20th Century,* may be applied to magic realism and realism. Realism pertains to the terms "history", "mimetic", "familiarization", "empiricism/logic", "narration", "closure-ridden/reductive naturalism", and "rationalization/cause and effect".[53] On the other hand, magic realism encompasses the terms "myth/legend", "fantastic/supplementation", "defamiliarization", "mysticism/magic", "meta-narration", "open-ended/expansive romanticism", and "imagination/negative capability".[53]

Surrealism

Surrealism is often confused with magical realism as they both explore illogical or non-realist aspects of humanity and existence. There is a strong historical connection between Franz Roh's concept of magic realism and surrealism, as well as the resulting influence on Carpentier's marvelous reality; however, important differences remain. Surrealism "is most distanced from magical realism [in that] the aspects that it explores are associated not with material reality but with the imagination and the mind, and in particular it attempts to express the 'inner life' and psychology of humans through art". It seeks to express the sub-conscious, unconscious, the repressed and inexpressible. Magical realism, on the other hand, rarely presents the extraordinary in the form of a dream or a *psychological experience*. "To do so," Bowers writes, "takes the magic of recognizable material reality and places it into the little understood world of the imagination. The ordinariness of magical realism's magic relies on its accepted and unquestioned position in tangible and *material reality*."[54]

Imaginary realism

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"Imaginary realism" is a term first coined by Dutch painter Carel Willink as a pendant of magic realism. Where magic realism uses fantastical and unreal elements, imaginary realism strictly uses realistic elements in an imagined scene. As such, the classic painters with their biblical and mythological scenes, can be qualified as 'imaginary realists'. With the increasing availability of photo editing software, also art photographers like Karl Hammer and others create artistic works in this genre.

Fabulism

Fabulism traditionally refers to fables, parables, and myths, and is sometimes used in contemporary contexts for authors whose work falls within or relates to Magical Realism. Italo Calvino is an example of a writer in the genre who uses the term *fabulist*.

Fantasy

Prominent English-language fantasy writers have said that "magic realism" is only another name for fantasy fiction. Gene Wolfe said, "magic realism is fantasy written by people who speak Spanish",[55] and Terry Pratchett said magic realism "is like a polite way of saying you write fantasy".[56]

However, Amaryll Beatrice Chanady distinguishes magical realist literature from fantasy literature ("the fantastic") based on differences between three shared dimensions: the use of antinomy (the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes), the inclusion of events that cannot be integrated into a logical framework, and the use of authorial reticence. In fantasy, the presence of the supernatural code is perceived as problematic, something that draws special attention—where in magical realism, the presence of the supernatural is accepted. In fantasy, while authorial reticence creates a disturbing effect on the reader, it works to *integrate the supernatural* into the natural framework in magical realism. This integration is made possible in magical realism as the author presents the supernatural as being equally valid to the natural. There is no hierarchy between the two codes.[57] The ghost of Melquíades in Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or the baby ghost in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* who visit or haunt the inhabitants of their previous residence are both presented by the narrator as ordinary occurrences; the reader, therefore, accepts the marvelous as normal and common.[16]

To Clark Zlotchew, the differentiating factor between the fantastic and magical realism is that in fantastic literature, such as Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, there is a hesitation experienced by the protagonist, implied author or reader in deciding whether to attribute natural or supernatural causes to an unsettling event, or between rational or irrational explanations.[58] Fantastic literature has also been defined as a piece of narrative in which there is a constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or extraordinary event.

In Leal's view, writers of fantasy literature, such as Borges, can create "new worlds, perhaps new planets. By contrast, writers like García Márquez, who use magical realism, don't create new worlds, but suggest the magical in our world."[11] In magical realism, the supernatural realm blends with the natural, familiar world. This twofold world of magical realism differs from the onefold world that can be found in fairy-tale and fantasy literature.[12]

Animist realism

"Animist realism" is a term for conceptualizing the African literature that has been written based on the strong presence of the imaginary ancestor, the traditional religion and especially the animism of African cultures.

The term was used by Pepetela (1989)[59] and Harry Garuba (2003)[60] to be a new conception of magic realism in African literature.

Science fiction

While science fiction and magical realism both bend the notion of what is real, toy with human imagination, and are forms of (often fantastical) fiction, they differ greatly. Bower's cites Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* as a novel that exemplifies the science fiction novel's requirement of a "rational, physical explanation for any unusual occurrences". Huxley portrays a world where the population is highly controlled with mood enhancing drugs, which are controlled by the government. In this world, there is no link between copulation and reproduction. Humans are produced in giant test tubes, where chemical alterations during gestation determine their fates. Bowers argues that, "The science fiction narrative's distinct difference from magical realism is that it is set in a world different from any known reality and its realism resides in the fact that we can recognize it as a possibility for our future. Unlike magical realism, it does not have a realistic setting that is recognizable in relation to any past or present reality."[61]

Major authors and works

Although critics and writers debate which authors or works fall within the magical realism genre, the following authors represent the narrative mode. Within the Latin American world, the most iconic of magical realist writers are Jorge Luis Borges,[62] Isabel Allende,[63] and Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez, whose novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was an instant worldwide success.

Plaque of Gabriel García Márquez, Paris

García Márquez confessed: "My most important problem was destroying the line of demarcation that separates what seems real from what seems fantastic."[64] Allende was the first Latin American woman writer recognized outside the continent. Her most well-known novel, *The House of the Spirits*, is arguably similar to García Márquez's style of magical realist writing.[1]:43 Another notable novelist is Laura Esquivel, whose *Like Water for Chocolate* tells the story of the domestic life of women living on the margins of their families and society. The novel's protagonist, Tita, is kept from happiness and marriage by her mother. "Her unrequited love and ostracism from the family lead her to harness her extraordinary powers of imbuing her emotions to the food she makes. In turn, people who eat her food enact her emotions for her. For example, after eating a wedding cake Tita made while suffering from a forbidden love, the guests all suffer from a wave of longing. The Mexican Juan Rulfo pioneered the exposition through a non-linear structure with his short novel *Pedro Páramo* that tells the story of Comala both as a lively town in times of the eponymous Pedro Páramo and as a ghost town through the eyes of his son Juan Preciado who returns to Comala to fulfil a promise to his dead mother.

In the English-speaking world, major authors include British Indian writer Salman Rushdie, African American novelists Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor, Latinos, as Ana Castillo, Rudolfo Anaya, Daniel Olivas, and Helena Maria Viramontes, Native American authors Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie; English author Louis de Bernières and English feminist writer Angela Carter. Perhaps the best known is Rushdie, whose "language form of magical realism straddles both the surrealist tradition of magic realism as it developed in Europe and the mythic tradition of magical realism as it developed in Latin America".[1] Morrison's most notable work, *Beloved*, tells the story of a mother who, haunted by the ghost of her child, learns to cope with memories of her traumatic childhood as an abused slave and the burden of nurturing children into a harsh and brutal society.[1] Jonathan Safran Foer uses magical realism in exploring the history of the stetl and Holocaust in *Everything Is Illuminated*.

In the Portuguese-speaking world, Jorge Amado and Nobel prize-winning novelist José Saramago are some of the most famous authors of Magic realism.

In Norway, the writers Erik Fosnes Hansen, Jan Kjærstad as well as the young novelist, Rune Salvesen, have marked themselves as premier writers of magical realism, something which has been seen as very un-Norwegian.

Dimitris Lyacos's Poena Damni trilogy, originally written in Greek, is also seen as displaying characteristics of magic realism in its simultaneous fusion of real and unreal situations in the same narrative context.

For a detailed list of authors and works considered magical realist please see Magic realism novels.

Visual art

Historical development

Giorgio de Chirico, *Love Song* 1914, Museum of Modern Art

The painterly style began evolving as early as the first decade of the 20th century,[65] but 1925 was when *Magischer Realismus* and *Neue Sachlichkeit* were officially recognized as major trends. This was the year that Franz Roh published his book on the subject, *Nach Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (translated as *After Expressionism: Magical Realism: Problems of the*

Newest European Painting) and Gustav Hartlaub curated the seminal exhibition on the theme, entitled simply *Neue Sachlichkeit* (translated as *New Objectivity*), at the Kunsthalle Mannheim in Mannheim, Germany.[66] Irene Guenthe refers most frequently to the New Objectivity, rather than magical realism; which is attributed to that New objectivity is practical based, referential (to real practicing artists), while the magical realism is theoretical or critic's rhetoric. Eventually under Massimo Bontempelli guidance, the term *magic realism* was fully embraced by the German as well as in Italian practicing communities.[67]

New Objectivity saw an utter rejection of the preceding impressionist and expressionist movements, and Hartlaub curated his exhibition under the guideline: only those, "who have remained true or have returned to a positive, palpable reality,"[68] in order to reveal the truth of the times,"[69] would be included. The style was roughly divided into two subcategories: conservative, (neo-) classicist painting, and generally left-wing, politically motivated Verists.[69] The following quote by Hartlaub distinguishes the two, though mostly with reference to Germany; however, one might apply the logic to all relevant European countries. "In the new art, he saw"[69]

a right, a left wing. One, conservative towards Classicism, taking roots in timelessness, wanting to sanctify again the healthy, physically plastic in pure drawing after nature...after so much eccentricity and chaos [a reference to the repercussions of World War I]... The other, the left, glaringly contemporary, far less artistically faithful, rather born of the negation of art, seeking to expose the chaos, the true face of our time, with an addiction to primitive fact-finding and nervous baring of the self... There is nothing left but to affirm it [the new art], especially since it seems strong enough to raise new artistic willpower.[70]

Both sides were seen all over Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, ranging from the Netherlands to Austria, France to Russia, with Germany and Italy as centers of growth.[71] Indeed, Italian Giorgio de Chirico, producing works in the late 1910s under the style *arte metafisica* (translated as *Metaphysical art*), is seen as a precursor and as having an "influence...greater than any other painter on the artists of New Objectivity".[72][73]

Further afield, American painters were later (in the 1940s and 1950s, mostly) coined magical realists; a link between these artists and the Neue Sachlichkeit of the 1920s was explicitly made in the New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition, tellingly titled "American Realists and Magic Realists."[74] French magical realist Pierre Roy, who worked and showed successfully in the US, is cited as having "helped spread Franz Roh's formulations" to the United States.[75]

Magic realism that excludes the overtly fantastic

When art critic Franz Roh applied the term *magic realism* to visual art in 1925, he was designating a style of visual art that brings extreme realism to the depiction of mundane subject matter, revealing an "interior" mystery, rather than imposing external, overtly magical features onto this everyday reality. Roh explains,

We are offered a new style that is thoroughly of this world that celebrates the mundane. This new world of objects is still alien to the current idea of Realism. It employs various techniques that endow all things with a deeper meaning and reveal mysteries that always threaten the secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things.... it is a question of representing before our eyes, in an intuitive way, the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world.[76]

In painting, magical realism is a term often interchanged with post-expressionism, as Ríos also shows, for the very title of Roh's 1925 essay was "Magical Realism:Post-Expressionism".[76] Indeed, as Dr. Lois Parkinson Zamora of the University of Houston writes, "Roh, in his 1925 essay, described a group of painters whom we now categorize generally as Post-Expressionists."[77]

Alexander Kanoldt, *Still Life II* 1922

Roh used this term to describe painting that signaled a return to realism after expressionism's extravagances, which sought to redesign objects to reveal the spirits of those objects. Magical realism, according to Roh, instead faithfully portrays the exterior of an object, and in doing so the spirit, or magic, of the object reveals itself. One could relate this exterior magic all the way back to the 15th century. Flemish painter Van Eyck (1395–1441) highlights the complexity of a natural landscape by creating illusions of continuous and unseen areas that recede into the background, leaving it to the viewer's imagination to fill in those gaps in the image: for instance, in a rolling landscape with river and hills. The magic is contained in the viewer's interpretation of those mysterious unseen or hidden parts of the image.[78] Other important aspects of magical realist painting, according to Roh, include:

- A return to ordinary subjects as opposed to fantastical ones.
- A juxtaposition of forward movement with a sense of distance, as opposed to Expressionism's tendency to foreshorten the subject.
- A use of miniature details even in expansive paintings, such as large landscapes.

The pictorial ideals of Roh's original magic realism attracted new generations of artists through the latter years of the 20th century and beyond. In a 1991 *New York Times* review, critic Vivien Raynor remarked that "John Stuart Ingle proves that Magic Realism lives" in his "virtuoso" still life watercolors.[79] Ingle's approach, as described in his own words, reflects the early inspiration of the magic realism movement as described by Roh; that is, the aim is not to add magical elements to a realistic painting, but to pursue a radically faithful rendering of reality; the "magic" effect on the viewer comes from the intensity of that effort: "I don't want to make arbitrary changes in what I see to paint the picture, I want to paint what is given. The whole idea is to take something that's given and explore that reality as intensely as I can."[80][81]

Later development: magic realism that incorporates the fantastic

Paul Cadmus, *The Fleet's In!* 1934

While Ingle represents a "magic realism" that harks back to Roh's ideas, the term "magic realism" in mid-20th century visual art tends to refer to work that incorporates overtly fantastic elements, somewhat in the manner of its literary counterpart.

Occupying an intermediate place in this line of development, the work of several European and American painters whose most important work dates from the 1930s through to the 1950s, including Bettina Shaw-Lawrence, Paul Cadmus, Ivan Albright, Philip Evergood, George Tooker, Ricco, even Andrew Wyeth, such as in his well-known work Christina's World,[82] is designated as "magic realist". This work departs sharply from Roh's definition, in that it (according to artcyclopedia.com) "is anchored in everyday reality, but has overtones of fantasy or wonder".[83] In the work of Cadmus, for example, the surreal atmosphere is sometimes achieved via stylized distortions or exaggerations that are not realistic.

Recent "magic realism" has gone beyond mere "overtones" of the fantastic or surreal to depict a frankly magical reality, with an increasingly tenuous anchoring in "everyday reality". Artists associated with this kind of magic realism include Marcela Donoso[84][85][*verification needed*][86][87][88] and Gregory Gillespie.[89][90][91]

Artists such as Peter Doig, Richard T. Scott and Will Teather have become associated with the term in the early 21st century.

Painters

- Mohammad Rawas
- Felice Casorati
- John Rogers Cox
- Antonio Donghi
- Marcela Donoso
- Gian Paolo Dulbecco
- Jared French
- Gustav Klimt
- Henry Koerner (1915-1991)
- Edward Hopper
- Gayane Khachaturian
- Ricco

- Carel Willink
- Frida Kahlo
- Colleen Browning
- Eyvind Earle
- Rob Gonsalves
- Carroll N. Jones III
- Armando Adrian-López

Film and television

Magical realism is not an officially recognized film genre, but characteristics of magic realism present in literature can also be found in many moving pictures with fantasy elements. These characteristics may be presented matter-of-factly and occur without explanation.[92]

Many films have magical realist narrative and events that contrast between real and magical elements, or different modes of production. This device explores the reality of what exists.[1]:109–11 Fredrick Jameson, in "On Magic Realism in Film", advances a hypothesis that magical realism in film is a formal mode that is constitutionally dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present.[93][94] *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) begins and ends with the first person narrative to establishing the magical realism storytelling frame. Telling a story from a child's point of view, the historical gaps and holes perspective, and with cinematic color heightening the presence, are magical realist tools in films.[95] Some other films that convey elements of magic realism are *The Green Mile* (1999), *Amélie* (2001), *The Mistress of Spices* (2005), *Undertow* (2009), *Biutiful* (2010), *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), *Birdman* (2014), a number of films by Woody Allen (including *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), *Alice* (1990), *Midnight in Paris* (2011), *Scoop* (2006), and *To Rome With Love* (2012)). Additionally, most of the films directed by Terry Gilliam are strongly influenced by magic realism,[96] the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki often utilize magic realism,[97] and some of the films of Emir Kusturica contain elements of magical realism, the most famous of which is *Time of the Gypsies* (1988).[98]

Magical realism is referred to in the 2015 Netflix series *Narcos*, which opens with a title card, from which the narrator reads: "Magical realism is defined as what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe. There is a reason magical realism was born in Colombia".[99][100]

Video games and new media

Early video games such as the 1986 text adventure *Trinity* combined elements of science fiction, fantasy and magic realism.[101] In his essay *Half-Real*, MIT professor and ludologist Jesper Juul argues that the intrinsic nature of video games is magic realist.[102] Point and click adventure games such as the 2017 release *Memoranda* have recently embraced the genre.[103] 2013 release *Kentucky Route Zero* is also deeply entrenched in magical realist tradition.

In electronic literature, early author Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story* deploys the ambiguity and dubious narrator characteristic of high modernism, along with some suspense and romance elements, in a story whose meaning could change dramatically depending on the path taken through its lexias on each reading.[104] More recently, Pamela Sacred perpetuated the genre through *La Voie de l'ange*, a

continuation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* written in French by a fictional character from her *The Passengers* hypertext saga.[105]

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