Porous borders:

the amorphous nature of magical realist fiction in Asia and Australasia

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By Ben Holgate

Wolfson College

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to broaden the scope of magical realism by examining contemporary fiction in Asia and Australasia, regions which have been largely neglected in critical discussion of the narrative mode. My research seeks to modify and expand our collective conception of magical realism through key texts that challenge not only how we read the narrative mode, but also our expectations of it. My analysis involves a dual intervention in the fields of postcolonial studies and world literature. I supplement existing scholarship of magical realism with new paradigms of critical thought, such as epistemology, mythopoeia, ecocriticism, intertextuality and discourse on human rights. Each of the key authors – Indigenous Australian Alexis Wright, New Zealand Maoris Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimaera, Indian-born cosmopolitans Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie, and Chinese Nobel laureate Mo Yan – subjects the narrative mode to differing intellectual, socio-cultural and historical frameworks, and in the process reinvents magical realism to serve their own artistic purposes. The authors' key texts demonstrate the need to recalibrate theory on magical realism in contexts such as Alexis Wright's depiction of ongoing colonisation of Australia's first inhabitants in a supposedly postcolonial country, and Mo Yan's critique of post-communist

China. I argue that magical realism has porous borders, not only geographically and culturally, but also in the sense that the narrative mode frequently spills over into other, different generic kinds such that the distinctions between them are often blurred. In addition, magical realism's constant state of transformation makes it particularly difficult to define. Therefore, I propose a minimalist definition of the narrative mode and a flexible approach. However, underlying cultural elements and individual artistic expression in a text may sometimes limit magical realism's utility as a tool for literary analysis. Finally, I explore the notion of a genealogy of magical realism based on polygenesis, emerging in different cultures at different times.

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Introduction: Broadening the scope of magical realism

The death of arguably the most famous magical realist novelist of all time, Gabriel García Márquez, on 17 April 2014 at the age of eighty-seven demonstrated that magical realism itself still retains relevance. The outpouring of grief over the Columbian Nobel laureate, whose seminal *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) has become a foundational text for so many subsequent magical realist works, highlighted that his legacy continues. Salman Rushdie, another central figure of magical realist fiction, pronounced in *The New York Times* that García Márquez's books remain "alive." "It's because the magic in magic realism has deep roots in the real, because it grows out of the real and illuminates it in beautiful and unexpected ways, that it works," wrote Rushdie. "But the magic realist sensibility is not limited to Latin America. It crops up in all of the world's literatures from time to time."[1] Australian author Peter Carey, whose novel *Illywhacker* (1985) is an under-appreciated example of magical realist fiction, confessed in his obituary in *The Guardian* that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was a "lightning strike" that "changed my life." "Like Joyce and Eliot, García Márquez gave a light to follow into the unknown," opined Carey.[2]

It is magical realist fiction's commingling of the magical and the real, of the supernatural and the natural, which provides a particular kind of light illuminating aspects of the world that may have been previously hidden to the reader. By fusing seemingly divergent or contradictory elements the narrative mode entices us to explore what many critics refer to as magical realism's "third space," which exists at the intersection of the unreal and the real. This space is hybrid in nature because of "the purely natural way in which abnormal, experientially impossible (and empirically unverifiable) events take place," says Rawdon

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[1] Salman Rushdie, "Magic in Service of Truth," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2014, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/books/review/gabriel-garcia-marquezs-work-was-rooted-in-the-real.html?ref=books&_r=0.

[2] Peter Carey, "Like Joyce, García Márquez gave us a light to follow into the unknown," *The Guardian*, April 18, 2014, accessed April 25, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/18/joyce-garcia-marquez-peter-carey/print.

Wilson.[3] A core reason why magical realist fiction retains its "strange seductiveness," to borrow Fredric Jameson's phrase, is that individual works present alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world.[4] Magical realist fiction re-evaluates different knowledge systems that have generally been rejected within dominant Western discourse through its realistic depiction of myths, metaphors, dreams, and belief in the supernatural or magical.[5]

In 2012, just over a year before García Márquez died, Chinese author Mo Yan became the ninth writer of magical realist fiction to win the Nobel Prize in Literature over more than six decades.[6] This is not to suggest the Nobel is the ultimate arbiter of literary value, even though any literary prize has a "primary function" of enabling various individual and institutional cultural agents to engage one another in the collective enterprise of "value production."[7] Yet it is significant that the Swedish Academy has seen fit to consistently acknowledge and canonise practitioners of this persistent yet amorphous narrative mode. Mo Yan's work also serves as a salient reminder that magical realist fiction is, in the early twenty-first century, an international literary phenomenon that transgresses borders, cultures and historical periods, and ought to be regarded as a literary form extending beyond Latin American fiction and postcolonial literatures from formerly colonised territories.

This thesis takes the enduring popular appeal of magical realism as a starting point to re-examine the narrative mode as a generic kind within the framework of contemporary fiction from Asia and Australasia. The study aims to explore magical realism's strengths and limits as a guiding concept in literary analysis. It also seeks to reassess the poetics of magical realism based on a close reading of key texts from writers and regions that have been largely overlooked by scholarship of the narrative mode. Many critical books on magical realist fiction predominantly celebrate the narrative mode without fully testing its scope and

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[3] Rawdon Wilson, "Metamorphosis of Fictional Space," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 220.
[4] Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry* 12.2 (1986): 302.
[5] Anne Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell* the *Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005), 3.
[6] The nine writers of magical realism who have won the Nobel Prize in Literature are: Mo Yan (2012), Mario Vargas Losa (2010), Günter Grass (1999), Kenzaburo Oe (1994), Toni Morrison (1993), Octavio Paz (1990), Gabriel García Márquez (1982), Miguel Angel Asturias (1967) and William Faulkner (1949).
[7] James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 26.

amplitude. Conversely, much commentary that is critical of magical realist fiction is often overwhelmingly negative without fully acknowledging its variety and adaptability. This critical study aims to navigate the middle ground, without being either fulsome or censorious.

The regional parameters of this thesis are framed as a response to a gap in scholarship of magical realism. Critical discussion is often marked by an inattention to the geographical boundaries set by individual critical studies. Wendy Faris noted more than a decade ago that "a comprehensive study of magical realism in world literature" needs to be broader than existing scholarship and include the "Far East."[8] Faris was responding to the fact that most research on magical realism has focused on Latin America, where the narrative mode is often considered to have originated in the 1930s-1940s, as well as North America, the Caribbean, Europe, West Africa, South Africa and India. Literary critical analysis of India, however, is largely concentrated on Indian-born Salman Rushdie, especially his early works *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Despite Faris' exhortation, little has been done to rectify the problem. This thesis aims to take up that challenge with a sustained analysis of magical realist fiction in the continental spread of Asia and Australasia, regions which have been under-explored, by focusing on a select group of authors from India, China, Australia and New Zealand.

My contention is that the geographical bias of much critical analysis of magical realist fiction to date has resulted in an understanding of the narrative mode that is too narrow. What I hope to demonstrate is that, by broadening the scope of magical realism by including contemporary fiction from Asia and Australasia, our collective conception of the narrative mode will be modified and expanded. The key writers and texts in this study challenge not only how we read magical realism, but also our expectations of it. For example, Indigenous Australian Alexis Wright fuses Dreamtime mythology and Indigenous Law with magical realist techniques to reveal an ancient ontology which is inextricably tied to the Australian land and offers a stark contrast to the transplanted Enlightenment empirical rationalist philosophies of

[8] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 3.

European white ‘settlers.’[9] Mo Yan draws on both foreign (non-Chinese) and domestic (Chinese) sources of magical realism to create an idiosyncratic literary style that is distinctly Chinese in terms of aesthetics and outlook. All of the key authors take magical realism into new territories – in terms of geography, technique and subject matter – thereby subjecting the narrative mode to differing intellectual and socio-cultural frameworks. The other key writers are New Zealand Maoris Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimeara, and Indian-born Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie. My methodology involves building on extant scholarship of magical realism, postcolonial studies and world literature in combination with a close reading of the key texts. I will also incorporate new paradigms of critical thought, such as epistemology, mythopoeia, ecocriticism, intertextuality and discourse on human rights. By carrying out a comparative analysis, Asian and antipodean notions of magical realist fiction will be brought alongside Western ones. As will become clear, authors from disparate national, political and cultural backgrounds are constantly reinventing the narrative mode to serve their own artistic purposes. Magical realism, therefore, is in a perpetual state of metamorphosis through the process of translation, both culturally and linguistically.

The concept of geography, however, is not without its own challenges, for defining specific territories can be fraught with difficulty. Cartographical boundaries are often abstract and arbitrary at best, or cynical tools for imperialistic expansion at worst. Faris’ reference to the “Far East,” for instance, assumes a relative perspective from the West. Beijing and Mumbai may be “far” from the Western imperial cultural centres like London, Paris and New York, but they are metropolitan centres themselves. On the other hand, Beijing and Mumbai, for authors who are either writing in English or whose fiction is translated into English, are still peripheral to the Western centres of print capitalism, and their resident writers are more subjected to the vagaries of international publication and circulation than their Anglo-American counterparts. Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson emphasises, nations are themselves “imagined communities” that do not always command a symbiotic sense of

[9] In Australia, the indigenous peoples of that country are usually referred to with a capital ‘I’ in order to include both Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.

identity from every one of their resident citizens.[10] A study of magical realist fiction from Asia and Australasia, therefore, must treat with caution, if not outright scepticism, the notion of these particular defined regions. Moreover, the amorphous nature of what a nation is and what nationhood represents directly affects each of the key authors in this study. Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) portrays a pre-colonial 'Australia' that bears little relation to the nation-state which resulted from British colonisation. Similarly, Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984) and Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987) recuperate a Maori way of life that pre-dates the arrival of the Pakeha, or Europeans, in New Zealand. Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) reinstates localised Indian scientific knowledge as a direct challenge to colonial science during the British Raj. Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) explores the porous nature of national boundaries and the interlocking of all cultures in the contemporary globalised world, using Kashmir, which is captive to hostilities between India and Pakistan, as a metaphor for distinctive regional cultures that defy nationalist aggression. Finally, Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum* (1987) expresses a nostalgia for individual liberty in pre-communist China, while his *The Republic of Wine* (1992) excoriates the materialism and corruption rampant in the country's post-communist era.

This thesis examines magical realism at the intersection of postcolonial literature and world literature, with the intent of contributing further scholarship to these two disciplines by demonstrating how the narrative mode works in new or under-explored situations. Magical realist fiction is "an international commodity" in that it is a mode of writing which circulates widely and freely around the world.[11] The key works in this thesis have attracted audiences outside of their original, local domains, and as such accord with David Damrosch's observation that works of world literature "circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language." Furthermore, these key texts exemplify the need to position magical realism firmly within discourse on world literature in relation to what is

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[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 6.
[11] Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, "Introduction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

critically regarded as a representative global canon. I am drawing here on Damrosch's concept that "world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading," in which individual texts may enter and exit the constantly changing canon, in which classical and new texts alike are read.[12] The same approach should be taken with the international canon of magical realist texts, in that the consecration and selection of critically and popularly acclaimed works should be fluid and responsive to new and important books. Yet critical works on magical realism frequently contain a geographical bias in their suggested global canons of the narrative mode. For instance, Wendy Faris confesses that, while aiming to discuss magical realism as a "worldwide phenomenon," she nevertheless "followed my own limitations and confined myself to texts from Europe, the United States, and Latin America."[13] Most critics, as Anne Hegerfeldt identifies, "have a certain group of core texts in mind when they speak of magic realism."[14] Hegerfeldt and Tamás Bényei, among others, recommend first examining a group of texts for which there is a degree of consensus about being considered magical realist in order to formulate a definition of the narrative mode.[15] But if this group is ethnographically or regionally biased, the resultant definitions will be either flawed or incomplete. Apart from Rushdie's novels, magical realist works from Asia and Australasia are routinely left out of these canonical selections.

Comparative reading of world literature is additionally complicated by linguistic translation, which is a factor for Mo Yan, the only one of the key authors in this thesis who does not write in English. In Chapter Five, I will demonstrate how translations of Mo Yan's original Chinese (Mandarin) language texts inevitably leave out cultural nuances and intra-cultural references. This is particularly problematic for a writer like Mo Yan because he not only imbues his novels with an intricate layering of Chinese intertexts, which require a degree of knowledge of those domestic literary references by the reader, he also draws on Chinese

[12] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4, 5.
[13] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 3.
[14] Hegerfeldt, 42.
[15] Tamás Bényei, "Rereading 'Magic Realism'," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 3.1 (1997): 150.

literary traditions that share similarities with magical realist fiction. For a critic who is not fluent in Chinese, therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between Chinese literary influences and postmodern magical realist fictional techniques.

My research also builds on those critics who consider magical realism to be an integral component in the development of postcolonial literature, a link which Elleke Boehmer describes as "inextricable."[16] Homi Bhabha proclaims that magical realism has become "the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world."[17] While Christopher Warnes declares that magical realism "fulfils its creative and critical potential to the fullest" in its "postcolonial incarnations."[18] There is an abundance of scholarship that explores the postcoloniality of magical realist texts from Latin America and other formerly colonised territories around the world, which has proliferated since Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* helped usher in what might be termed a second wave of magical realist fiction, outside of Latin America, from the early 1980s. Rushdie's book was followed by Hulme's *The Bone People*, Carey's *Illywhacker* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), to name just a few.

A number of key texts in this study, however, prompt a reassessment of our conceptions of postcoloniality. For instance, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book* (2013) highlight the need to modify Stephen Slemon's influential theory on magical realism as postcolonial discourse, which has largely gone unchallenged since its initial publication in 1988. Slemon argues that in a magical realist text "a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other." The two systems are "incompatible" and, as a result, "each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other'." In turn, magical realism's "characteristic" manoeuvre is that its "two separate narrative modes never manage to

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[16] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 228.

[17] Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.

[18] Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 28-29.

arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy."[19] The two systems, or modes, are usually taken by critics to mean the 'magical' world of the colonised and the 'real' world of the coloniser. However, Wright's fictional portrayal of Australia's first inhabitants still being at war against colonialist forces suggests there remains ongoing colonisation in what is officially a postcolonial country. Moreover, rather than Slemon's two binary, oppositional systems, Wright's novels depict three oppositional systems: the Indigenous colonised; the white 'settler' coloniser; and global economic forces that help perpetuate the ongoing colonisation. In other words, Wright's fiction challenges the binarism inherent in Slemon's theory.

Other key texts complicate the notion of postcoloniality in different ways. Hulme's *The Bone People* introduces a Gothic element associated with Irishness, in relation to the boy Simon, which, historically, is another oppressed culture that acts as a counterpoint to the colonisation of the Maori. Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, by endowing whales with consciousness, intelligence and the ability to communicate across species, exhibits a metaphysics of biocentrism which, by implication, shows up the anthropocentrism of much postcolonial theory and fiction. Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* suggests a cross-fertilisation of localised Indian scientific knowledge with British colonial science, in a fictionalised re-imagining of the 'discovery' of the cause of malaria. Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* questions the paradigms of domination and resistance that have resulted from the experience of colonialism and anti-colonial movements in recent history through its depiction of the destruction of Kashmir by neighbouring India and Pakistan, two former colonies of the British empire. Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum* offers a different perspective of postcoloniality for a country that is not usually thought of as postcolonial, in that much of the narrative is set during the Japanese invasion of China (1937-1945). Moreover, this novel and *The Republic of Wine* serve as a reminder that magical realist fiction ought to be studied in contexts beyond postcolonialism, in this case, a communist, or arguably post-communist environment, areas which have been significantly neglected by scholarship on the narrative mode.

[19] Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 409-411.

Another goal of this thesis is to reassess the poetics of magical realism based on a close reading of the key texts. I frame this discussion within the broader context of genre, for magical realism provides a *particular* example of the more *general* issues surrounding the use of genre as an interpretative concept. My premise is that a literary genre as an abstract concept and a reader's perception of a genre are each culturally conditioned. Consequently, genre is an effective aid to understanding a work of literature as long as the cultural context of the genre accords, to a meaningful extent, with that of the text being analysed. The limitations of genre as a tool for literary analysis become apparent when there is a discrepancy between the cultural context of the genre and that of the text. Stephen Slemon highlights that "the established systems of generic classification" are constructed upon the reading of literary texts "of almost exclusively European or United States provenance." These generic classifications, therefore, are complicit with a centralising impulse in "imperial culture." The major genre systems are, on occasions, "confounded" by certain literary forms and the "modalities of cultural experience that underlie those forms" which originate from outside the Western literary sphere. Alternative generic kinds such as magical realism are useful literary critical tools to identify styles of writing that lie beyond the comprehension of conventional genres.[20] The deep connection between some types of magical realist fiction and the corresponding writer's cultural background is evidenced by the orality of some of these cultures. For example, authors who acknowledge the influence of traditional oral storytelling techniques of their respective cultures on their own writing include Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Alexis Wright and Mo Yan.

I am using genre here in a broad sense. Literary genre, as defined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is "a recognizable and established category of written work employing such common conventions as will prevent readers or audiences from mistaking it for another kind."[21] Exactly what the "common conventions" are for magical realism is what I intend to explore, given critical disagreement about what the narrative mode

[20] Slemon, 408.

[21] Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 90.

constitutes. I am also following Alastair Fowler by including within the term genre both the historical structured kinds of genre as well as the "unstructured modes." A mode, as Fowler says, is "a selection or abstraction from kind" that has "few if any external rules, but evokes a historical kind through samples of its internal repertoire."[22] Most critics refer to magical realism as a mode, although there are some who refer to it as a genre. Intriguingly, few critics explain why they choose one over the other. Among the exceptions, Anne Hegerfeldt argues that "genre primarily relates to form and, at least on the level of sub-genre, content, while mode refers to manner of narration."[23] This strikes me as an adequate explanation, as magical realism has no form as such and it is the poetics, the way writers utilise this particular kind of narrative, which is paramount.

The risk in applying magical realism as a tool for literary analysis is that it may become, as Slemon says, "a monumentalizing category" if it is employed as "a single locus upon which the massive problem of *difference* in literary expression can be managed into recognizable meaning in one swift pass" (original emphasis).[24] Slemon's concern echoes Benedetto Croce's "theory of artistic and literary kinds." It is an "intellectualist error," says Croce, to pass from "the aesthetic to the logical" by identifying "expressive facts" that appear in disparate texts and conceptualising them into "logical relations." In other words, the error occurs if a reader first asks whether a text obeys the laws of a particular literary kind, rather than inquiring into a work's intrinsic artistic expression.[25] However, I am advocating that magical realism be applied as just one tool among others in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of a literary work, and without extinguishing the individual artistic expression that lies within any text. For instance, it would be pointless to primarily ask whether Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* exhibits magical realist elements: the novel is first and foremost a paean for Indigenous Australian culture and an individualistic adaptation of

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[22] Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 56.
[23] Hegerfeldt, 47.
[24] Slemon, 408-409.
[25] Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, 2nd ed. (London: Peter Owen, 1953), 35-37.

Dreamtime mythology and spirituality. In addition, the structure of the book intersects with a range of different genres, such as thriller, quest narrative, action drama and multi-generational family saga. Wright's book also illustrates how the underlying aesthetic and cultural dynamics within a text may often burst or exceed the boundaries that are perceived to delineate magical realist fiction. Therein lies the paradox of magical realism as a tool for literary analysis: while it may identify literary kinds of expression that established genres miss, it may still not adequately capture all aspects of artistic expression. This is especially true of magical realist fiction from distinctly non-Western societies, as I shall demonstrate in the succeeding chapters. The fact that texts consistently exceed the boundaries of genres and, in doing so, resist any rational attempt to apply a taxonomic classification recalls Jacques Derrida's notion of "the madness of genre." "There is no madness without the law; madness cannot be conceived before its relation to law," says Derrida.[26]

The law Derrida refers to is "the law of the law of genre," a concept I shall build on to formulate an alternative system of poetics for magical realism. Every genre, says Derrida, necessarily involves "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity," because no genre can exist in a pure form, in and of itself. In Derrida's view, any literary category (genre, mode, type or form) contains a "trait" that is common to all works within a particular category, by which readers recognise that category. The trait acts as a "code." Yet the trait means that a text "participates" in a genre, or more than one genre, without actually belonging to the genre(s). "Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging," says Derrida (original emphasis). The text cannot belong to a genre because the same trait that marks the text as participating in a genre does not in itself belong to that genre, or to any category for that matter. "In marking itself generically, a text unmarks itself," he adds. Derrida concludes

[26] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, trans. Avital Ronell (London: Routledge, 1992), 251-252.

that the "formless form" of literary categories points to "the possibility and the impossibility of taxonomy".[27]

I propose a minimalist definition of magical realism that accords with Derrida's notion of a single, common trait for each genre. The trait for every work of magical realist fiction is the representation of the magical or supernatural in a quotidian manner that is embedded within literary realism. Without this trait a text cannot be said to be magical realist. This minimalist definition allows a wide range of texts to participate in the category of magical realism without actually belonging to it. There is also an implied recognition that any magical realist text will participate in other generic kinds without belonging to any of them. The most notable example of this among the key texts in this study is Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which is most often regarded as a work of science fiction, but is also part detective novel, historical novel, quest narrative, Gothic novel and magical realist novel, among other literary kinds. One advantage of this minimalist approach to magical realism is that it highlights the narrative mode's porous borders – a key theme of this thesis, hence the title – not only in the geographic sense but also the generic sense. My argument is that magical realism has a tendency to be more shape-shifting than most other generic kinds, throwing up unexpected and surprising permutations, partly because it is a mode, or a style of writing, rather than a genre, which denotes form, but also partly because it is frequently used in vastly different cultural, political, historical and geographical situations. In turn, this engenders the narrative mode with a seemingly infinite number of opportunities to transform and to be transformed. Magical realism is, by nature, porous, spilling over into other generic kinds such that the distinction between them is often blurred. Another advantage of this framework is that it makes it less likely for magical realism to be applied as a monumentalising category, to borrow Slemon's term, to be used as a dominant rubric within which to read a work of fiction. If there is a tacit acknowledgement that a magical realist text participates in additional generic kinds, there will be a natural resistance to the temptation to apply magical realism – or any genre – as a dominant, defining taxonomy for that text.

[27] Derrida, 227-231.

Where my approach to defining magical realism differs from many other critics is that it does not seek to add further qualifications to what a magical realist text should incorporate; that is, it does not impose a taxonomical system. One of the major reasons why there is widespread disagreement about what magical realism is and theoretical discordance about how it operates is a tendency among many critics to employ a methodology that revolves around classification. These critics typically study a select group of texts they consider to be magical realist and identify characteristics common to that particular group, although usually with the proviso that not all their nominated characteristics will necessarily appear in every magical realist text. The end result is quite often lists, such as: Wendy Faris' five primary characteristics and nine secondary characteristics;[28] Anne Hegerfeldt's five "prototypical literary techniques";[29] Ato Quayson's four "issue clusters";[30] and Amaryll Beatrice Chanady's three essential criteria.[31] The essential problem with this approach is that one critic's list is unlikely to exactly match up to another critic's list. Also, the more peripheral the characteristic, the less likely it will appear in other critics' lists. Critical attempts to define magical realism gathered momentum in the 1980s, but subsequent scholarship is often marked by what Marisa Bortolussi describes as a "passive adoption of these earlier, uncontested approaches" that results in "serious flaws and omissions."[32] I am advocating a revised approach to the narrative mode that is flexible and able to accommodate markedly different literatures from around the globe that are in a constant state of flux.

Another problem with the lists of supposedly common characteristics of magical realist fiction is that some criteria may involve a Western bias when tested against non-

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[28] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Faris initially outlined her primary and secondary characteristics in this essay. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*; Faris modified her primary characteristics in this book but did not include the secondary characteristics.

[29] Hegerfeldt, 50-62.

[30] Ato Quayson, "Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative and History," in *The Novel Vol 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[31] Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1985).

[32] Marisa Bortolussi, "Introduction: Why We Need Another Study of Magic Realism," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 30.2 (2003): 281.

Western texts. For example, Hegerfeldt, Faris and Quayson each refer in their own way to a kind of "verbal magic"[33] or a literalisation of metaphor, whereby figures of speech are rendered as real at the level of the text. Salman Rushdie is a pre-eminent practitioner of this technique, such as when Saladin Chamcha literally becomes demonised as an Indian immigrant in Britain by turning into a cloven-hoofed goat in *The Satanic Verses*. But the exploitation by Rushdie and other writers of the traditional Western distinction between the literal and the figurative is not something that generally applies in, say, the fiction of Alexis Wright or Mo Yan, due to their respective Indigenous Australian and Chinese cultures, which have different takes on the relationship between the literal and the figurative. For instance, the black swans which protect Oblivia Ethyl(ene), the teenage Indigenous Australian protagonist in Wright's *The Swan Book*, may be read on one level, from a non-Indigenous perspective, as a metaphor for Australia's original inhabitants. In the novel, the black swans – the antithesis of northern hemisphere (read colonial) white swans – face extinction due primarily to a prolonged, severe drought. Figuratively, the black swans might represent the ongoing struggle for Indigenous Australians, who are starved of nourishment due to colonising forces. From an Indigenous perspective, however, the black swans are not metaphorical but are to be read literally as "ancestors" who are the custodians of Indigenous Law, the "ancient" wisdom of how to live, how to survive, which, according to the text, has largely been forgotten by Indigenous people.[34] Similarly, in Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*, the alleged cannibalism, by which local government officials are said to be eating young babies for epicurean pleasure, may be interpreted by a non-Chinese reader as being metonymic for a corrupt political regime eating its young, given that the novel was written as a reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre of student and worker protestors in 1989. However, the Chinese word for "to eat," *chi* (吃), has wider connotations than its English counterpart because eating in Chinese also relates to "various economic, political, social,

[33] Faris, "Scheherezade's Children," 176.
[34] Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2013), 16, 67.

and cultural codes."[35] Moreover, the Chinese word *rou* (肉) means both "flesh" and "meat," and so applies to both human flesh (*renrou*, 人肉) and different kinds of animal meat, such as pork (*zhurou*, 猪肉) and beef (*niurou*, 牛肉). The eating of animal meat, therefore, has an etymological crossover, or resonance, with the eating of human flesh. From a Chinese perspective, then, the novel's central motif of cannibalism involves nuances that are more subtle than those apparent in an English translation, implying complicity among the whole of society. In essence, these cultural differences exist because the Indigenous Australian and Chinese approaches to particular words – at least in these specific instances – involve deeper and more pluralistic meanings than are apparent in the English language. As a result, the magical realist characteristic of the literalisation of metaphor fails to translate to an Indigenous Australian or Chinese perspective.

My argument is that magical realism has constantly changing boundaries and is inherently unstable. Magical realism, like any generic kind which endures over the long term, remains in a state of flux. I take Fowler's point that any genre will undergo a continuous "metamorphosis" because each new work that enters a genre introduces a new element to the genre, which in turn changes the nature of the genre.[36] The continuous transmutation of magical realism is borne out by the key writers in this thesis. Alexis Wright's adaption of the Indigenous Australian Dreamtime reinvigorates the narrative mode within the context of Indigenous Law and its inextricable links with the arid landscape of northern Australia. Keri Hulme's and Witi Ihimaera's deployments of Maori mythology and spirituality introduce a distinctively Pacific island ecological mindset to magical realism. Mo Yan incorporates traditional Chinese literary forms and styles into his work. Amitav Ghosh mines the colonial archives of the British Raj to reinstate localised scientific achievement in India. While Salman Rushdie reinterprets the supernatural power of telepathy to reflect the inter-connectedness of

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[35] Yue Gang, *The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 11, 25, 28.
[36] Fowler, 23.

the contemporary globalised world. With each key text by these authors the boundaries of what constitutes magical realist fiction are simultaneously broadened and reshaped.

This ongoing process of metamorphosis is what critics of magical realism usually fail to take into account. Peter Carey, in an interview published in 1992, stated that while he thought magical realism was "a lovely way" to describe elements in his first two novels, *Bliss* (1981) and *Illywhacker*, he had come to regard the term as a "tag that was thrown around so much that it started to get soiled" and "a sort of cheap cliché."[37] Two years later, Jean Franco censured magical realism for changing from being "innovative" to mere "fashion." "'Magical realism,' once taken as the index of Latin American originality, is now little more than a brand name for exoticism," wrote Franco.[38] Around the same time Raymond Williams referred to the "now defunct magic realist enterprise."[39] Their comments reflect a cynicism that emerged in the 1990s in response to publishers exploiting the term magical realism and applying it to a wide range of non-Western literature, with the aim of capitalising on the commercial success of magical realist authors from Latin America in the preceding decades. To some extent, that cynicism was warranted, as magical realism was inappropriately applied as a marketing tool to many books, leading Graham Huggan to refer to magical realism's "hypercommodified status."[40] Yet the notion that magical realism has become a "cliché" disregards the variegated ways in which it has been developed by authors.

Another variation of this line of argument is that magical realism is a European-derived term that imposes a Western ideological framework on non-Western concepts. Alfred López, for instance, argues that magical realism is a "European term applied to a 'non-European' literature," which "retain[s] its irreducible difference, its mark or alterity." López believes the mere act of naming a text magical realist is itself an act of appropriation, or "a colonial fantasy" of the mastery of reading, in "a bid to harness the wild, 'exotic' text within a

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[37] Ray Willbanks, *Speaking Volumes: Australian Writers and their Work* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1992), 55-56.
[38] Jean Franco, "What's Left of the Intelligentsia? The Uncertain Future of the Printed Word," in *Critical Passions*, ed. Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 204.
[39] Raymond Williams, *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America: Politics, Culture, and the Crisis of Truth* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 5.
[40] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 19.

reasonable European critical framework."[41] Similarly, Liam Connell contends the application of magical realism to "traditional forms of non-Western culture" is a form of "essentialism."[42] Even the proponents of magical realism sometimes give way to this argument. Brenda Cooper, for example, concedes that a "slide into exoticism" may be inevitable whenever writers exploit their own cultural background, and therefore such exoticism is "a particular vulnerability of magical realism."[43]

As will become apparent in the ensuing chapters, especially in my discussion of Alexis Wright and Mo Yan, Western philosophical ideas quite often do not adequately capture non-Western ontologies. However, it would be erroneous to assume non-Western writers do not adapt magical realism for non-Western contexts. The narrative mode is not ossified, nor stuck in a phase of automatisation, to borrow the Russian Formalists' term. If this were the case, magical realist fiction would not have endured. Instead, the process of exogamy means that authors keep reinventing the nature of magical realist fiction by way of dynamic evolutionism, thereby ensuring its longevity.[44] Authors utilise magical realist elements in contexts as varied as the emancipation of American slaves (Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, 1987), the dawn of the suffragette movement in Britain (Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, 1984), the Jewish Holocaust under Nazism (D.M. Thomas' *The White Hotel*, 1981), and the duality of faith and the animalist instinct for survival (Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*, 2001).

Given the ever-increasing diversity of magical realist fiction, something more than a minimalist definition of magical realism is required in order to engage in comparative analysis. Magical realism plays an important role within literary criticism generally because it allows

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[41] Alfred J. López, *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 143.

[42] Liam Connell, "Discarding Magic Realism," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 29.2 (1998): 97-98.

[43] Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 31.

[44] The Russian Formalists state that any literary genre is subject to a life cycle of birth and death, in which the genre initially challenges ordinary perceptions of reality but over time, through repetition and familiarity, loses its potency and falls victim to automatisation, becoming another "dull epigone which our senses register mechanically," in the words of Victor Schklovsky. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History – Doctrine*, 4th edn. (The Hague, New York: Mouton, 1980), 252.

comparative analyses between separate literatures which in turn “enable us to recognize continuities within literary cultures that the established genre systems might blind us to,” says Slemon.[45] He is specifically referring here to separate postcolonial literatures. While this study has a strong focus on postcolonial texts, as I have outlined above, Slemon’s rationale for comparative analysis equally applies to literatures outside of the postcolonial arena, such as post-communist China. An approach that recognises narrative techniques spanning different traditions and interactions between different cultures “permits an increased understanding of the formal characteristics and cultural work of magical realism, and most important, of the relationship between them, of the ways in which literary forms develop in response to cultural conditions,” says Wendy Faris.[46] Comparative readings allow us to determine why writers utilise the narrative mode in particular works at particular times, whether for political, social or cultural purposes. While this study is mindful to respect the cultural differences between the key texts, connections do abound, not only with each other, but also with other magical realist texts. Thematic similarities include: reacting against oppressive regimes; exhibiting political or ethical imperatives; giving voice to the marginalised; reinstating indigenous knowledge systems that might have been trivialised as magical or fantasy; and exploiting historiographic metafiction to portray alternative versions of history. Historiographic metafiction, as Linda Hutcheon defines it, is fiction that is “intensely self-reflexive” with a “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs,” and which rethinks and reworks “the forms and contents of the past.”[47]

I propose that similarities, rather than characteristics, provide the building blocks for comparative analysis. The benefit of this approach is that it avoids “overly schematic formulations,” as Jenni Adams puts it, in relation to magical realist fiction.[48] Moreover, I am mindful of the dangers inherent in applying rigid theories for literary analysis. A theory, as

[45] Slemon, 409.
[46] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 2.
[47] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 5.
[48] Jenni Adams, *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

Michel Foucault defines it "in the strict sense of the term," is "the deduction, on the basis of a number of axioms, of an abstract model applicable to an indefinite number of empirical descriptions." A model may be useful as a hermeneutic device, but it remains an abstraction, an imaginative construct, whereas a literary work is something tangible and real. Foucault, however, eschews linear deduction, favouring instead to proceed "by concentric circles, moving sometimes towards the outer and sometimes towards the inner ones." His goal is not to construct "a rigorous theoretical model," but "to show how a domain can be organised, without flaw, without contradiction, without internal arbitrariness."[49] I propose a similar, flexible approach for a comparative analysis of magical realist fiction, one that proceeds by concentric circles without applying a rigid, abstract model. For this reason I believe a family resemblance model is most suitable for the narrative mode.

In this respect I am building on the work of Jenni Adams and Anne Hegerfeldt, who similarly adapt a family resemblance model for their respective studies on Holocaust and British magical realist fiction.[50] However, my approach differs from theirs in that I am not advocating a given list of similarities, like Adams' "properties" and Hegerfeldt's five prototypical literary techniques. Rather, I propose the similarities among magical realist texts should remain open and changeable, resulting from a close reading of texts. The only factor that remains fixed is magical realism's solitary trait: the representation of the magical or supernatural in a quotidian manner that is embedded within literary realism. Once this trait is identified in a text, the comparative analysis of similarities can proceed. I am, like Hegerfeldt, drawing on Alastair Fowler's insight that literary works within a particular genre make up a "family" whose individual members are related in various ways. Fowler, in turn, adapts Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances, which the latter uses to describe phenomena that do not have any one thing in common but are related to one another in many different ways. Family resemblances, says Wittgenstein, involve "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities,

[49] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (1969; London: Routledge, 1994), 114.
[50] Adams, 5. Hegerfeldt, 44.

sometimes similarities of detail."[51] Fowler follows Wittgenstein by stating that literary works within a genre do not necessarily have "any single feature shared in common by all."[52] On this point, however, my approach to magical realist fiction differs. On a philosophical level, unless a "family" or a literary genre has at least one common characteristic, the similarities between the phenomena or literary works could potentially extend to an infinite number. In relation to magical realist fiction, a minimalist definition, or solitary trait, is necessary to identify which works ought to be included in the "family," and, equally, which ones ought to be excluded.

There are three main similarities, or deep connections, that become apparent through a close reading of the key texts in this thesis, and which occur in particular groups of texts but not all of them: first, the use of mythopoeia by indigenous writers in white-'settler' countries in Australasia; second, a complex structure of intertextuality from which the 'magical' or supernatural elements are derived; and third, the presence of elements in pre-modern literature (Chinese and Indigenous Australian) that are similar to magical realist elements in contemporary fiction. I will discuss each of these similarities shortly but before then I want to explain my rationale for choosing the key authors and texts, which involves different reasons for each of them. Even though authors may not think of themselves as writers of magical realism, or that their works are magical realist, if the term fits their texts, as Jeanne Delbaere says, "it is usually because what they had to say in them required that particular form of expression."[53] Of the six key authors in this study, only three of them – Alexis Wright, Salman Rushdie and Mo Yan – admit openly to have been consciously influenced or inspired by either magical realism as a literary style or writers of magical realism early in their career. But even if writers are silent on the matter, or, like Amitav Ghosh, protest that magical realism is not present in their work, this does not mean that, for the critic, using magical realism as a tool for literary analysis is null and void. As Anne Hegerfeldt says

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[51] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Oxford, 1967), sections 65 & 66.
[52] Fowler, 41.
[53] Jeanne Delbaere, "Magic Realism: the Energy of the Margins," in *Postmodern Fiction in Canada*, ed. Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 98.

in a different context: "If magic realism has not been found in fiction from Britain, it is not because it is not there, but because critics have not looked for it."[54] Similarly, the regions which I am investigating remain under-explored regarding critical analysis of the narrative mode.

Alexis Wright's adaption of Indigenous Australian mythology and spirituality in *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book* and her development of a narrative style that is strongly influenced by Indigenous oral storytelling techniques in turn create a kind of magical realism that is distinctly different from other treatments of the narrative mode elsewhere. Moreover, Wright's utilisation of magical realist techniques is more extensive than other Indigenous Australian authors, such as Kim Scott or Sam Watson, and is markedly different from that of white-'settler' Australian authors like Peter Carey or Richard Flanagan, who also on occasions deploy magical realism. Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimeara, as Maori writers from New Zealand, provide a useful counterpoint to Wright as they explore similar issues – the survival of a pre-colonial culture and giving voice to the indigenous marginalised – and also employ mythopoeia from an indigenous perspective in a neighbouring white-'settler' country. Although Hulme's *The Bone People* attracted a considerable amount of critical analysis in the wake of its controversial win of the Booker Prize in 1985, relatively little commentary has eventuated over the past two decades. It is worth revisiting Hulme's book in light of subsequent developments in magical realism to explore how it fits in an historical context. Ihimaera's novella *The Whale Rider* complements Hulme's book because it involves a more artistically successful execution of magical realism and also introduces a biocentric perspective to the narrative mode.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which is most frequently thought of as a science fiction novel, is not usually associated with magical realism. Nevertheless, the supernatural imbues the narrative and the book offers a unique study in historiographic metafiction by creating an alternative colonial archive during the British Raj that challenges the colonialist scientific dominance as depicted in Western history. Moreover, Ghosh's novel

[54] Hegerfeldt, 4.

provides the chance to explore magical realism as a porous generic kind by investigating its crossover with science fiction. Salman Rushdie is impossible to avoid in any discussion of magical realist fiction in Asia, given his importance in the growth of postcolonial magical realist fiction, yet there is such a preponderance of critical commentary on his early fiction that it is incumbent to focus on relatively under-explored terrain. For this reason I have chosen *Shalimar the Clown*, which exhibits Rushdie's thematic shift from postcolonialism to globalism, and also reveals developments in his treatment of magical realism: namely, an inversion of the supernatural to explore the dark, destructive side of humanity rather than the positive, constructive side; and his use of the bodily grotesque to symbolise the powerlessness of individuals to influence historical forces.

Mo Yan's recent win of the Nobel makes him an obvious inclusion for any critical study of magical realism in Asia, let alone world literature, thereby addressing the dearth of Western literary criticism of magical realism in Chinese fiction. Irrespective of the Nobel, Mo Yan's idiosyncratic and distinctively Chinese literary style brings a fresh perspective to the study of magical realist fiction. I focus on two, contrasting novels: *Red Sorghum*, which is largely set in pre-communist China and is infused with regional folklore; and *The Republic of Wine*, which is set in post-communist China and is structured within a highly metafictional kind of magical realism.

All of the above key texts are circulated widely, outside of their national borders, and are taught in literary courses. In addition, all of the key texts have received critical attention as works of magical realism, although the extent of this varies considerably. While *The Bone People* is sometimes cited in lists of international works of the narrative mode and *Shalimar the Clown* has been the subject of some critical debate for its magical realist aspects, *Carpentaria* is only beginning to attract critical discussion on its magical realist elements, while *The Whale Rider* has gained limited attention. Critics have discussed magical realist aspects of some of Ghosh's work but not so much *The Calcutta Chromosone*. Critical focus on the magical realist aspects of Mo Yan's fiction has largely come from Chinese scholars, who are typically based either in China or the US, but relatively little from Western critics. My

research, therefore, contributes to how these texts may be used in the classroom in a broader perspective and to augment extant scholarship on magical realism.

All of the key texts are relatively contemporary, having been published since the 1980s, but this is symptomatic of the narrative mode taking off in different countries, especially formerly colonised territories, over the same time period. The situation in China is slightly different in that the country did not open up again to non-Chinese literature until after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, hence Chinese writers like Mo Yan were unable to read 'foreign' authors of magical realism until the liberalising reforms initiated by Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping. My comparative analysis of the key texts, therefore, is predominantly synchronic. However, I am aware of the pitfalls of what David Damrosch terms "presentism," or the tendency in global commercial culture to focus on the recent past at the exclusion of the distant past.[55] In order to avoid this chronological trap, I attempt, where appropriate, to include a degree of diachronic analysis by including magical realist texts from throughout the twentieth century.

The first similarity that emerges out of my close readings of the key texts is mythopoeia, which pertains mostly to Wright, Hulme and Ihimaera. These antipodean authors each blend indigenous myth with non-indigenous or Western mythology in order to provide a narrative structure to their fiction and to depict their own personal worldview, which is characterised by being indigenous in a white-'settler' territory. Donald Shaw notes that early Latin American authors of magical realist fiction, such as Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias and Gabriel García Márquez, would often combine classical, Christian and indigenous Latin American mythology, reflecting both their European literary heritage and desire to encapsulate the unique reality of their homelands. They not only use myth as a structuring principle of the narrative, but also as a vehicle to express their own ideas and attitudes. "The mythical elements incorporated into it [magical realism fiction] are not

[55] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5, 6, 17.

normally there for any truths intrinsic to the myths themselves," says Shaw.[56] Wright, Hulme and Ihimaera follow in this tradition but with a crucial difference: a distinctly antipodean perspective.

Wright incorporates indigenous mythology from the Waanyi nation in northern Australia, where her family originates, with Christian, classical, European and even Chinese mythology. Wright uses mythopoeia to reinstate Indigenous Australian knowledge and culture, as well as to reflect the multi-racial nature of Australia that existed even before the British invasion in the eighteenth century. Moreover, in *The Swan Book* Wright inverts a Eurocentric, northern hemisphere bias, which is represented by the mythological white swan, by prioritising the Australian native black swan. Similarly, Hulme contrasts northern and southern hemisphere perspectives in *The Bone People* by blending Maori mythology with Celtic myth, in particular Irish. As a result, Hulme's narrative explores deeper truths surrounding the violence and marginalisation associated with colonisation, not only in New Zealand but as a general phenomenon. In *The Whale Rider*, Ihimaera fuses Maori mythology about the Great Migration across the ocean with Western myths about whales in order to accentuate an ecological perspective in relation to the South Pacific (including nuclear bomb testing) as well as a feminist twist, to make the tale relevant to a late twentieth-century, urban readership.

The mythopoeia underpinning these antipodean texts is indicative of the *ontological* kind of magical realism, which Maggie Ann Bowers defines as taking as its source material "beliefs or practices from the cultural context" of the text, and which is often associated with Latin American fiction. Critics generally divide magical realism into two broad strands or kinds, although they differ on the nomenclature. The other category is often called *epistemological* magical realism, which takes as its inspiration source material that may not

[56] Donald L. Shaw, "The Presence of Myth in Borges, Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo and García Márquez," in *A Companion to Magical* Realism, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Rochester NY: Tamesis, 2005), 46-48.

coincide with the cultural context of the fiction or the author.[57] Jeanne Delbaere, by contrast, prefers the terms "popular" magical realism, in which the 'magical' is derived from "popular myths," the supernatural, folklore, "primitive faith" and oral tradition, and "intellectual" magical realism, in which the 'magical' "generally arises from the confusion of the tangible world with purely verbal constructs similar to it but without their counterparts in extra-textual reality," and which is typically "playful, metafictional and experimental."[58] Warnes, on the other hand, coins the terms "faith-based" magical realism, which implies faith in the capacity of literature to convey an "expanded sense of reality," and "irreverent" magical realism, which is driven by discourse about reality and elevates "the non-real to the status of the real in order to cast the epistemological status of both into doubt."[59] Although these two strands are useful in discussing the two broader traditions of magical realism, it is misleading to think that they provide a definitive guide to how the poetics of magical realist fiction operates. Despite the obvious point that such a dichotomy risks imposing the type of binary categorisation that magical realism itself attempts to subvert, the fact is much magical realist fiction incorporates both the ontological and epistemological strains, and authors frequently write across both kinds. The dual strains are often "intertwined" in a single text.[60] *Carpentaria*, for instance, is predominantly ontological but also includes epistemological magical realism, such as when the Indigenous activist Will Phantom miraculously evades capture by the police by hiding out on a one-kilometre-long "floating island of rubbish" in the middle of the sea.[61] Conversely, *The Republic of Wine*, which is mostly of the epistemological vein, features a "demon" child that evokes traditional Chinese mythology, or magical realism of the ontological kind.

Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* and Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine* are pre-eminent examples of the epistemological strain and exhibit the second similarity to emerge

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[57] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 91. Bowers draws on Roberto González Echevarría's distinction between "ontological" magical realism, which he associates with Latin American fiction and a "transcendental order," and "phenomenological" magical realism, which refers to a reader's change in perception as a result of defamiliarisation. See Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113, 116.
[58] Delbaere, "Magic Realism: the Energy of the Margins," 76.
[59] Warnes, 12-14.
[60] Delbaere, "Magic Realism: the Energy of the Margins," 77.
[61] Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2006), 492.

from my close reading: a narrative structure built upon a complex mosaic of intertexts from which the magical aspects are derived. Of course, intertextuality is a fundamental component of almost all literature, and critics have previously discussed intertextual techniques in regards to magical realist fiction, most notably the work of Salman Rushdie. However, what I am identifying in these two novels is a narrative strategy that foregrounds and exploits the postmodern concept of a text as a network of other texts. I draw here on Michel Foucault's concept that the frontiers of a book are never clear cut because every text is caught up in a system of references to other texts; a book is "a node within a network."[62] In other words, every text is an intertext, and, as Roland Barthes says, "any text is a new tissue of past citations" in that a text incorporates previously existing texts and reflects the surrounding culture.[63]

Structurally, *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Republic of Wine* are both work-in-progress novels in that a narrator or character is engaged in the act of writing. It is this writing process, combined with a concomitant intertextuality pushed to extremes, which provides the source of the magical or supernatural elements in the novels. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the obsessive archivist L. Murugan writes theses, reports and emails in his quest to determine the 'truth' behind the British scientist Sir Ronald Ross' discovery of the cause of malaria and the assistance he received from his subaltern Indian laboratory workers. Murugan's archives become part of a wider, alternative colonial archive that Ghosh creates in order to question the basis of empirical epistemology, scientific knowledge, faith and personal identity. The supernatural is represented by the power of interpersonal transference, through which one person's identity can pass onto another person, and the "Silence," a mystical force that drives subaltern Indian knowledge. In *The Republic of Wine*, the fictional author Mo Yan writes the novel's main narrative, about the hapless Chinese special investigator Ding Gou'er's attempt to determine whether local government officials are eating young babies for epicurean pleasure in Liquorland. In turn, the fictional Mo Yan's novel

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[62] Foucault, 23.
[63] Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

involves an epistolary structure, as the 'author' corresponds in a series of letters with an aspiring writer, Li Yidou, who sends 'Mo Yan' a series of short stories that are pastiches of a variety of literary styles, both Chinese and foreign, including magical realism. The supernatural emerges from the interplay of intertexts, in particular the ambiguity surrounding the cannibalism of children and the merging of the fictional Mo Yan with the 'actual' Mo Yan towards the end of the novel.

The exploitation of intertextuality in magical realist fiction is not a new technique. Russian author Mikhail Bulgakov, for instance, employs it in *The Master and Margarita*, which was completed during the Soviet era in 1940 but not published until 1967. Bulgakov's book uses the Christian Bible as a textual source which is juxtaposed with the Master's novel, an intertext that presents Jesus, named Yeshua Ha-Notsri here, in secular terms. The prophet's story is told from the point of view of Pontius Pilate, who is portrayed as a sympathetic figure within a magical realist context.[64] The 'magical' world of the ancient Middle East is contrasted with Stalinist-era Moscow, the grim realism of which is subverted by the supernatural re-appearance of the Satanic figure Woland, a practitioner of "black magic." Critics often note intertextual techniques within magical realist fiction. Wendy Faris, for instance, speaks of the "intertextual bricolage" that often underpins the literalisation of metaphor, which involves making the verbal real at a textual level. The "intertextual play" frequently found in magical realist fiction, she adds, "questions narrative's authority to represent the world directly."[65] Salman Rushdie is regularly singled out for his extensive use of intertextuality in his early work, which reinforces his artistic philosophy at that time of hybridity, a style that reflects a migrant's view of the world. Bishnupriya Ghosh, for example, remarks that Rushdie's "Bombay English" makes his use of the English language "palimpsestic, the image of one language and culture mapped over another."[66] Rebecca Walkowitz echoes Faris when she describes Rushdie's tactic of mixing up different cultures

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[64] Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master & Margarita*, trans. Michael Glenny (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1967).
[65] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 114, 115.
[66] Bishnupriya Ghosh, "An Invitation to Postmodernity: Rushdie's English Vernacular as Situated Cultural Hybridity," in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker (New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1999), 136.

as “countercultural bricolage,” or “collage,” with the suggestion that every culture borrows from other cultures.[67] While these comments have validity in their respective contexts, what I am proposing is to examine the narrative strategy of a complex form of intertextuality from which the magical or supernatural elements are derived in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Republic of Wine*. Both novels employ a network of intertexts to subvert the classical, Aristotelian notion of a universal, objective reality, and instead portray the relativity of subjective, unstable realities. In their respective worlds, ‘truth’ is indecipherable and individual ‘identity’ indistinguishable from the communal crowd. Moreover, this intertextual kind of magical realism underscores the multilingual and heterogeneous composition of the mode, which facilitates its translation and circulation in the world.

The elevation of the textual world to the equivalence of the extra-textual world in these two novels highlights that magical realism is not dependent upon a cultural context. Rather, the narrative mode is primarily textual, even though its use will often be influenced by the cultural background of the author or the text’s setting. In this respect, the oft-cited assertion by critics that magical realism is an oxymoron – which is predicated on the assumption that the magical and the real are antinomies, positioned on opposite sides of a spectrum – is debatable. Stephen Slemon, for instance, says the two words combined as a pair denote “an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy.”[68] Eugene Arva says magical realism has “an oxymoronic constitution” which in turn “creates a special kind of dual signification: its meaning(s) can be read both literally and figuratively – depending on which ontological level, or on which side of the mirror, one happens to be.”[69]

The adoption of any position of binary opposites, as Fredric Jameson says, “make[s] unavoidable the taking of sides.”[70] But is there really a need to take opposing sides for the magical and the real? Are they locked in a mutually antagonistic relationship? More

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[67] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 134, 139.
[68] Slemon, 409.
[69] Eugene Arva, “Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 38.1 (2008): 70.
[70] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 2.

specifically, as Michael Bell, asks: "To what extent is magical realism *opposed* to realism or a form *of* it?" (original emphasis)[71] Much critical discussion of magical realism suggests the former, implying that literary realism has, as its basis, a naively mimetic or copyist function. Wendy Faris, for instance, argues that literalised metaphor, which is common in magical realist texts, is an example of the narrative mode's "linguistic magic" that "takes us beyond representation conceived primarily as mimesis."[72] Yet the literary realism from which magical realism springs is more complex than mere representation or mimesis. In this regard, I would argue that magical realism is a form of literary realism and not a binary opposite. As Jameson notes, the realist mode is itself a "construction," a "hybrid concept" in which "an epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth) masquerades as an aesthetic ideal."[73] Realism involves a dual process of registering both the external world and, simultaneously, the perception of the external world that, inevitably, distorts it. In other words, realism involves a degree of self-consciousness on the part of the author about how to represent, at a textual level, the external world. Or, as George Levine declares: "Realism *is* an illusion" (original emphasis).[74] Realism constitutes "a self-conscious effort" by the writer "to make literature appear to be describing directly not some other language but reality itself (whatever that may be taken to be)."[75] Magical realism, then, may be viewed as an iteration of literary realism in that it also attempts to reflect different perceptions of reality. Magical realism, as Anne Hegerfeldt notes, "approximates literary realism in that it presents a fictional world that is clearly recognizable as a reflection of the extratextual world."[76] The key difference between magical realism and the realist mode is that the former introduces magical or supernatural elements that are integrated within the real.

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[71] Michael Bell, "Magical Realism Revisited," in *English Now: Selected Papers from the 20th IAUPE Conference in Lund 2007*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Lund: Lund University Press, 2008), 127.
[72] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 115.
[73] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 5.
[74] George Levine, *Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 189.
[75] George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 8.
[76] Hegerfeldt, 50.

Rather than view the magical and the real as being antagonistic or oppositional, I would argue they are more like an infinite array of points that lie upon a continuum. Some critics have attempted to eradicate any impression of the 'magical' being a pejorative word when applied to non-Western or 'exotic' cultures, as if it denotes some inferior status to the 'real' world, or the Western world, by re-conceptualising the adjective in neutral terms in relation to magical realism. For instance, Hegerfeldt speaks of the magical as denoting "non-realistic elements,"[77] while Ato Quayson suggests the magical should be "an umbrella term to denote elements drawn from mythology, fantasy, folk tales, and any other discourse that bears a representational code opposed to realism."[78] The weakness in Hegerfeldt's suggestion is that perceptions of 'reality' are highly subjective and culturally conditioned, so what may appear 'real' (or unreal) to one person may seem 'unreal' (or real) to another. Although Quayson's idea of an umbrella term has greater merit, magical discourse is not fundamentally opposed to realist discourse, as I have been arguing, but is a variation of it. The identification of the magical involves a descriptive process that is just as representational as realism. Magical realist texts, says Tamás Bényei, consider narration as an act, and therefore "magic is used as the implicit or explicit trope for this narrative act." Consequently, the magical and the real are not mutually opposite points on a spectrum but have an "adjunctive, supplementary relationship" with one another. Any magical realist text employs "an infinite number of gradations between the two poles" of the magical and the real.[79]

Differences in critical opinion about whether magical realism is essentially oxymoronic or not reflects ongoing critical disagreement about what the term actually means. Critics have described the concept of magical realism as "a troubled one for literary theory,"[80] "a misnomer, an impossible name,"[81] and one which "many scholars would be hard-pressed to

[77] Hegerfeldt, 51.
[78] Ato Quayson, "Magical Realism and the African Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, ed. Abiola Irele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 164.
[79] Bényei, 157, 154.
[80] Slemon, 407.
[81] Bényei, 151.

define."[82] Although many critical works on magical realism dedicate substantial space to reprising a critical history of the term, I shall confine my discussion to a brief historical overview that focuses on the generic and philosophical implications. German art critic Franz Roh is generally credited as the first person to coin the term *magic realism* to identify in 1925 a Post-Expressionism trend in European visual art. Roh chose the word "magic" to indicate a "mystery" that "does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it."[83] The Italian critic and writer Massimo Bontempelli then applied the term *realism magico*, or magical realism, to both visual art and literature in his bilingual (Italian and French) journal *900.Novocento* between 1926 and 1929. Bontempelli used the term to highlight "the sense of magic discovered in the everyday life of man and things," and enlarged the scope of magical realism, compared to Roh, by including the portrayal of magical events with realistic techniques.[84] In 1948, the Venezuelan writer Arturo Uslar Pietri applied *magical realism* specifically to Latin American literature, arguing the term denoted "the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts," a feature he thought was "prominent" in Venezuelan short stories.[85]

However, the confusion set in once Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier invented the term *lo real maravilloso*, or the "marvelous real," to express the unique reality of Latin America in the prologue to his 1949 magical realist novel, *The Kingdom of this World*. Carpentier was inspired by a visit to Haiti, the setting of his novel, where he found a "presence" and "vitality" that he concluded was "the heritage of all America," of all time. Carpentier's rhetorical purpose was to use the notion of *lo real maravilloso* to create an indigenous literary style to reflect an indigenous view of Latin America, one that does not differentiate between the

[82] Shannin Schroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 1.
[83] Franz Roh, "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community,* trans. Wendy B. Faris, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 16.
[84] Seymour Menton, *Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981* (Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1983), 51-52.
[85] Arturo Uslar Pietri, quoted in Luis Leal, "Magical Realism in Spanish America," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 120.

"marvelous" and the real, rather than employ derivative European literary styles to so do.[86] As he put it later, Latin American writers "needed a new vocabulary" – "To describe a baroque world, we needed a baroque style."[87] Crucially, the novelty of Carpentier's idea was to present the "marvelous real" as "a cultural condition," specifically of Latin American reality, "and not an aesthetic perception of reality universally available," says Mariano Siskind.[88] It is also important to note the European contribution to the development of the theorisation of magical realist fiction in the early to mid twentieth century, as Bontempelli, Uslar Pietri and Carpentier all knew one another while living in Paris in the 1920s.[89] Moreover, Uslar Pietri acknowledges that he – and so, we may infer, possibly Carpentier, too – initially came across the concept of magical realism in Paris in 1927 through a Spanish translation of Roh's book.[90]

Carpentier's notion of the "marvelous real" has left a legacy of confusion, as a significant number of critics still equate magical realism predominantly with Latin American fiction, which is erroneous following the proliferation of other kinds of magical realist fiction around the world since the 1980s.[91] Adding to the confusion is the fact that Carpentier is still "widely acknowledged as the originator" of Latin American magical realism, as Maggie Ann Bowers notes, even though he did not use the term.[92] Yet the fundamental problem with Carpentier's theory is that, as Michael Bell points out, the phrase *lo real maravilloso* "refers to a *reality* whereas 'magical realism' refers to a literary *mode*" (original emphasis). What Bell means is that Carpentier's phrase relates to a culturally and geographically specific way of life, whereas magical realism refers to a particular kind of writing at a textual level that is not

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[86] Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 84, 87.
[87] Alejo Carpentier, "The Latin American Novel," interview with Ramón Chao, trans. Ann Wright, *New Left Review* 154 (1985): 107.
[88] Mariano Siskind, "Magical Realism," in *Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 843.
[89] Warnes, 28.
[90] Siskind, 837, 841.
[91] Lorna Robinson, "'The Golden Age Myth in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Rochester NY: Tamesis, 2005), 79.
[92] Bowers, 14.

dependent upon a cultural or geographic context. "Carpentier's argument, which was squarely based on a regional specificity, has coloured the use of the English phrase so that an ethnographic exceptionalism became part of the meaning of the sub-genre," says Bell.[93] In 1955, Angel Flores reclaimed the term *magical realism* but perpetuated the ethnographic exceptionalism by using it to describe the nascent Latin American literary 'boom,' defining the concept as an "amalgamation of realism and fantasy" that includes the "transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal."[94] Flores' specification of the blending of the unreal and the real in an everyday manner provided the foundation for most contemporary definitions of the narrative mode.[95]

The legacy of early attempts by Latin American critics, especially Carpentier, to define magical realism (or its variants) is a residual assumption among some critics that the literary style originated in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century. Marisa Bortolussi, for example, refers to "contemporary critics of magic realism, who assume that the mode or genre started in Latin America," but who ignore earlier texts from other regions that contain magical realist elements.[96] Similarly, some critics hold "a misconceived assumption that magic(al) realism is specifically Latin American,"[97] while "many" people think magical realism "connotes Latin American literature."[98] Separately, there is a tendency among certain other critics who do recognise the international nature of the narrative mode to describe a kind of passage from Latin America to other regions. Jesús Benito, for instance, talks of "the *translation and relocation* of Latin American magical realism to a US ethnic space, a

[93] Bell, 127.
[94] Angel Flores, "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction," *Hispania* 38.2 (1955): 189-190.
[95] Both the terms *magical realism* and *magic realism* are still used by different critics. Anne Hegerfeldt says she prefers *magic realism* because it "can be read as a double noun phrase and thus better reflects the relationship of equality between magic and realism that is a fundamental aspect of the mode" (Hegerfeldt, 1, n2). However, there does not seem to be any significant difference in the way critics employ either term. Regardless, *magical realism* is the conventional term (Bowers, 2) and so will be the default term in this thesis.
[96] Bortolussi, 287.
[97] Bowers, 18.
[98] Schroeder, 1.

postcolonial space, or even a global space" (my emphasis).[99] Stephen Hart writes about "magical realism ... *migrating* to various cultural shores" (my emphasis).[100] Mariano Siskind believes certain "post-García Márquez magical realist postcolonial novels ... *transformed* a Latin American aesthetic form into a global cultural formation" (my emphasis).[101]

However, I would argue that magical realist fiction did not originate in Latin America. Consequently, the narrative mode did not necessarily "relocate," to borrow Benito's term, from Latin America to other regions. Instead, magical realism emerges in a multitude of literatures from different countries, different cultures and at different times in history. My argument is based on the third similarity arising from the close reading of key texts in this thesis: the presence of magical realist-like elements in the pre-modern literature of China and Indigenous Australia, which suggests a stylistic connection – but not necessarily one of causality – with contemporary magical realist fiction. In other words, I envisage a genealogy of polygenesis, a multi-strand co-existence, which may be due to randomness as much as causality.

This idea of polygenesis is largely prompted by comments by two Chinese literary scholars who identify similarities between magical realism and classical Chinese fiction, which I shall examine more fully in Chapter Five on Mo Yan. David Der-wei Wang argues that the actions of Mo Yan's fictional characters "not only express the special traits of magic realism and the influence of traditional Chinese legends of the strange, but also display a startling similarity between these two very different literary genres." While he is adamant that magical realism and traditional Chinese legends of the strange are generically *not* the same, he nevertheless cites their shared commonality of the supernatural, such as characters undergoing metamorphosis or being reincarnated.[102] Separately, Ming Dong Gu argues that

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[99] Jesús Benito, "Juxtaposed Realities: Magical Realism and/as Postcolonial Experience," in *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures*, by Jesús Benito, Ana Ma Manzanas and Begoña Simal (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 108.

[100] Stephen M. Hart, "Magical Realism: Style and Substance," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2005), 6.

[101] Siskind, 856.

[102] David der-wei Wang, "The Literary World of Mo Yan," trans. Michael Berry, *World Literature Today*, 74.3 (2000): 492.

classical Chinese literature, with its “strange and extraordinary things or events,” and its “blurring of the real and the unreal,” actually “*anticipated* the modern technique of magic realism” (my emphasis). Crucially, Ming Dong Gu concludes that classical Chinese fiction “differs fundamentally” from magical realism, due to the preponderance of underlying cultural factors that are not characteristic of the narrative mode, and proposes that what exists in classical Chinese fiction might be more accurately described as “mythical realism” or “supernatural realism.”[103] It is the prospect that classical Chinese fiction anticipated magical realist techniques, through shared similarities, which is of interest here. Given that Mo Yan’s contemporary fiction is influenced by classical Chinese literature, it may be said that the author draws on two different and arguably separate magical realist traditions: one domestic (Chinese); and the other foreign (non-Chinese).

In a completely different context, critic and author Colin Johnson, who publishes under the Indigenous Australian name of Mudrooroo Narogin, argues the Indigenous Australian Dreamtime is a world which is “as existent and as real” as that conceived by the European natural sciences, and that the Dreamtime involves what Johnson calls “maban reality.” He defines maban reality as being “characterised by a firm grounding in the reality of the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality.” Johnson states: “Maban reality is akin to magic realism.”[104] Johnson’s theory raises the prospect that Dreamtime narratives exhibit magical realist similarities. However, given that Indigenous Australian literature, prior to the European invasion of Australia, was primarily, although not exclusively, oral rather than textual, this hypothesis is difficult to trace historically.

My purpose here is not to say definitely whether classical Chinese literature anticipated magical realism, nor whether Indigenous Australian Dreamtime narratives do in fact exhibit magical realist elements, but to generate broader discussion about the genesis of

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[103] Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 83, 194.
[104] Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo), *Milli Milli Wangka: The Indigenous Literature of Australia* (South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997), 96-98.

magical realism as a literary phenomenon. By applying Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances in this context, I would argue that elements in classical Chinese literature *resemble* those elements that exist in contemporary magical realist fiction. It is a similar argument for Indigenous Australian narratives. The elements are not necessarily the same, but they could be said to be members of the same family; they overlap and criss-cross, to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase. Magical realist fiction, as Eugene Arva points out, is "viewed primarily as a postmodern literary phenomenon."[105] Nevertheless, this idea of a genealogy involving polygenesis suggests magical realist-like elements may not be exclusively postmodern. The notion of magical realism as *avant la lettre*, as existing before the term was invented, has been raised before. Margaret Anne Doody, who identifies magical realist elements in the Roman writer Apuleius' "novel" *The Metamorphosis* (also known as *The Golden Ass*), which was written about 160 A.D, says: "Magical realism ... has obviously been practiced long before the term was invented."[106] Similarly, Shannin Schroeder asserts: "The fact that magic realism existed before it existed, that is, before we knew what to call it, suggests that its definition will not be limited to any particular region or set of experiences."[107]

Curiously, although a number of critics have examined isolated incidences of what they perceive to be magical realist fiction which existed *before* Latin American fiction of the mid-twentieth century, none of them seems to have put forward a general theory about why this might have occurred. Christopher Warnes, who traces magical realism's genealogy back to the historical romance, suggests the German Romantic poet and philosopher Novalis developed a related concept of "magical idealism" in 1798. Warnes also identifies in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* intertextual references to Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, which Warnes describes as "a magical realist proto-novel."[108] David Young and Keith Hollaman also trace magical realism's "ancestry" to the romance, as well as the pastoral, both of which

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[105] Eugene L. Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2011), 5.
[106] Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 470.
[107] Schroeder, 4.
[108] Warnes, 20, 115. Warnes says: "A magical idealist is one who participates in the project of apprehending truth not through correspondence with external reality, but by undoing the antinomies between language and the world and between subject and object" (22).

are in turn derived from the ancient classics.[109] The idea of searching for an originating kind of magical realism in the ancient classics is supported by Lorna Robinson, who argues that the ancient Roman poet Ovid "creates a world in magical-realist terms" in *Metamorphosis*.[110] Susan Napier suggests, albeit in passing, that magical realist elements may be found in ancient Japanese tales.[111] Other critics have identified the narrative mode in European fiction over the past two centuries. Jonathan Allison, for example, says W.B. Yeats creates "a species of marvellous poetry" that may be equated with magical realism in his lyrical Irish poems.[112] The 1984 magical realist anthology edited by Young and Hollaman includes nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature, including writers as diverse as the Russians Nikolai Gogol and Leo Tolstoy, German Thomas Mann, Englishman D.H. Lawrence and American Henry James. Despite this considerable list of examples, no critic seems to have attempted to explain why magical realism may have existed as a literary phenomenon before the term came into common usage in the twentieth-century.

It may be useful, therefore, to build on Franco Moretti's idea of evolutionary trees and waves to interpret literary history in order to help explain the paradox of magical realism as it is generally perceived as a postmodern incarnation and magical realism as *avant la lettre*. According to Moretti, the diversification of a national literature is like Charles Darwin's evolutionary tree, in that one trunk grows into many branches, or a species develops "from unity to diversity." A national literature produces new forms mostly by divergence. By contrast, world literature operates like a wave, in that "it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity." The wave is driven by markets. Whereas trees require discontinuity in order to branch off from each other, waves demand continuity. "Cultural history is made up of trees

[109] David Young and Keith Hollaman, "Introduction," in *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology*, ed. David Young and Keith Hollaman (New York and London: Longman, 1984), 4.
[110] Robinson, 82.
[111] Susan J. Napier, "The Magic of Identity: Magic Realism in Modern Japanese Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 451.
[112] Jonathan Allison, "Magical Nationalism, Lyric Poetry and the Marvellous: W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Rochester NY: Tamesis, 2005), 230.

and waves," declares Moretti (original emphasis).[113] Similarly, I propose that localised emanations of magical realism broadly follow the principles of the evolutionary tree, creating new variations of the mode with the addition of each new local work. Over time they diversify within their own internal network. But each geographical location of local magical realism is not necessarily causally linked with emanations of the narrative mode in other locations. They may be separate and completely unrelated. On the other hand, the market forces that propel the publishing industry, plus the intellectual and cultural forces that drive the literary community and the academy, collectively act as a wave to construct what is generally perceived to be magical realism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This wave washes over heterogeneous examples of magical realism while refining a degree of uniformity or homogenous conceptualisation of magical realism in order to market, circulate and promote (in both the commercial and intellectual senses) this kind of fiction. Moretti's twin metaphors of the evolutionary tree (diversification) and the wave (convergence) are useful in explaining the tension that exists between generally accepted notions of magical realism and what exists in individual works that contain magical realist elements (either pre or post the 1930s-1940s).

In reality, however, the situation is complicated by the variegated ways in which magical realism is put to use by novelists, publishers, reviewers, readers and academics. Although the term remains in circulation in the public sphere, its use is inconsistent. Writers as a general rule are less "explicitly concerned" about knowing which genre, or genres, their work participates in than creating a work of fiction "with certain traditions and works in mind," as Jean-Pierre Durix says.[114] Durix's comment is borne out by the key writers in this study. Although most of them – Wright, Ghosh, Rushdie and Mo Yan – admit the influence of García Márquez early in their career, only Rushdie explicitly acknowledges magical realism in relation to his own work. Yet a snapshot of these author's comments about García Márquez reveals they absorbed from his work fundamental elements of magical realist fiction:

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[113] Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 60, 134.

[114] Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (Basingstoke: Macmillian, 1998), 15.

the presentation of fantastical stories as matter-of-fact (Wright);[115] the sense of a shared magical reality (Rushdie);[116] a profundity of time felt in places seemingly outside the main currents of history (Ghosh);[117] and a foreign literary style that can be domesticated (Mo Yan).[118] Even if writers do not consciously create their works with magical realism in mind, they may still deploy magical realist techniques.

While there is a general consensus that some trade publishers exploited magical realism as a marketing tool by the 1990s, their use of the term these days seems limited. For example, of the key texts in this study, there are no overt mentions of magical realism on any of the book covers on the editions used for my research. However, in the introduction to Arcade Publishing's paperback edition of Mo Yan's *Big Breasts & Wide Hips* (1995) the English translator, Howard Goldblatt, compares Mo Yan to "the Latin American creators of magic realism."[119] I take the introduction to be part of Gérard Genette's "paratext," the "undefined zone" between the fictional text and the outside world in which the book circulates. The paratext is a space of "transaction" that involves a strategy, on behalf of the author, to influence the public in relation to "a better reception for the text."[120] In other words, this introduction clearly signals an intention by Arcade Publishing and the translator to encourage readers to interpret Mo Yan's novel as magical realist. Publishers may also place references to magical realism on their websites. Random House, for instance, categorises Rushdie's latest novel, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015), as "magical realist" on

[115] Alexis Wright, 'On Writing *Carpentaria*', *HEAT* 13 (2007): 88.
[116] Rushdie, "Magic in Service of Truth" (no pagination).
[117] Amitav Ghosh, *Confessions of a Xenophile & Wild Fictions* (New Delhi: Outlook, 2008), 19-20.
[118] Laifong Leung, "Mo Yan: Creator of the *Red Sorghum* Series," in *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation*, by Laifong Leung (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 151.
[119] Mo Yan, *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (1995; New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), vii.
[120] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-2.

its website,[121] while Simon & Schuster suggests magical realism as the first topic to be discussed in a reading club guide for Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*.[122]

Reviewers also use the term sporadically and inconsistently. Only a minority of reviews of the key texts in this thesis, from a sample survey, refer to the book or author as magical realist, even when the reviews contain the words magic or magical. Reviewers sometimes compare the author with another, well-known writer of magical realism without specifically mentioning the narrative mode. On other occasions, reviewers employ the term hesitantly, as if they are unsure whether it should be applied. For instance, Jason Steger, in *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne, describes *Carpentaria* as "a sort of indigenous magic realism."[123] Katy Guest, in *The Independent*, poses a question rather than an answer about Wright's novel: "Is it magic realism, is it stories or is it a dream?"[124]

Inconsistency of the public use of magical realism suggests the narrative mode is not being habitually deployed as a generic aid to interpret the meaning of a text. "A novel, poem or play takes on its full meaning when it is integrated in the framework of the reader's or spectator's generic expectations," says Jean-Pierre Durix.[125] In other words, magical realism as a generic kind may not *consistently* perform the same interpretive function as a well-defined literary genre like, say, romance, fantasy, science fiction, satire, detective novel, spy thriller, and so on. This issue is particularly acute for the reading public who, as Maggie Ann Bowers points out, have "little contact with literary criticism" and so are unpredictable in their reception of magical realism. If a reader does not have a clear expectation of magical realism as a generic kind, the work's meaning may not be fully apparent. For example, would a reader who does not interpret *Carpentaria* as magical realist regard the Indigenous

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[121] http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780812998917&view=print; accessed 27 December 2015.

[122] Simon & Schuster, reading group guide for Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), http://books.simonandschuster.com/Carpentaria/Alexis-Wright/9781439157848/reading_group_guide; accessed 26 December 2015.

[123] Jason Steger, "Humanity's voice rises," *The Age*, June 23, 2007, accessed December 26, 2015, http://www.theage.com.au/news/in-depth/humanitys-voice-rises/2007/06/22/1182019367689.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap2.

[124] Katy Guest, "Dreamtime stories," *The Independent*, April 24, 2008, accessed December 26, 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/carpentaria-by-alexis-wright-814966.html.

[125] Durix, 15.

Australian protagonist Norm Phantom's ability to commune with dead people as matter-of-fact – as the narrative mode would suggest – or fantasy? In a different analogy, Bowers thinks that if a reader is not aware of the ramifications of colonialism, the subject of so much magical realist fiction, they might be more likely to mis-read a magical realist text as fantasy or escapism.[126] I am invoking here Hans Robert Jauss' concept that any work of fiction develops a "horizon of expectations," which depends on the work itself as well as the preceding experience of all other works from the genre (or genres) in which that work participates.[127] The issue for magical realism is that, if it is being used inconsistently in the public sphere, there may not be a cohesive or substantive horizon of expectations that builds up around successive magical realist texts. In addition, it becomes questionable whether the expectations of trade publishers, reviewers and readers about magical realist fiction will correspond with one another.

By contrast, the academy is consistent in its use of magical realism as an interpretive tool for literary analysis and so it is incumbent upon scholars to clarify working definitions of the narrative mode in order to ensure cohesion of expectations. Scholarship of magical realism has flourished since the mid-1980s, once critics realised there were texts written in English and from beyond Latin America to which the literary concept could be applied.[128] In researching this thesis I was particularly influenced by a number of critical books. The anthology edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995), repositioned magical realism in a world literature context and provides a selection of essays from key figures in the historical development of magical realist theory, which are complemented by essays from contemporary theorists of the narrative mode. Faris' follow-up monograph, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (2004), offers a more comprehensive treatment of her theory which she initially outlined in an essay in the anthology. However, my concern with Faris'

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[126] Bowers, 127.

[127] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 25.

[128] Slemon, 408.

book is that she defines magical realist fiction on the basis of a list of common characteristics. For a historical overview of the development of magical realist fiction, the two stand-out works are Jean-Pierre Durix's *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (1998) and Maggie Ann Bowers' *Magic(al) Realism* (2004). Christopher Warnes' *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (2009) is perhaps the best book that explores the nexus between postcolonialism and magical realist fiction, and offers a fresh perspective on how to define the poetics of the narrative mode. As mentioned previously, Warnes also resists the presentism of much discourse on magical realist fiction by exploring a genealogy tracing the mode back to romance literature and Novalis. The importance of Anne Hegerfeldt's *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (2005) largely rests in its attempt to identify magical realist texts in a geographical location that was previously not generally associated with the narrative mode, Great Britain. In turn, this provided me with encouragement to conduct a similar exercise in Asia and Australasia. Finally, Eugene Arva develops a highly distinctive theory about magical realism's capacity to re-present historical trauma through imaginative power in *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (2011).[129]

Chapter Outline

Chapter One explores how Alexis Wright utilises magical realism as a narrative strategy to present an Indigenous Australian voice within postcolonial discourse. Wright adapts the narrative mode to revivify traditional Indigenous Australian mythology in order to portray an alternative version of reality. She deploys magical realism to give voice to the marginalised autochthon, and to reassert Indigenous knowledge and ontology. Wright also depicts Australia's first inhabitants as still being colonised in a supposedly postcolonial nation, which prompts a revision of Stephen Slemon's influential theory of magical realism as postcolonial

[129] I have focused on critical books on magical realism written in English due to my own linguistic limitations. There is, of course, a considerable amount of critical works on the narrative mode written in other languages, especially Spanish and Portuguese, but have not yet been translated into English.

discourse. Wright's appeal to international law for intrinsic human rights illustrates why magical realism should be a factor in emerging discourses on humanitarian fiction. In addition, Wright's fiction exemplifies how strong cultural sources may cause the text to exceed the parameters of magical realism as a generic kind, thereby revealing the mode's limits as an interpretive tool for literary analysis.

Chapter Two similarly investigates the use of mythopoeia, by New Zealand writers Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimaera, who both focus on the recuperation and fragility of Maori culture amid urbanisation and modernity in another antipodean white-'settler' former colony. Hulme's *The Bone People* illustrates the porous nature of the narrative mode through its utilisation of the Gothic (in relation to the Irish-French child Simon), which overlaps with an epistemological strain of magical realism and points to violence associated with all colonisation. Hulme accentuates magical realism of the ontological kind, sourced from Maori spirituality, in the fourth and final section of the novel to resolve character and plot, but this seems like a forced coda rather than an integral part of the narrative. Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, by contrast, incorporates Maori mythology throughout the entire narrative, the magical realist elements of which are successfully translated into the film adaptation. I also bring ecological and feminist perspectives to both texts, which are under-theorised in criticism of magical realist fiction.

Chapter Three examines parallels between magical realism and science fiction in Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* in order to illustrate the porous generic borders of the narrative mode. The novel utilises historiographic metafiction to reimagine the history of localised Indian scientific knowledge during the British Raj by creating an alternative colonial archive. The text complicates notions of postcoloniality by suggesting Indian and British colonial science cross-fertilised one another, mutually reinforcing their advancement. I also explore how the novel creates a complex mosaic of intertextuality from which the 'magical' elements are derived.

Chapter Four shows how Salman Rushdie shifts from a distinctive postcolonial kind of magical realism in his early work to one focused on globalisation and the interconnectedness

of the contemporary world in *Shalimar the Clown.* In order to convey his new theme – which is dramatised through the title character, the Islamist terrorist Shalimar – Rushdie develops a new style of magical realism that inverts his previous use of the supernatural by associating it in this book with the destructive side of humanity, rather than the constructive. I also explore criticism that Rushdie exhibits ambivalence towards magical realism by abandoning it for literary realism in passages of violence, especially in occupied Kashmir, arguing instead that this allegation misunderstands the relationship between the two modes and the paradoxical nature of Rushdie's fiction.

Chapter Five explores why and how Mo Yan utilises various magical realist techniques to circumnavigate internal censorship in communist China. Focusing on *Red Sorghum* and *The Republic of Wine*, I illustrate the difficulty in distinguishing between postmodern magical realist literary techniques and Chinese cultural influences, both literary and ontological. I also highlight observations by Chinese scholars of similarities between magical realist fiction and classical Chinese literature. Although Mo Yan maintains he writes in his own distinctively Chinese style, rather than magical realism, I argue that he draws on both domestic and foreign magical realist influences. *The Republic of Wine* also exploits intertextuality from which supernatural elements are derived, although in a different fashion to Ghosh's novel. I trace how the brilliantly satirical *The Republic of Wine* references both Chinese and Western intertexts, and parodies a range of literary styles, including magical realism.

In the conclusion, I consolidate my insights of this critical study on contemporary magical realist fiction in Asia and Australasia, highlighting the ways in which my key findings contribute to extant scholarship of the narrative mode, postcolonial literature and world literature. I also indicate possible areas for further research, including: an in-depth investigation into magical realist elements in pre-modern fiction; magical realist fiction in communist or post-communist countries; applying an ecocritical analysis to magical realist texts; and how magical realism translates from the genre of the novel to the genre of film.

Chapter One

“Silence is a major curse”: Alexis Wright’s revitalisation of myth

Introduction: deploying magical realism as a postcolonial strategy

Since the key feature of colonial oppression is control over the “means of communication,” rather than control over life, property or even language, writing then becomes a fundamental tool for colonialist regimes to impose their authority on the local populace, particularly those that have primarily oral cultures. Writing also creates a different kind of ‘historical’ consciousness, in which collective social memory is replaced by the recording of particular ‘facts,’ introducing the notion of a fixed past and the idea of ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ to past events.[1] Indigenous Australian fiction in written form is a relatively recent phenomenon, having emerged in the 1960s as part of a resurgent Indigenous voice that developed during the civil rights movement of that decade. After two centuries of political, economic, social and cultural marginalisation, Indigenous peoples belatedly won the right to vote in national elections and were finally counted in the national census. Pioneering writers such as playwright Jack Davis, poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal and novelist Monica Clare paved the way for a renaissance in Indigenous Australian literature, which was supported by government funding from the 1970s and the establishment of dedicated Indigenous publishers like Magabala Books from the 1980s. Collectively, Indigenous writing may be seen as a reappropriation of European communication, an intervention by Australia’s first inhabitants in the postcolonial space to wrest back control of their own narrative and to re-insert themselves back into social and political discourse. Importantly, creating their own literature enabled Indigenous peoples to literally write themselves back into history and present an alternative view to challenge the orthodox version of history as established by the British colonisers. However, despite there now being a wide variety of published Indigenous authors in the early twenty-first century, “a

[1] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 78, 80.

general Aboriginal reading audience is yet to be fostered."[2] This may be partly because Australian first inhabitants make up a relatively low three per cent of the country's entire population.[3]

The engagement between Indigenous Australian orality and European literacy has always been complex, more of "an entanglement between radically different reading and writing cultures" rather than a clash.[4] Traditional Indigenous Australian culture is predominantly oral and thought to extend back more than forty thousand years, with about two hundred different Indigenous Australian languages spoken by around six hundred Indigenous nations creating a rich linguistic diversity.[5] However, even before the arrival of Europeans in late eighteenth century Indigenous Australians were using written forms of communication, such as rock paintings and engravings, message sticks and ground drawings. So while many Indigenous children and adults subsequently learned to read and write in English on Christian missions, this particular by-product of colonialism became a supplementary form of writing by which Indigenous people could record and pass on their culture.

Alexis Wright, therefore, follows in the tradition of contemporary Indigenous Australian authors reclaiming their own narratives for cultural and political purposes and recording them in engaging, written forms. Wright's fiction acts as an intervention in the postcoloniality of Australia by preserving Indigenous culture on the one hand and reasserting its central importance to the country on the other. The idea of the postcolonial from an Indigenous Australian point of view, however, is problematic. As Indigenous critic and author Anita Heiss says, it is "hard to believe there is any such thing as postcolonial when you are

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[2] Anita M. Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala: To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003), 16.
[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026, accessed July 3, 2014, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/31329946F1E095BACA257CC9001438BA?opendocument
[4] Penny Van Toorn, "Early writings by Indigenous Australians," in *The Cambridge History of Australian Literature*, ed. Peter Pierce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.
[5] Heiss, 28.

the people who've been colonised."[6] Wright takes an even more strident attitude, maintaining the dispossession of land represents an ongoing "war just for our very survival" that continues to this day.[7] Colonisation for Indigenous Australians, in her view, never ceased. More specifically, I propose that Wright utilises magical realism as a narrative strategy to present an Indigenous voice within postcolonial discourse. Wright adapts the narrative mode as a popular and accessible style of writing in order to revivify traditional Indigenous spirituality and culture, and to present it as an alternative version of reality. The Dreamtime 'reality' of her fiction challenges the Western conception of 'reality,' which is based on empirical rationalism and was imposed by the British colonists. Wright's novels, then, illustrate magical realism's capacity to portray different knowledge systems by according myth, metaphor, dreams and the like the same importance as extra-textual 'reality.'

In this chapter I shall argue that Wright deploys mythopoeia to depict an Indigenous view of life both in the present and in the past. Wright uses Indigenous myth to circumnavigate what she describes as an effective nationalist censorship in allowing Indigenous voices to attain prominence. However, her adaptation of Indigenous myth, specifically from the Waanyi nation in northern Australia from where her family originates, is based on a genuine belief in the stories as being real. Since magical realism presents the supernatural as an everyday phenomenon commingling with the natural, the narrative mode enables Wright to depict Indigenous myth in a quotidian matter and hence plausible for Western or non-Indigenous readers. Moreover, Wright's use of myth foreshortens time, which in turn enables her fiction to subvert the dominant, white-'settler' version of Australia's post-invasion history by suggesting that the past is as much a factor of the present as it will be the future. I will also demonstrate how Wright fuses both Indigenous and non-Indigenous mythology in order to reflect Australia as a multicultural country even before the arrival of the British colonists. As a result, this enables us to recontextualise her fiction within the world literature system.

[6] Heiss, 44.
[7] Alexis Wright, "Politics of Writing," *Southerly* 62.2 (2002): 18.

What will also become apparent is how Wright's use of traditional Indigenous culture as source material for her particular style of magical realism points to the difficulty in applying the narrative mode as a tool for literary analysis. The underlying cultural dynamics and individual artistic expression in her fiction exceed the boundaries of magical realism as a generic kind, blurring the lines between where one begins and the other ends. I will also show how Wright's fiction, with its multi-faceted analysis of postcoloniality, prompts a reassessment of Stephen Slemon's influential theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse. Finally, I shall argue that Wright's invocation of international law regarding intrinsic human rights demonstrates why magical realist fiction ought to be considered an integral component of emerging discourse on humanitarian fiction.

Wright's background as an activist for Indigenous affairs, including co-ordinating two Indigenous constitutional conventions in the 1990s in an unsuccessful attempt to develop political self-autonomy for law and governance, informs her fiction. She is unstinting in her criticism of "tired, old-fashioned, dysfunctional" governments that "continue to think like colonists." [8] This political attitude underlies her choice of magical realism as a narrative strategy to portray an Indigenous world view. Interestingly, while Wright does not seem to have ever explicitly described her fiction as magical realist, she has acknowledged finding inspiration early in her career from leading international writers of magical realism, including Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Carlos Fuentes, Toni Morrison, Günter Grass and Keri Hulme. In particular, Wright says she sought out authors from other countries which, like Australia, had been colonised, and who had "ancient ties with their land." "I wanted somebody to speak to me because I could not find the words I was searching for in Australian literature," she says. "I was interested in how other people survived horror."[9] We may position Wright's fiction, then, in a transnational context because she has consciously developed her own literary style on a select group of canonical writers of the narrative mode. Nevertheless, the distinctiveness of Wright's own work lies in its subnational essence, being

[8] Alexis Wright, "We have a vision. What we need is authority," *The Advertiser*, June 30, 2007, 9-10.
[9] Wright, "Politics of Writing," 11-12.

rooted in traditional Indigenous Australian culture, in particular that from northern Australia. What distinguishes Wright's fiction from treatments of magical realism in other countries is her fusion of Dreamtime spirituality and philosophy and its inextricable connection to Indigenous Law as well as the land.

In addition to the political element – a connection with colonised countries – Wright also attests to being attracted to authors of magical realism because of their similarity in traditional storytelling techniques, which share commonalities despite existing across different continents.

> The stories of Aboriginal people are similar to those of South America, Europe, Africa, Asia or India. The old storytellers of the Gulf country, or Indigenous storytellers in any other part of Australia, could also be likened to Márquez's grandmother telling incredible stories with a deadpan look on her face. Such stories could be called supernatural and fantastic, but I do not think of them in this way.[10]

Wright's comment underscores Stephen Slemon's observation, which I raised in the Introduction, that magical realism plays an important role within literary criticism because it allows comparative analyses between separate literatures which in turn "enable us to recognize continuities within literary cultures that the established genre systems might blind us to."[11] In this case, Wright highlights the predominant orality of the local cultures on which she and most of the above authors developed their own literary styles. Indeed, she acknowledges a conscious effort to compose *Carpentaria* (2006) in a style similar to that of García Márquez, mimicking an oral storytelling tradition with a "deadpan look," no matter how fantastical or incredible the tale being told. She also compares her own grandmother to that of García Márquez, both of whom passed down inter-generational stories to ensure cultural "memory" survives.[12] Furthermore, Wright specifies that she does not view the "supernatural"

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[10] Alexis Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*," *HEAT* 13 (2007): 88.

[11] Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 409.

[12] Sean Dolan, *Gabriel Garcia Marquez* (New York: Chelsea House, 1994), 95-96. See also: Wright, "Politics of writing," 10; and Kerry O'Brien, interview with Alexis Wright, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *7.30 Report* TV programme, June 21, 2007, published in *Hecate* 33.1 (2007): 215-216.

elements in her fiction to be supernatural as such, but as everyday occurrences which ought to be considered ordinary.

> These are stories of spiritual beliefs as much as the beliefs of the everyday. It comes from the naturalness of being fully in touch with the antiquity of this world as it is now. ... These stories are about having a belief system and principles of the right and wrong way to live.[13]

In other words, Wright's fiction incorporates a sense of the numinous, of a magical essence palpitating behind the surface of everyday object and events, but which is sourced from a localised culture. In this sense her style of magical realism is more aligned to the ontological strain most associated with Latin American fiction. The fact that Wright identifies the elements which make up the solitary trait of magical realism – the depiction of the supernatural in a quotidian manner and embedded within literary realism – in her discussion of those writers of magical realism who had influenced her, but without explicitly mentioning magical realism, does not detract from examining her work in regards to the narrative mode. On the contrary, by Wright's own admission it points to the benefits of discussing her work in a transnational context and in relation to other subnational magical realist fiction that transcends its original locale.

Mythopoeia and Dreamtime "expanded reality"

Much early Indigenous Australian literature focused on literary realism in order "to make a clear statement about the conditions under which Aborigines lived in white Australia: dispossession, violence, poverty, disease, constant harassment by whites, and the day-to-day struggle to survive." These works, therefore, were "polemical and confrontational" so that their political message would be apparent to white readers, says Suzanne Baker.[14] Wright, however, largely eschews literary realism in favour of a different narrative strategy, magical realism, which enables her to represent a distinct alternative mode of 'reality' that privileges

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[13] Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*," 88-89.
[14] Suzanne Baker, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Strategy: *The Kadaicha Sung*," *SPAN* (*Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*) 32 (1991): 55.

her traditional culture. In particular, Wright adapts Indigenous mythology to depict the world as it is viewed though Indigenous eyes and which stands in stark contrast to the empirical rationalism imported by the European colonisers. Magical realism's commingling of the magical and the real, which involves an implicit suspension of disbelief by the characters within the text as well as the reader, dissolves the boundaries between the supernatural and the natural, the 'unreal' and the 'real.' The narrative mode results in the experience of a "closeness or near-merging of two realms," such that the text exists at the intersection of the magical and the real. "In terms of cultural history, magical realism often merges ancient or traditional – sometimes indigenous – and modern worlds. Ontologically, within the texts, it integrates the magical and the material," says Wendy Faris.[15] This intersection between the magical and the real is what some critics refer to as magical realism's third space, or third plane of reality.

I propose that Wright's deployment of myth enables her to present an Indigenous ontology that merges, or co-exists, with a Western conception of reality. This is what Wright means when she says she attempts to "use literature to try and create a truer replica of reality."[16] Yet her adaptation of Dreamtime mythology is a reinterpretation of Indigenous spirituality rather than a transcription. It is why Frances Devlin-Glass proclaims *Carpentaria* to be "transformative" as a magical realist text in the way that it "draws on Waanyi cosmology to insist that mythological meanings are embedded in the mundane and everyday real."[17] Paul Sharrad describes her narrative technique slightly differently when he observes that Wright creates "an Aboriginal 'expanded reality'" which taps "into the 'underlying stuff' of [D]reaming consciousness."[18]

The orality of Indigenous myth is crucial because it highlights the link between Wright's cultural sources and her narrative style, which is modelled on traditional oral story-

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[15] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 21.
[16] Wright, "Politics of Writing," 13.
[17] Frances Devlin-Glass, "A politics of the Dreamtime: destructive and regenerative rainbows in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*," *Australian Literary Studies* 23.4 (2008): 393.
[18] Paul Sharrad, "Beyond *Capricornia*: Ambiguous Promise in Alexis Wright," *Australian Literary Studies* 24, no. 1 (2009): 57, 62.

telling techniques. *Carpentaria* includes multiple story lines that interweave in time through the past and present in a non-linear fashion. The novel, says Wright, is "written as a traditional long story of our times" and is "reminiscent of the style of oral storytelling" of Indigenous people.[19] Indeed, the narrative's discursiveness is reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's in his best-known magical realist works, *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which draw on traditional Indian oral storytelling techniques. "An oral narrative does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the story," says Rushdie. "It goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops."[20] To reinforce the orality of the book's heritage, Wright imbues *Carpentaria* with Indigenous Australian words, phrases and sections of dialogue.[21] Wright's fiction, then, may be termed mythic more than supernatural, reflecting Roland Barthes' definition of myth as "a type of speech." Etymologically, myth is derived from the Greek *muthos*, meaning story or tale. Myth, says Barthes, is "a system of communication" or a "message;" it is "depoliticised speech" in that it describes "the whole of human relations in their real, social structure."[22]

Wright began experimenting with Indigenous mythology in her debut novel, *Plains of Promise* (1997), which is largely written in a realist mode, suiting the book's subject matter of the so-called 'stolen generations,' the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their parents by government and missionary authorities throughout the twentieth century.[23] The mythical, or perhaps supernatural, element mainly resides in the "unnatural phenomenon" (172) of crows that regularly appear throughout the novel and represent death. The crows keep haunting Ivy Koopundi, whose daughter – the outcome of rape by the mission head when she is a young girl – is taken away from her. Ivy consequently suffers emotional and psychological trauma. At the end of the novel, Wright inserts a coda which constitutes a short

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[19] Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*," 80.
[20] Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 181.
[21] Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2006), 300; hereafter cited by page in the text. For example, Norm dreams: "'*Wanyingkanyi ninji nanagkurru jila?*' What are you doing there? And she, like a queen, said grandiloquently, '*Wawaru*. Nothing,' she said."
[22] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 1993), 93, 131.
[23] Alexis Wright, *Plains of Promise* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997); hereafter cited by page in the text.

myth, the interpretation of which is that the black crows represent white men who lure a lone waterbird (Ivy) away from a lake, which is the source of life. The crows keep other waterbirds away from the lake (representing Ivy's daughter Mary and Mary's child Jessie), which results in the lake drying up and its secrets becoming lost (303-304). The crow myth in *Plains of Promise*, which spans from the 1950s to the 1990s, reflects a common theme in Indigenous literature, in that it makes visible the hidden colonial legacies in Australia and "illuminate[s] the pain and loss of dispossession in its many forms."[24]

Wright is not the first Indigenous Australian author to have employed magical realism. Sam Watson imbues *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990) with an Indigenous creationist myth.[25] The novel is rooted within the extra-textual world of Queensland and urban Brisbane, and generically is essentially a revenge tale, with the realist sections depicting the marginalisation and oppression of Indigenous peoples in contemporary Australia. The protagonist, Tommy Gubba, is the son of Koobara, who was chosen by his father, Kobbina, over his twin brother, Booka, to be a leader of ancient sorcerers called the Kadaitcha. An enraged Booka kills their father, steals a magic stone, and joins the white "settlers so he would secure position within their order" (3), waging war against his own people. Tommy's quest is to recover the magic stone. The text is political in that it deploys myth to depict an Indigenous 'reality' and proclaims a reassertion of Indigenous sovereignty over traditional land. "Your law does not belong to this land. You are invaders and you have come into my house, and you have raped and pillaged my people," Tommy tells a white judge during his defence while on trial for payback murders (311).

Kim Scott, who was the first Indigenous author to win Australia's most prestigious literary prize, the Miles Franklin Award, in 2000 for his novel *Benang* (1999) (as joint winner), also deploys magical realism in that novel. Yet while Wright and Watson utilise myth, Scott's emphasis is more on supernatural elements, such as the protagonist Harley learning to fly and connect with the animal and spirit worlds. Set in Western Australia amid Scott's

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[24] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 3.

[25] Sam Watson, The Kadaitcha Sung (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1990); hereafter cited by page in the text.

Nyoongar people, the novel is essentially a coming-of-age story as Harley attempts to retrace his Indigenous heritage and come to terms with his part-Scottish, part-Indigenous grandfather who is obsessed with eradicating indigeneity out of the family line. In this respect, *Benang* is a meditation on colonial biopolitics and so-called assimilation policies, which were designed to 'breed out' the Indigenous peoples. White-'settler' Australian authors like Peter Carey, with *Bliss* (1981) and *Illywhacker* (1985), and Richard Flanagan, with *Death of a River Guide* (1994) and *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001), have also utilised magical realist techniques, although more of the metafictional kind and without appropriating Indigenous spirituality. What distinguishes the magical realism of the above Australian authors from magical realist orientations elsewhere is the way they utilise the narrative mode to explore Australia's specific circumstances as a 'settler' nation, especially to address its history in which the Indigenous population was dispossessed from their land and suffered from continuous government policies of attempted cultural and racial annihilation.

However, Wright takes magical realism in new directions in her second novel, *Carpentaria*, for which she won the Miles Franklin Award in 2007. The book marks a significant shift in her style, away from the predominantly literary realism in *Plains of Promise* to a strong focus on myth and an epic structure. Myth is an integral component of Wright's narrative strategy to intervene in postcolonial discourse, for myth becomes a vehicle by which to counteract the suppression of an opposing voice of the marginalised autochthon. "The nation's narrative provides effective censorship," argues Wright, adding that "conflicting stories will scarcely be heard."[26] *Carpentaria* remedies the marginalisation of an Indigenous voice from its opening words: "A nation chants, but we know your story already" (1). It is both an ironic statement and a challenge at the same time: the "nation" here is official white Australia, not Wright's Waanyi nation or any of the myriad Indigenous nations. The first lines imply that white Australia does not, in fact, know the Indigenous story, but that the novel will tell it. Importantly, Wright talks about "weaving history and myth into the present situation"

[26] Alexis Wright, "Secrets and ties," *The Age*, February 6, 2010, 12.

through the novel's narration.[27] Her use of the term myth is almost synonymous with the term epic. "The everyday contemporary Indigenous story world is epic," says Wright. "Our story world follows the original pattern of the great ancient sagas that defined the laws, customs and values of our culture."[28] Wright utilises myth as a form of storytelling that disrupts time by fusing past, present and future, which in turn accords with her magical realist treatment of it. Magical realist fiction, as Stephen Slemon points out, acts as a metonymic of postcolonial culture by foreshortening history "so that the time scheme of the novel metaphorically contains the long process of colonization and its aftermath."[29] The mythology that Wright interweaves into *Carpentaria*, then, denotes not only Indigenous living conditions in the present-day world, but also the traumatic experiences that Indigenous peoples experienced in the past.

Carpentaria, at 519 pages, is both epic in scope and ambition, as a generic hybrid of multi-generational family saga, murder mystery and action thriller. The novel is also epic in its mythopoeia. For this reason Alison Ravenscroft is correct to identify in the novel a modernist aesthetic reminiscent of James Joyce, although her reason (that the novel's unresolved dialectic promotes uncertainty)[30] misses the main point. *Carpentaria* can be validly compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) in its recycling of myths to create an epic narrative structure, as well as is celebration of the quotidian trials and tribulations of an everyman – in this case, an Indigenous everyman, Norm Phantom. Wright's fluid treatment of myth echoes the prophetic wish of Indigenous literary pioneer David Unaipon, who in the 1920s considered that "Aboriginal folklore may be among the oldest in the world." Unaipon predicted: "Perhaps some day Australian writers will use Aboriginal myths and weave literature from them, the same as other writers have done with the Roman, Greek, Norse,

[27] O'Brien, 216.
[28] Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*," 80.
[29] Slemon, 411.
[30] Alison Ravenscroft, *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 70.

and Arthurian legends."[31] *Carpentaria* has a main plot – Indigenous elder Norm Phantom's tribulations with his family, relatives and white authorities – and two subplots – Norm's son Will's militant activism against an international mining company, and Indigenous leader Mozzie Fishman's "travelling cavalcade of religious zealots" (119) that on one level is a pastiche of the Christian Crusades. The narrative is framed within the mythology of the Dreamtime, in particular the Rainbow Serpent, which is an ever-present force, both nurturing and destructive. Reminiscent of the opening of *The Kadaitcha Sung*, *Carpentaria*, in its first few pages, presents a creationist myth when the "ancestral serpent," during an indeterminate time "billions of years ago," descends from the stars and crawls "all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria." But the serpent "continues to live deep down under the ground" and "permeates everything" (1-2). Ultimately the Rainbow Serpent wreaks vengeance on the fictional town of Desperance by whipping up a cyclone that destroys the white settlement, razing the land back to a pre-colonial state, recalling a similar fate for Macondo in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).

In addition to the Rainbow Serpent, *Carpentaria* includes many references to ancestral spirits, such as: the "silent spirit men" who watch over the country and people (150); the Gardajala "land woman devil" who fights with the "sea woman" (276); and, in an echo of the historical massacres of Indigenous tribes, the "fairy-like people," the yinbirras, who once lived beside real people but "disappeared into the wilderness of life" in order to not be found (299). Wright also utilises myths specific to her own people, the Waanyi, such as the *Mararabarna* spirit sea-woman. Lloydie the white barman is seduced by a "beautiful fish woman" who is "locked inside the timber planks of the bar" (342). In revenge for Lloydie refusing to acknowledge his young son, the result of his affair with an Indigenous woman, the fish woman entices Lloydie to chain himself to the bar during the cyclone so that he is washed out to sea to drown (490).[32]

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[31] David Unaipon, *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aborigines*, ed. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker (Carlton, VIC: The Miegunyah Press, 2006), 4.
[32] Ashcroft, Bill, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCreddan, *Intimate Horizons: The Post-Colonial Sacred in Australian Literature* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 235-236.

Ancestral spirits are linked to, and watch over, people in the present day, as custodians of "a predictable and unchanging system of Law" that governs "the social and spiritual system as set down at the Beginning, the start of time," says Indigenous playwright and poet Kevin Gilbert. "The Dreaming is the first formation, the beginning of the creative process of mobile / life upon and within the land. It is the days of creation when the Great Essence, the Spiritual Entity and minion spirits formed the Aboriginal version of the 'Garden of Eden'."[33] This notion of the Dreamtime's presence in everyday reality, in which ancestral spirits are manifest among the living, is personified in Norm Phantom. Norm's life is inextricably tied to that of the spirits: he is assisted by an "otherworldly spirit" to make his preserved fish "more beautiful to the eye" (209); and he is visited by dead people who are "frightened" about "what was going to happen to them" (202). Norm's communing with the dead serves as a hauntology, a reminder that the murder of Indigenous peoples during the colonial and postcolonial eras is as relevant to the present as to the past. I am borrowing Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology as a ghost of history that keeps returning, the repetitive recurrence of its presence highlighting its repression by hegemonic discourse of the present. The returning ghost is situated outside of time.[34]

The extended sequence of Norm's aquatic burial of his friend, the shipwrecked European sailor Elias Smith, illustrates how Wright evokes the Dreamtime in her fiction that accords with a magical realist treatment, eroding distinctions between the supernatural and the real, the incorporeal and the corporeal. Moreover, this passage also shows how magical realist texts "disturb received ideas about time, space and identity."[35] Norm's preferred habitat is the ocean, as "the sea man of Carpentaria" (95) who "inherited his father's memory of the sea" (17). After Elias is murdered by mining company workers, Norm places his body in his small boat and heads out into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Elias' spirit talks back to him, as if they are on one of their regular fishing trips. After two weeks, Norm's boat is surrounded by

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[33] Kevin Gilbert, "Introduction," in *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry*, ed. Kevin Gilbert (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin Books, 1988), xix.

[34] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1993; London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 10, 37.

[35] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 23.

“hundreds” of groper fish that remind him of Indigenous “families gathering at funerals” (252). The groper is said to be not only from the Dreamtime, but also a “descendent of the giant dinosaur” (248-249). This passage links ancestral time with pre-historic time, highlighting how Wright often blends Indigenous mythology with Western science to present two different cultural perspectives on immemorial time, thereby creating an inherent tension within the narrative. The gropers guide Norm to Elias’ “final resting place” (252) as Norm places the body into “the strangely calm emerald green waters” (253). Elias descends to the gropers’ underwater “abyss,” a “place where they left to go on their spiritual journeys into the skies” (251). Norm watches as groper fish raise “their bodies high out of the sea” and “ascend into the sky world of the Milky Way” to become “a cloudy blur in the celestial heavens of stars and spirits.” “He knew at once Elias was up there with them,” and that “Elias was taking the journey back to his own country” and “would be like a star” (257-258).

However, this groper passage is also indicative of what a Western reader may perceive as magical realist but which in fact contains underlying cultural factors that exceed the narrative mode. Wright’s evocative repetition of imagery such as the mythical groper, emerald-coloured water and stars reflects the poetics of much Indigenous storytelling. The imagery is what Kevin Gilbert refers to as “emotional symbolism,” which is “an extension of the traditional oral language” or song cycles. They are “symbolic mnemonics” that aid the teller and listener in remembering “the beginning and end of the complex whole.”[36] So while we may say that *Carpentaria* participates in magical realism as a generic kind, it does not belong to magical realism, and, crucially, it participates at a more fundamental level as a textual representation of traditional oral storytelling.

Wright’s use of the mythic to present a reality in contrast to the rationalist worldview, such that past, present and future are merged, is reminiscent of the ontological kind of magical realist fiction from Africa as well as Latin America. For example, Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991) features the Yoruba myth of the *abiku*, or spirit children, who oscillate

[36] Gilbert, xix.

between the spirit world and the living in a space that lies outside chronology.[37] Okri's purpose is to show how the endless birth-rebirth cycle of the *abiku* becomes metonymic for Nigeria (478), a nation that "keeps being reborn and after each birth come blood and betrayals" (494). The spirit child Azaro's attempt to break the *abiku* cycle, by staying with his oppressed mother to make her happy, suggests Nigeria is able to break its own destructive cycle. The Yoruba's sense of holistic time, as fellow Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka says, "is no abstraction."[38] This is borne out in Okri's novel when a Yoruba man tells Azaro's mother that he met her five hundred years ago, although she thinks it was only two weeks ago. "Time is not what you think it is," says the Yoruba man (484). In Ghanaian author B. Kojo Laing's *Search Sweet Country* (1986), the sociologist Professor Sackey encapsulates the fusion of this kind of traditional holistic reality and magical realism: "There is no territory between the supernatural, and the purely factual … you get the factual explanations that do not fit the superfactual situations, and you get the supernatural answers that fly off at a tangent to the merely factual."[39]

Author and critic Colin Johnson, who publishes under the name of Mudrooroo Narogin and who was once regarded as a pioneer of Indigenous Australian literature, argues the Dreamtime is a world that is "as existent and as real" as that conceived by the European natural sciences. Indigenous Australians, he says, are forced to resort to fictional narratives to present both their own reality and history as they had been denied "alternative 'authentic' historical" texts due to the official history of the colonists. Johnson coins the term "maban reality" to describe this Indigenous Australian world view, which, he says, is "characterised by a firm grounding in the reality of the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality." Critically, Johnson states: "Maban reality is akin to magic realism."[40] The authenticity of Johnson's Indigenous heritage was called into question

[37] Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991); hereafter cited by page in the text.
[38] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 143-144.
[39] B. Kojo Laing, *Search Sweet Country* (London: Heinemann, 1986), 240.
[40] Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo), *Milli Milli Wangka: The Indigenous Literature of Australia* (South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997), 96-101.

after his sister traced their family's ancestry to an African-American (a topic I shall examine in more detail in Chapter Two).[41] Nevertheless, his concept of "maban reality" and its relation to magical realism deserves critical attention. Notice that Johnson uses the word "akin" rather than to equate Dreamtime reality to the narrative mode. In other words, Johnson's theory accords with my argument that critics should look for similarities or family resemblances between texts in relation to magical realism rather than set lists of characteristics. The implication of his maban reality concept is that there are similarities between pre-modern Dreamtime narratives and what is conceived as postmodern magical realism as a literary mode. This is not to exoticise the formal elements of the Dreamtime, but to draw a link between the ontological perspectives of Indigenous Australian philosophy (for want of a better term) and a magical realist sensibility. Johnson's theory, then, provides another marker from which to explore the possibility of polygenesis for magical realism.

Of course, there are limits to which the rubric of magical realism as a Western-derived concept may be applied to non-Western philosophies, which is a key theme of this thesis. For fiction that is rooted in a distinctively non-Western traditional culture, as Wright's is, there will inevitably be underlying cultural dynamics and artistic expression that exceed the parameters of what magical realism entails. The Dreamtime, for instance, cannot easily be understood by non-Indigenous readers. The Dreamtime is a "fraught epistemology" for Western intellectual consumption as European philosophies, derived from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, tend to categorise and give weight to rationalist ideals. Dreamtime narratives, on the other hand, "integrate fields that are separate discursive domains in [W]estern knowledge – philosophy, religion, economics, ecology, epistemology, kinship, gender behaviour, kinship systems, interpersonal relations, geography and mapping."[42] The Dreamtime in turn is inextricably tied to Indigenous Law and the land. Historican Bill Gammage describes Indigenous Law as "an ecological philosophy enforced by religious

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[41] Regina Ganter, *Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal Contact in North Australia* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 240-241.
[42] Ashcroft et al, *Intimate Horizons*, 208-209.

sanction" which "compel[s] people to care for all their country."[43] Wright describes the Law as "Indigenous memory [by which] men and women can name and tell the story of thousands of individual sites in their country, continuing a long tradition of watching over this country and maintaining the ecologically sustainable life." The "ancient stories of the ancestral creation beings," she adds, are "mind maps that define the philosophical understanding of Aboriginal law, and which, taken together, embrace the entire continent." [44]

Wright uses her fiction in an attempt to make Indigenous Australian spirituality accessible – to some extent – to non-Indigenous readers. Norm Phantom is an "old tribal man" (4), a keeper of the Law whose stories are referred to as "*decorum* – the good information, intelligence, etiquette of the what to do, how to behave for knowing how to live like a proper human being" (246). Mozzie Fishman is another elder, a "religious leader" who with his "holy pilgrims of the Aboriginal world" bring "the feared Law ceremony" across state borders (119). Norm and Mozzie know that the Law can only exist if it is continuously passed down through generations. Indigenous Australian literature has a "unique conception of textuality" because the land is viewed as a text of the Dreamtime, a text that is bound up with the experiences of each and every individual.[45] *Carpentaria* demonstrates how the Law is inscribed in the land, and how this can be communicated through singing. Joseph Midnight passes information on to Will Phantom by singing "in the right sequence hundreds of places in a journey to a place at least a thousand kilometres away" (375). Wright's most recent novel, *The Swan Book* (2013), presents the land as a textual document, describing the drought-riven country as having been "rolled like an ancient scroll from its top and bottom ends."[46] The protagonist Oblivia as a young girl spends a decade underground, having been taken there by an ancestral spirit, learning the ancestor's memories by touching a native eucalypt tree's "huge woven roots" and "writing stanzas in ancient symbols" (7), meaning she literally inscribes knowledge on to the earth. Yet the Law is also localised, specific to a

[43] Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 2.
[44] Alexis Wright, "A Question of Fear," in *Tolerance, Prejudice and Fear*, by Gideon Haigh, Christos Tsiolkas and Alexis Wright (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2008), 135-136.
[45] Ashcroft et al, *The Empire Writes Back*, 142.
[46] Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2013), 18; hereafter cited by page in the text.

particular language group or groups. Wright herself speaks of having to follow “protocols” in her own work, and not write about things outside her own traditional country in the Gulf of Carpentaria.[47] In *The Swan Book*, Oblivia is led by Warren Finch through spinifex country that is foreign to her. This country “had a serious Law story for every place” (191), but Oblivia listens to grass and scrub that sing “stories and laws that she would never know” (171).

The implication is that local traditional knowledge is only accessible to insiders. In *Carpentaria*, the narrator states that “the old white people” who had tried to “translate the secret conversations Norm had with the heavenly spirits at night” “*will never know*” (original emphasis) (230). In other words, Indigenous spirituality is truly comprehensible only by those who live within an Indigenous culture. This dilemma is highlighted by critic Alison Ravenscroft, who maintains that Indigenous Law “cannot be ‘seen’ from a Waanyi point of view if one is not Waanyi,” as Wright is, and that the Law “makes no sense in a white Western epistemology.” Instead, she thinks white readers of *Carpentaria* are better off “examining the limits of our own imagining” in what she terms a “paradigm of radical uncertainty.” Ravenscroft proposes the novel reveals “an *impossible* dialectic” (original emphasis), and in this regard she differs with Stephen Slemon, arguing the “gaps” and “silences” that Slemon identifies in postcolonial magical realist fiction “*cannot* be filled” (original emphasis), and that these gaps and silences point to a gap in all knowledge. “If this is true,” says Ravenscroft, “whites cannot hope to look to another to fill in the gaps in their knowledge, of themselves or their others.”[48] Yet Ravenscroft’s position is questionable for two reasons. First, it would be fallacious to suggest that Slemon’s theory of oppositional systems works towards a dialectic of certainty. Rather, the competing narratives remain locked in battle because neither manages to dominate the other in any hierarchical schema. Magical realism accentuates the inability of the opposing systems to communicate with one another, leading to ongoing friction and cultural clashes. Second, Ravenscroft’s insistence on an “impossible” dialectic does not acknowledge the opportunity for readers of Wright’s fiction to arrive at even a partial

[47] Jean-Francois Vernay, interview with Alexis Wright, *Antipodes* 18.2 (Dec 2004): 120.
[48] Ravenscroft, 63, 73-74, 77.

understanding of Indigenous culture. A primary reason why Wright, Watson and Scott choose to convey an Indigenous reality through the form of the novel, as well as through magical realist strategies, is to make that reality accessible to a wider audience outside of their immediate communities.

This is especially evident in Wright's appropriation of the word 'magic,' by which she subverts expectations. Ravenscroft argues that while it is a "popular move to fit the text [of *Carpentaria*] within the constraints of magic realism," she warns against reading the novel in a binary approach that "associates Indigeneity with magic, irrationality, delusion and dream, and whiteness with realism, reality and rationality."[49] Similarly, Penny Van Toorn says much Indigenous Australian fiction resists classification in European genres because they blend fact and fiction and present readers with a "double vision of what critics customarily call magic realism." Van Toorn adds: "What Westerners call magic realism might be seen, from a different cultural viewpoint, as a self-consistent story form."[50] Frances Devlin-Glass worries the word "magic" somehow "trivialises the sacred dimension" of the ancestral Rainbow Serpent.[51] However, a textual examination of *Carpentaria* reveals a deliberate strategy by Wright to co-opt 'magic' from an Indigenous viewpoint, using it in a positive sense, rather than pejorative one. The words 'magic' or 'magical' occur at least fourteen times in the novel: the majority (eight) refer to special powers; three refer to the spiritual; two to the natural world; and one to science. Among the characters, Norm Phantom receives the most references to 'magic' or 'magical' (four), followed by his wife, Angel Day (two), and Mozzie Fishman (one).

A brief survey illustrates the range of contexts in which Wright employs the notion of the magical. Mozzie tells Will that Norm is one of those people who "have swapped their blood for magic" and who have "only got magic running through their veins" (486). Norm's practice of preserving dead fish is described as being "like magic" (197), and Will seeks out "the latest piece of magic his father was working on" (194). Mozzie himself is said to be "a

[49] Ravenscroft, 60-62.
[50] Penny Van Toorn, "Indigenous Texts and Narratives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Webby, 19-49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38-39.
[51] Ashcroft et al, *Intimate Horizons*, 227-228, 241. See also Devlin-Glass, "A politics of the Dreamtime," 395.

wizard or some kind of magic man with a cauldron of tricks brewing inside his body" (133). Since Norm and Mozzie are tribal elders who commune with the ancestral spirits, Wright is clearly using the word 'magic' in a positive manner, connecting it with the Dreamtime. This is reinforced by the "land woman devil Gardajala" exercising "the power of her magic," while an imminent clash between land and sea spirits is referred to as "[m]agic big time" (276).

Yet Wright also uses the word 'magic' in more prosaic contexts. Angel Day, for example, is regarded as having "used magic to erect a home from scraps" found in the rubbish tip (14). The phenomenon also appears in the natural world as "mildew, fed on moisture-laden air steaming up from the earth, spread a magical, sealike world above water" (309). The conclusion is that Wright utilises the words 'magic' and 'magical' to depict the spiritual power of Indigenous people, ancestral spirits and the natural environment. Ian Syson picks up on this point when he suggests *Carpentaria* is "a major Australian landmark" in magical realist fiction because it gives "the magic more indigenous ... sources."[52] This interpretation is reaffirmed by an analysis of the three uses of the word "supernatural" in *Carpentaria*, all of which are positive: Norm is said to a "supernatural master artist who created miracles" (206); white birds from the sea assume "the supernatural appearance of the spirits" (297); and the Indigenous residents in Norm's Pricklebush area share a "subconscious mind" that taps into the "disembowelled spectre of the supernatural" (320).

Wright's approach is consistent with what might be called an anthropological perspective, which treats magic as a legitimate form of knowledge. Claude Lévi-Strauss considers magical thought in pre-modern societies to form "a well-articulated system" that is just as valid as modern scientific thought. Rather than pitting magic against science as adversaries, Lévi-Strauss suggests it is better to "compare them as two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge." Both magic and science are similar insofar as they "require the same sort of mental operations," yet they are dissimilar in regards to "the different types of phenomena to which they are applied."[53] Magic, as Marcel Mauss notes, is a knowledge

[52] Ian Syson, "Uncertain Magic," *Overland* 187 (2007): 85.
[53] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1972), 13.

base that has to be believed. It is "a social phenomenon" rather than a private one and is sanctioned by public opinion through "shared ideas and voluntary rites," which are passed down through generations. Mauss emphasises that magic is learned through "revelation," which occurs through contact "with one or more spirits."[54] In short, an anthropological interpretation of magic is as a well-articulated system of thought equal in status to scientific thought, and as a social phenomenon consecrated by tradition.

While Wright focuses on Indigenous mythology in deploying magical realism, she also broadens her treatment of mythopoeia to include non-Indigenous myth, which in turn complicates her intervention into discourse on postcolonial Australia. "In contrast to Indigenous spiritual beliefs, I also wanted to demonstrate in this novel [*Carpentaria*] that other people have strange ideas and belief systems about who and what they are," says Wright. "I have often thought about how the spirits of other countries have followed their people to Australia and how these spirits might be reconciled with the ancestral spirits that belong here."[55] I propose that Wright deepens her narrative strategy by exploiting magical realism's polyvocal nature and incorporating contrapuntal voices alongside an Indigenous voice, in order to illustrate the multicultural nature of both modern and pre-modern 'Australia.' Critics often refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to explain "the cacophony of discordant voices" that typically exist in magical realist fiction, as conveyed by the competing modes that are continuously locked in a battle with one another.[56] For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque involves a non-hierarchical inter-relationship between individuals who are normally bound by socio-hierarchical restrictions. In the "polyphonic" novel, this is dramatised in a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" which each have "equal rights."[57]

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[54] Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1972), 40, 127, 141.
[55] Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*," 92.
[56] Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 23.
[57] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6, 123.

Wright's fiction particularly invokes the carnivalesque by adapting Christian mythology. The role of Christian churches in Australia's post-invasion history is often regarded in a negative light by Indigenous peoples because of their involvement in running "apartheid" missions, appropriating land, as well as participating in assimilation by "kidnapping and imprisoning young Blacks" and keeping them "estranged from their tribal family."[58] In this respect Wright's fiction exemplifies how magical realism syncretises "paradoxical dimensions," to borrow Brenda Cooper's phrase, such as "life and death, historical reality and magic, science and religion," and, in this case, Indigenous and Christian spirituality, among other things.[59] Angel Day repaints a statue of the Virgin Mary she found on the rubbish tip as an Indigenous woman of the sea and calls it "the Aboriginal Mary." But her (perhaps unconscious) attempt at cross-cultural bonding backfires when the Uptown whites criticise her artistic act as "irreverence" (38). The Irish Catholic priest Father Danny is depicted as being useless on a spiritual level – he fails to exorcise a demon spirit in the Phantom family's house with a hundred crucifixes (139-140) – but helpful on a practical one: the ex-heavyweight fighter saves Will Phantom from the police and mining company while Will is on the run (190), even though Will "never saw eye to eye with his religion" (191). Father Danny speaks politically like a Latin American liberation theologian, siding with the Indigenous population against the multinational mining company. "They cannot crush people just because they have the power to crush the landscape to smithereens," says the priest (193).

A more complex re-working of Christian mythology involves Elias Smith, who is represented as a Christ-like character. The white mariner with "long white hair and beard" strolls in from the sea after being shipwrecked (43-50). His walk across water is described as a "miracle" (62), although it is explained rationally that he walked across tidal flats at high tide (48). Elias, who is named after Saint Elias and compared to the prophet Jonah (50), represents the immigrant, which anyone living in Australia is, except for the country's first

[58] Gilbert, xxii.
[59] Cooper, 32.

inhabitants. But Elias, who is Slavic (63), also symbolises the possibilities of reconciliation through immigration as he becomes spiritually close to Norm. Importantly, Elias loses all memories of himself (78), including his origins, but he regains a sense of identity by acquiring other people's memory, who willingly "gave him their imagination." As a result, Elias is "able to close the gap on the past he could not remember" (80). Although the source of these adoptive memories is not specified, we may infer through contextualisation that Elias gains the memories of Indigenous people to replace his own. Yet this is a reconciliation step too far for the whites, who run Elias out of Desperance, making him the scapegoat for a fire that destroyed the council's records (89). Elias is later murdered by men working for the international mining company.

The Swan Book further complicates the myth of Christ through the politician Warren Finch, who becomes Australia's first Indigenous president only to be assassinated soon after. Warren has a face like "a modern Moses" and is "intent" on "saving the world from the destructive paths carved from its own history" (123). Warren's age, early thirties (134), draws a parallel to Christ at the time of his crucifixion, as does the belief by Indigenous elders that Warren as a young boy is a "*gift from God*" (original emphasis), "even though he was a half-caste" (101). Yet unlike Christ, who refused to make deals with earthly powers, Warren does so in order to advance his political career. His financial backers, however, have grown rich by oppressing his own people and exploiting natural resources. Their support is contingent upon them having a "separate voice" so they can "hold sway in this country" (223-224). The novel suggests compromise only damages Indigenous needs. Although Warren's Brolga Nation people form an Aboriginal Nation Government (97), they cede some of their sovereignty and agree to some assimilation in exchange for mining royalties (116). Warren becomes an "addict" for power (192) and is riddled with "cynicism" (116). Moreover, Warren effectively adopts the role of coloniser by kidnapping Oblivia – the sole custodian of traditional Law – and taking her from her home in remote northern Australia to a big city in the south as his forced bride. Warren is assassinated, with the text suggesting Oblivia might have killed him.

Warren, then, is a Christ-like figure with flaws, a false messiah who plays Judas to his own oppressed people.

Notwithstanding Wright's use of Christian mythology, *Carpentaria* prioritises Indigenous spirituality over the West's primary form of monotheism. As Mozzie Fishman and his Indigenous religious "zealots" descend into a cave to bury three Indigenous boys murdered by the town's mayor and policeman, they see "ancient stone tools," evidence of a culture that stretched "further back in time, one hundred thousand years of dreams" (436). Crucially, the text highlights how Indigenous Australian culture and spirituality is far older than Christianity, which is, by comparison, a relatively younger two thousand years. Mozzie and his followers realise the cave is "much older than the ornate cathedrals made with stone, or the monasteries and places of worship to relics of bones and other bits and pieces of sanctified saints of old Europe and the Holy Land" (437). This passage also highlights that Indigenous Australians have recorded their own history in written form for millennia. As a tourist might stare in wonderment at the leadlight windows of saints illuminating Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, Mozzie sees that the cave walls "screamed at you with the cryptic, painted spirits of the Dreamtime" (436).

In *The Swan Book*, Wright progresses her fusion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous mythology to a greater degree of complexity and subtlety through the novel's central magical realist motif of the swan. The native black swan, which Wright makes supernatural, is an inversion of the northern hemisphere's white swan. The black swans are said to be "banished" and "gypsies" (15-16), representing the plight of Indigenous Australians. Black swans have their own ancestral spirits and Law stories (16), but nobody can remember what the swans' stories are (67), signifying a loss of cultural memory. Oblivia, however, becomes a custodian of Indigenous knowledge after living in the "bowels" of an ancient eucalypt tree, a "sacred tree where all the stories of the swamp were stored like doctrines of Law left by the spiritual ancestors" (78). Oblivia's fall into the tree as a girl is caused by an ancestral spirit responsible "for looking after the memories" (79). Oblivia's muteness symbolises both the denial of an Indigenous voice and the prospect that only she can speak traditional knowledge.

The black swans act as Oblivia's protectors, attacking Warren Finch when he kidnaps Oblivia (160) and following her thousands of miles to the southern city (246). After Warren's assassination, the swans return Oblivia her northern homeland but along the way they "lose faith in their journey" and "lose each other." Unable to find the "last drying water holes," they die (328) – all except one, the "old Stranger swan," which Oblivia nurses back to health (330). The text implies, therefore, that the future of traditional Indigenous knowledge is uncertain and its survival precarious.

Although the book's central imagery is that of the native black swan, Wright also draws on white swan mythology from around the world. It is a signal that Wright desires a transnational audience, linking the plight of Indigenous Australians to wider human rights issues. It also reinforces the need to position Wright's fiction within a world literature framework, since the text transcends its subnational genesis. The novel's mythological swan references range across: Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*, which is part of the Knight of the Swan tradition (28); Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, after which Oblivia's home is renamed (94); the belief by Chinese and Greeks that the sighting of swans means good luck (269-270); a swan poem by Chinese monk Ch'i-chi (303); and various swan poems by John Keats, Charles Baudelaire, Pablo Neruda, Seamus Heaney and the Australian James McAuley (327). Early in the text the narrator juxtaposes the different names for white swans in eight different languages, such as Japanese ("Kugui") and Dutch ("Zwaan"), with nine separate names for the black swans in different Aboriginal languages, like "Goolyen" and "Koonwarra" (75). This deceptively simple yet effective linguistic technique helps to underscore both the swan's archetypal symbolism in different cultures around the globe, as well as the distinction between northern hemisphere and antipodean swans. It exemplifies the storyline's cross-cultural resonance, while reinforcing the text's Indigenous Australian origins.

Wright also explores the intersection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous myth by juxtaposing the Dreamtime with geological time. I am taking geological science to represent the mythical nature (in a secular sense) of Western science generally, in that science in the twenty-first century offers meaning to both existential and social questions.

Wright's purpose, I contend, is to inject a narrative tension between Dreamtime cosmology and Western science, between the magical and the real, without giving precedence to either. This particular juxtaposition disrupts not only received ideas about time, but also questions the discourse of realism. The interplay between the fantastic and the real in magical realism, as Ato Quayson says, produces "constitutive *aporia*" that is "felt most strongly in the conduct of time and temporality, since it is these that most capture our sense of consensual realism" (original emphasis).[60] The groper fish that help Norm Phantom bury Elias Smith at sea, as I referred to above, live in an underwater abyss that "descended down the many levels of a Mesozoic bluff" (257). When Will Phantom sits at the edge of a lagoon contemplating Elias' corpse, he realises time is just "a fleeting whisper" as the lagoon had "been carved by an eternity of rushing floodwaters inside the remains of a forest that lived a million years ago" (164). Will later stands at a spot in the desert that "500 million years ago" had sea levels "as high as the surrounding hills" (169). Geological time denotes another temporality that extends back beyond the ancient Indigenous Australian culture and even human existence. Geological time, although long-dated, is scientifically measured, whereas the Dreamtime, which began "billions of years ago" (1), is indeterminate.

Wai Chee Dimock coined the neologism "deep time" to identify "a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations." Deep time is a conceptual framework that enables the reader to view a text as having a long duration with a "backward extension" that reaches material in pre-modern and non-Western literature. Deep time, says Dimock, consists of "temporal length added to the spatial width of the planet." In turn, this allows the text to operate "below the plane of the nation," where the subnational and the transnational intertwine "in a loop," creating a kind of denationalised space.[61] I propose that the geological formations referred to throughout *Carpentaria* may also be read as texts, in that the Dreamtime and the Law regards the land as a text that communicates knowledge. In this

[60] Ato Quayson, "Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative and History," in *The Novel Vol 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 743-744.
[61] Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3-4, 23, 28.

sense, *Carpentaria* extends back textually millions of years in the earth, just as it extends back over past millennia to ancient Greek and Chinese swan myths. In doing so, the text transcends its national origins to exist in a denationalised space.

"War with no name": ongoing colonialism in an officially postcolonial nation

A critical difference between Wright's fiction and much other postcolonial magical realist literature is that it is written from an Indigenous point of view that regards the autochthon as still being colonised. Australia is not a postcolonial nation in the same way that other postcolonial territories such as India and Malaysia are because those nations do not have a dominant white-'settler' population. This is borne out, for instance, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which commences on the eve of India's independence from Britain in 1947. I take Robert Young's definition of the postcolonial as "coming after colonialism and imperialism, in their original meaning of direct-rule domination, but still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global market system of hegemonic economic power."[62] However, I also take Young's point that the "emancipatory narrative of postcolonialism was not accessible to those who remained invisible" within 'settler' colonies, such as Australia. "In almost any settler colony one can think of, settler liberation from colonial rule was premised on indigenous dispossession," says Young.[63] For Wright, the dispossession of land for Indigenous Australians remains a priority. "This nation was shaped through its ability to lie and get away with the land theft of the entire country from Aboriginal people since day one of colonisation; it is the most fundamental issue of what is still wrong in the country," she argues.[64] Historian Nicholas Thomas says that when settler colonies become settler nations, "the colonial relationship endures," because native peoples do not experience independence from their immediate colonisers. A distinctive feature of settler colonies, he continues, is that the acquisition of land typically leads to "piecemeal dispossession" through appropriation,

[62] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 57.
[63] Robert J.C. Young, "Postcolonial Remains," *New Literary History* 43.1 (Winter 2012): 25.
[64] Wright, "A Question of Fear," 130.

forcible removal, "genocidal terror" and assimilation.[65] Wright's fiction, as I shall demonstrate, depicts an ongoing process of dispossession that suggests colonialism in Australia exists as much in the present as it did in the past. A truism of all postcolonial societies, says Bill Ashcroft, is that "imperial power circulates and produces rather than simply confines," and that in some settler colonies the colonised become the colonisers.[66] After the British invasion of Australia in the late eighteenth century, white convicts and free settlers were ruled by the British colonials. Descendants of the convicts and settlers, however, took over the running of the country from Federation in 1901, which officially marked the end of British colonial rule.

Wright believes Indigenous Australians remain engaged in "a war just for our very survival" and "a continuing invasion". [67] The theme permeates her fiction. The omniscient narrator in *Plains of Promise* calls the theft of the land "an undeclared war … [a] war with no name." The enforced removal of Indigenous peoples to the "prison camps" of Christian missions and cattle stations, where they were exploited as effectively slave labour, was a continuation of that war (74). *Carpentaria*, although set in 2002, a century after Federation, is full of references to a perpetual war, which is dramatised in the guerrilla war waged by Will Phantom against a multinational mining company that causes environmental devastation of traditional lands. Will believes the mining company brings a "new war on their country," a war "with no rules" and "for money" (378). In this war the white politicians and police willingly collude with international capital with complete disregard to the Indigenous peoples or their native land rights. *The Swan Book* is replete with images of the army forcing Indigenous people into refugee camps. Set in the near future, in a post-apocalyptic Australia ravished by climate change, Indigenous elders of the "Brolga Nation Government" are said that have fought "for three centuries the war of oppression" (106). Crucially, Wright views this war not only in terms of acts of violence, but also linguistic subjugation within the context of Australia's British-derived judicial system. The English language, argues Wright, becomes a

[65] Nicholas Thomas, *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 9-11.
[66] Bill Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 128.
[67] Wright, "Politics of Writing," 18, 19.

"historical weapon" of "oppression" in the "contemporary war" against Indigenous people when used in the "monolingual and monocultural" setting of Australian law. In other words, Indigenous people, who have their own languages and culture, and who had been governing themselves "since ancient times," are forced to defend themselves against these judicial attacks on their lives, she says.[68]

The plight of Indigenous Australians is what Robert Young describes as the "fourth world," where in an officially decolonised country there is still colonisation of first inhabitants "who seek the basic rights of legal and social equality." After independence, power is passed on to a "native bourgeois elite" who have been raised during the period of colonialism and taken on Western presuppositions, such as the idea of the nation-state.[69] This is a key issue in Wright's utilisation of magical realism as a postcolonial stategy. Although Australia is generally considered to be postcolonial because the country is no longer subject to "direct-rule domination" by the British, Indigenous Australians remain dominated by non-Indigenous governments. My argument is that Wright's use of magical realism in a fourth-world context prompts a modification of Stephen Slemon's influential theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse. Slemon's 1988 article has been variously described as "seminal,"[70] "groundbreaking"[71] and "influential,"[72] yet his assumptions have largely gone unchallenged over the past three decades.

Slemon argues that in a magical realist text "a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other." The two systems are "incompatible" and, as a result, "each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other,' a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rendering them with gaps,

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[68] Alexis Wright, *Grog Wars* (1997; reprint, Broome, WA: Magabala Books, 2009), 4.
[69] Young, *Postcolonialism*, 4, 57-60.
[70] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 48.
[71] Ursula Kluwick, *Exploring Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 16.
[72] Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 249.

absences, and silences." In turn, magical realism's "characteristic" manoeuvre is that its "two separate narrative modes never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy." Critically, Slemon makes clear he is talking about a "binary opposition" or a "double vision" that results from the clash between the colonial culture and that of the indigenous population. In a postcolonial context, this manifests itself in a dialectic between two different codes: the "codes of recognition" handed down from the "inherited," or coloniser's, language; and the "imagined" or "future-oriented" codes that aspire towards a language of "local realism," usually taken to mean the language of the colonised.[73] Slemon here invokes Gabriel García Márquez's famous metaphor of the "speaking mirror" that appears at the climactic end of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which, subsequent to Slemon, has often been used by critics to explain the dual nature of magical realism.[74]

Slemon believes the two systems are oppositional and irreconcilable. In an often overlooked remark, Slemon says in a footnote that his reading "takes issue" with contrasting approaches which view magical realism as "a seamless interweaving of, or synthesis between, the magical and the real."[75] Furthermore, Slemon's theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse is predicated on a binary analysis: magical and real; coloniser and colonised; foreign and local. As he admits, Slemon builds on the notion of postcolonialism's hybrid nature, which in turn creates this double vision or "metaphysical clash." But it is Slemon's fixation on binaries, or a postcolonial hybrid dualism, which limits his otherwise insightful theory when it comes to magical realist texts set within ongoing colonisation in an officially postcolonial nation.

Ato Quayson argues that Slemon's use of the term "battle" does not accurately reflect the dynamics inherent in magical realism. "The idea that they are in a battle undermines the notion of equivalence, since it implies that the reader is invited to switch sides in a shifting

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[73] Slemon, 409-411.

[74] During the "biblical hurricane" that destroys Macondo, Aureliano Amador Buendía reads the gypsy Melquíades' parchments, in which he predicted the future of the Buendía family. Aureliano "began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror."Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (1967; London: Pan Books, 1978), 336.

[75] Slemon, 424, fn 11.

hierarchical relationship, either of an ethical, motivational, or indeed, spatial kind, between the real and the fantastic," says Quayson. Instead, Quayson says magical realist fiction involves an "equivalence" that governs the narrative relationship between the two domains: the magical and the real. "It is better to speak of an interplay between the two representational regimes, with an equal emphasis on both parts of the word *inter/play*," he adds (original emphasis).[76] On the one hand, Quayson is correct to highlight the constant intermingling between the magical and the real; after all, the magical aspects of magical realism are embedded in, and emanate from, the realistic ones. On the other hand, Quayson's notion of "equivalence" suggests a kind of equal voice between the magical and the real, which may not always be the case within a specific text. In Wright's fiction, for instance, the ontological reality of the Dreamtime, which is signified by the "magical" elements, ultimately achieves a dominant voice in *Carpentaria* and *The Swan Book*. Moreover, Slemon's notion of a "battle" between the oppositional systems captures the tension that exists between these irreconcilable narratives, which reflects the fractures within the postcolonial societies being portrayed. As Elleke Boehmer says, by drawing on magical realism "postcolonial writers in English are able to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural clash and displacement."[77]

Despite the strengths and insight of Slemon's theory, his analysis does not adequately allow for the complexity of problems that arise from a situation in which there is ongoing colonisation in a supposedly postcolonial country. Wright's fiction illustrates that for Indigenous Australians there are three oppositional systems in operation, one more system than what Slemon identifies. There is arguably a continuous dialectic between the still-colonised Indigenous Australians, the contemporary white-'settler' rulers who inherited British-European ideologies from the colonial era, and global economic forces that help perpetuate a colonialist mindset. In *Carpentaria*, the colonised Indigenous viewpoint is dramatised in the spiritual resistance offered by Norm Phantom, and the militant resistance

[76] Quayson, "Fecundities of the Unexpected," 728-729.
[77] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 229.

waged by Will Phantom and Mozzie Fishman against the mining company as well as the white politicians and police. The British colonialist viewpoint is represented by the white mayor of Desperance, named Stan Bruiser, whose motto is to "*Hit first, talk later*" (327) (original emphasis). The mayor chases down Aboriginal women on his horse until they are exhausted and then rapes them (41), and bullies the town's police constable, the ironically named Truthful E'Strange, to jail three young Indigenous boys falsely accused of murder. The third viewpoint, of global economic forces, is represented by the New York-based multinational mining company, called Gurfurritt International (as in 'Go For It'), which destroys the environment, ignores Indigenous land rights and demands the complicity of the domestic politicians and police. In *The Swan Book*, Oblivia is symbolic of the colonised Indigene, while the intervention of the army into Indigenous communities echoes the original British colonists' invasion. The portrayal of the international economic powers, however, is more complicated than in *Carpentaria* because of Warren Finch, the Indigenous leader who colludes with mining companies in order to finance his political career. Warren's behaviour points to the danger of political corruption within the Indigenous community.

Re-writing Indigenous history, appeals to intrinsic human rights

Carpentaria satirises Indigenous Australians being literally written out of the recorded history of the colonisers when neither Norm Phantom's family nor any of his Indigenous relations are said to have "rated a mention in the official version of the region's history. There was no tangible evidence of their existence" (10). Their surname, Phantom, symbolises non-existence as well as a hauntology. This reflects the colonialist construct that history is that which is recorded in writing, with the corollary that it excludes all other forms of history not encoded in a written language, consigning them, as Russell West-Pavlov says, "to the bin of 'pre-literate societies' or 'people without history.'"[78] It is not just people written into, or out of, history, but places, too. The fictional white-'settler' town of Desperance, which lies on the

[78] Russell West-Pavlov, "The Time of Biopolitics in the Settler Colony," *Australian Literary Studies* 26.2 (2011): 15.

coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, did not exist until “the original pioneers came along and developed the town” by inscribing the town’s boundaries on paper through surveying methods. Yet the cartographical boundaries are subverted by the “ancestral creation spirits,” which move freely “through the town, even inside other folk’s houses, right across any piece of the country” (59).

A critical component of Wright’s utilisation of magical realism as a postcolonial strategy is to literally re-write Indigenous peoples back into recorded history. Her purpose is not only to re-assert the primacy of the autochthon to the continent’s ancient history, but also to ensure the survival of Indigenous stories for future generations of Indigenous peoples by preserving them in book form.[79] Wright warns of the danger of not passing on intergenerational stories, otherwise “silence is a major curse” that threatens to result in Indigenous peoples forgetting who they are, she says.[80] Magical realism, says Wendy Faris, not only reflects history but “it may also seek to change it, by addressing historical issues critically and thereby attempting to heal historical wounds.”[81] The narrative mode offers an “alternative history” that is “just as valid as the official version,” says Denis Donoghue, in which “the pluperfect subjunctive is just as good as the past perfect.”[82] Wright follows in a long tradition in magical realist literature with texts that seek to fill in the gaps of official nationalist history and re-insert the perspective of the marginalised, often in response to oppressive regimes; indeed, this will unfold as a central theme of this thesis. For example, García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* highlights United States capitalist imperialism in Central America and the subjugation of workers; Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) depicts the dehumanising consequences of slavery in the United States; Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* critiques Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi’s autocratic rule; and Richard Flanagan’s *Gould’s Book of Fish* reinterprets the brutalising colonial legacy of Tasmania on its Indigenous population and white convicts.

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[79] Vernay, 121.
[80] Wright, “Secrets and ties,” 12.
[81] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 138.
[82] Denis Donoghue, “Safe in the Hands of the Uncanny,” *The New York Times Book Review*, April 8, 1990, 15.

Wright's fiction is particularly acute in illustrating the absurdity of much official history. It is well noted by critics that magical realist fiction frequently employs historiographic metafiction, which critically reworks the forms and contents of the past with a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs." Linda Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction "plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record" by foregrounding the possibility of error – both deliberate and inadvertent – in recorded history, emphasising that we know the past through our reading of historical textual documents.[83] Ato Quayson develops this point further: "In magical realism, historiographic metafiction often also embraces various processes and contradictions by which the historical is established, producing what, to echo Raymond Williams, is a structure of (absurdist) feeling with respect to history."[84] Quayson here picks up on Williams' theory that there will always be certain elements of past times and places that are "irrecoverable," and that even those elements which are recovered will only be so "in abstraction." "The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period, is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living," says Williams.[85]

The absurdity of official recorded history is particularly evident in Australia's colonial past. Historian Henry Reynolds points out the artificial construct of 'Australia' at the commencement of Federation in 1901: at the time "there were two Australias," the white colonialist south and the Indigenous-multiracial north, which included residents hailing from South-East Asia, China and Japan, with the northerners being largely unaware of the white southerners' existence. In remote northern Australia there lived "uncounted thousands of Aborigines" who "had never seen Europeans and knew nothing of Federation or their putative membership of a new nation."[86] It is a stark example of Benedict Anderson's

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[83] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 5, 114.

[84] Quayson, "Fecundities of the Unexpected," 749.

[85] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), 63.

[86] Henry Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia's North*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), vii.

argument that the modern nation-state is no more than "an imagined political community," because all of its citizen-members will never know most of their fellow members.[87]

Wright's fiction transcends the limitations of an abstracted textual reconstruction of history by drawing on oral storytelling passed down through generations. Wright's fictionalised history, then, becomes a felt history in that it involves an emotional recovery as much as an intellectual one. This is evident in the continual references in her fiction to the massacres of Indigenous Australians, which even today is a contentious point among conservative white-'settler' historians. For instance, the Indigenous elder Mozzie Fishman experiences visions of "white hands" "touching everything in the community" that are "created by a special luminance caught in the fractures of light" (126). "Sometimes he saw thousands of these hands at work. He could see them killing Aboriginal people. He believed the hands belonged to all kinds of white people, some dead, some still alive" (127). Again, Wright compresses time so that the past is fused with the present, suggesting the colonisation process is continuous. *Carpentaria* also satirises the potential flaw in recorded history ignoring tangible documentation that is easily accessible, when Uncle Mickey finds "evidence" of "all kinds of cartridges used in the massacre of the local tribes" with a humble metal detector. Mickey obsessively collects "maps, names of witnesses, details, the lot," assembling his own alternative archive of historical artefacts (11).

Wright complicates our conceptions of postcoloniality by reconstructing a history of the continent that lies outside the binary of coloniser and colonised, European and Indigenous. Wright draws on her own mixed heritage, especially that of her Chinese ancestry, which she shares with her maternal grandmother. Granny Ah Kup, a major influence on Wright who passed on Indigenous stories, "collapsed history and assimilated the remote Dreamtime into the present in order to explain her attachment to country," says Wright. But

[87] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 6. See also Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 42-43.

her grandmother also "acknowledged her Chinese inheritance."[88] Wright's great-grandmother was kidnapped as a child in 1881 by a pastoralist who "gave" her to his Chinese cook as a wife. Their daughter, Granny Ah Kup, in turn married a man who also had Chinese ancestry. Wright's mixed Indigenous and Chinese heritage was crystallised in May 2012 at the launch of the Chinese translation of *Carpentaria*. Presiding over the event at the Australian Embassy in Beijing for Li Yao's translation of Wright's novel was China's most famous magical realist author, Mo Yan, who five months later would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.[89]

Wright's mixed Chinese ancestry is emblematic of the historical ties between Indigenous people from northern Australia and Asia that extend back at least to the mid-eighteenth century, long before the European invasion. Northern Australia was an open, international territory that enjoyed intricate, multi-layered ties with countries from as far as China, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia through trade (especially of seafood) and inter-marriage. "The British arrived years after Asians had negotiated economic and social relationships with Indigenous communities," writes historian Peta Stephenson.[90] Wright utilises a magical realist treatment of history to reflect a Chinese presence in Indigenous Australian settings, emphasising personal and spiritual cross-cultural connections rather than recovered abstractions. In *Plains of Promise*, the character Pilot comes from "a Chinese family with a long line of doctors" who treated "royal dynasties in China for hundreds of years." Pilot flees China's communist regime and ends up in the Australian desert, where he lives with Indigenous peoples, learns their languages and natural bush medicines, and appreciates their "culture of traditional ownership" (137-138). Mysteriously, Pilot is murdered and the mission head refuses to report his death (132), which suggests the Chinese, like Indigenous Australians, are also marginalised by white authorities. The "dozens of spirits" that descend into Pilot's grave and carry out the Chinaman's "soul" (140) implies a spiritual

[88] Alexis Wright, "A Family Document," in *Storykeepers*, ed. Marion Halligan (Sydney: Duffey & Snellgrove, 2001), 238.
[89] Nicholas Jose, "Deconstructing the dumpling: Australia, China, lived connections," *Journal of Australian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2013): 120-122.
[90] Peta Stephenson, *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), 22.

communion between the Chinese and Indigenous Australians. In *The Swan Book*, Oblivia walks north to her homeland and comes across an "old Chinese hermit" who "lived on an island of sticks that looked like an enormous swan's nest." The implication is that the Chinese hermit is a swan, with swans generally representing Oblivia's spiritual guides. The hermit points Oblivia to an "Aboriginal man" who in turn takes her to a "sacred place" that enables her to continue her journey home (310-314).

Perhaps the most contentious aspect of Wright's re-interpretation of history, however, is her focus on genocide, which she maintains is an ongoing issue. For many, if not most, white Australians genocide is an abominable term associated mostly with Nazi Germany and, in their own minds, not with their white-'settler' heritage. This attitude was exemplified in former conservative prime minister John Howard's refusal to say 'sorry' to Indigenous Australians for past injustices. "I am interested in the reality of our social, political, economic and cultural position in today's Australia as a consequence of the continuing invasion and our ongoing war against genocide," says Wright.[91] Despite a widespread public misconception about genocide in Australia, historical scholarship and judicial opinion lends weight to Wright's stance. Henry Reynolds argues that the massacres of Indigenous groups in the nineteenth century by white 'settlers,' who were assisted by Indigenous trackers and troopers, are likely to be classified as genocide if the term is applied to smaller, distinct groups rather than, say, Indigenous Australians in their entirety. Reynolds also asserts the policy of assimilation – the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families by governments and churches – could be considered "genocidal in effect, if not necessarily in intention" if the aim of the children's transfer was the destruction of a group of people. Indeed, this was the conclusion of the Human Rights and Opportunity Commission's 1997 report, *Bringing Them Home*, which examined the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. In addition, jurist Hal Wootten, in his 1989 report to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, argues that assimilation falls within the "modern definition of genocide." Reynolds says government-sanctioned assimilation was in breach of international

[91] Wright, "Politics of Writing," 19.

law prohibiting genocide that had been laid down by the United Nations Genocide Convention in 1946.[92] The creator of the word genocide, Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin, who in 1944 helped draft the United Nations' Genocide Convention, considered that genocide did not necessarily mean the entire destruction of a nation, but could also apply to the planned disintegration of a national group and the destruction of individuals within such groups.[93] Assimilation, says historian Ann Curthoys, was designed to make Indigenous Australians "lose their identity as a distinct people" through "intermarriage and mixed-race children."[94]

Rather than use literary realism to tackle the topic of genocide, which would be, to say the least, confronting, Wright instead deploys magical realism to depict the attempted annihilation of Indigenous peoples from an imaginative, Indigenous perspective. The narrative mode, I propose, enables the text to engage readers with the issue rather than to alienate them. As *The Swan Book*'s narrator sarcastically remarks, "it was officially denied" that "crimes" such as "genocide, or mass murder" ever occurred in the country (309). Believability, then, becomes paramount. *Plains of Promise*, which was published in the same year of the *Bringing Them Home* report, details the devastating emotional and psychological effects of assimilation, which the narrator says is simply another word for "annihilation." "The white people wanted everyone to become white, to think white" (74). The unnamed mother of Ivy Koopundi commits suicide by self-immolation after missionaries take her daughter away. Ivy's mother had previously seen "small and faceless" creatures slide down ropes in the sky and beckon her in the night (14). Ivy in turn has her own daughter, Mary, taken away from her. As Grannie Kathie, herself taken from her parents on the cattle station where she was born, tells Mary: "Lots of children had been taken away." The ramifications, however, are profound, as parents were unable to pass down language, culture and Law to their offspring. "I couldn't give them their past," laments Grannie Kathie (275).

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[92] Henry Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History* (Ringwood: VIC: Viking, 2001), 30-31, 120-121, 173-174.

[93] Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

[94] Ann Curthoys, "An uneasy conversation: the multicultural and the indigenous," in *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand*, ed. John Docker and Gerhard Fischer (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2000), 25.

Carpentaria, on the other hand, focuses on the dispossession of land as a central factor of genocide, highlighting the issue as an abuse of intrinsic human rights. The socio-political background to the genesis of the novel is important to understand. Wright began working on the book a decade after the High Court of Australia's historic *Mabo* judgment in 1992, which overturned the white-'settler' concept of *terra nullius* – meaning land belonging to no-one – by affirming native title rights to traditional land, and which led to improved land rights legislation with the Native Title Act in 1993.[95] The court's decision, however, subsequently came under attack from conservative state and federal governments, as well as mining and pastoral interests. So Wright's novel may be read as a counter-reaction to the conservative reaction to *Mabo*. In *Carpentaria*, mining represents another form of dispossession of land, robbing the Indigenous inhabitants of their traditional lands and polluting the environment. The novel portrays this cultural clash – between exploitation and ecology, profit and community – in a supernatural manner as the land is itself a living entity inextricably tied to ancestral spirits, which listen to "the dull, monotonous clanging made by heavy machinery churning and gouging the land" (150). Eventually, "everyone" sees what the spirits see: "The country looked dirty from mining, shipping, barges spilling ore and waste" (401). Corporate interests ignore Indigenous legal rights: representatives of the New York-based multinational mining company Gurfurritt International "claimed not to know what was required from Native title claims" (391). Mining engenders greed for money, causing Indigenous peoples to fight among themselves and dividing families.[96] Norm Phantom's two eldest sons, Inso and Donny, who will not do a thing for anybody "except for money," work at the iron ore mine (107), while Norm's sixteen-year-old son, Kevin, the bright child in the family, suffers brain damage after being caught in an explosion on his first day's work at the mine (109). Moreover, Norm Phantom's rival, Joseph Midnight, organises his community to make up the false Wangabiya tribe in order to claim land rights and receive mining royalties

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[95] The concept of *terra nullius* was derived from the philosopher John Locke's dictum that, in Robert Young's rephrasing, "those who did not cultivate the land had no rights to it." Young, *Postcolonialism*, 20.

[96] Wright says mining was "an important seed" in the conceptualisation of *Carpentaria*. In the 1990s the author witnessed deteriorating relationships between Indigenous people in the Gulf of Carpentaria following negotiations to develop the Century Mine in north-west Queensland. Wright, "On Writing *Carpentaria*," 93.

(52). Norm's rebellious son, Will, represents Indigenous resistance by sabotaging the mine's $30 million, one-hundred-and-fifty-kilometre pipeline to the coast (366-367). But this only prompts further discrimination and oppression, as the white politicians demonise Will as "a curse to the Gulf" (289) and order a police manhunt to capture him. However, in a magical realist touch, the land itself comes alive to save Will after he has set fire to the mining headquarters. A mining employee who is hunting Will trips on a rock. "Instantly, his head was split open at the temple by a rock that had, up to that moment, lain on the ground, embedded in soil that was thousands of seasons old, untouched by humankind since the ancestor had placed it in this spot, as if it had planned to do this incredible thing" (405).

What is distinctive about Wright's fiction is her appeal to intrinsic human rights and international human rights law in relation to land dispossession, assimilation and other genocidal policies, as well as illustrating the hypocrisy of colonial law. In this respect, her work demonstrates how magical realism may be used to address traumatic and complex social and historical issues. A key issue in Australia is the imposition of British colonial law to replace and eradicate Indigenous Law. "The rule of law was perceived as a key implement in the civilizing mission of Western Europe, expected to instill a wide array of ancillary values tied to socio-political progress and advancement; by contrast, the absence of a legal code was interpreted as a handicap and sign of inadequacy," says Elizabeth Anker.[97] Moreover, colonial powers like Britain used international law to ratify territorial claims that were imagined cartographically, thereby justifying their geographical expansion.[98]

The hypocrisy of colonial law is most evident in the British justification of 'occupying' Australia on the basis of *terra nullius*, which created the fiction the continent belonged to no-one and was not cultivated. Nomadic Indigenous Australians in pre-colonial times did, in fact, cultivate the land through controlled fire and parklands to ensure a sustainable food supply, as Bill Gammage demonstrates in *The Biggest Estate on Earth* (2011). The post-*Mabo* era that *Carpentaria* encapsulates, therefore, involves the inversion of two centuries of white-

[97] Elizabeth S. Anker, *Fictions of Dignity: Emodying Human Rights in World Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012), 91.
[98] Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 318.

‘settler’ self-deception, as traditional lands revert back to the original inhabitants. The novel depicts this juridicial process dramatically towards the end of the narrative when the cyclone engendered by the Rainbow Serpent obliterates Desperance, thereby echoing the legislative reparation of colonial land theft. Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs identify an “unsettledness” that arises in a “settler” nation like Australia when the mode of occupation that is initially taken for granted by Europeans is challenged, a feeling of strangeness they relate to Freud’s concept of the “uncanny.” “What is ‘ours’ is also potentially, or even always already, ‘theirs’: the one is becoming the other, the familiar is becoming strange,” they write.[99] The uncanny in a post-*Mabo* context is peculiarly postcolonial. The uncanny occurs when we experience the unfamiliar in the familiar. For Freud, the uncanny “is in some way a species of the familiar” because the German words *unheimlich* (‘uncanny,’ or ‘unhomely’) and *heimlich* (‘homely’) are not so much antonyms but actually overlap; the boundaries between them are blurred.[100] Ato Quayson argues that magical realist fiction promotes a sense of the uncanny when it portrays “the general instability of the perceived world.” Quayson adds: “Magical realism normalizes what in other contexts would be patently abnormal and deeply unsettling.” This is especially true during times of social disintegration or collapse. “In the face of persistent physical or social violence brought on either by acute political chaos or the general collapse of the social order, there is an internalization of these perceived disorders in terms either of guilt, an inexplicable terror, or a general sense of disquiet which does not seem to have a clear source.”[101]

This general sense of disquiet, I propose, is reflected in the imagery of the net in *Carpentaria*. The net becomes metonymic of the exclusion of, and control over, Indigenous people. Yet it also, perhaps paradoxically, becomes representative of a security for which Indigenous people crave. From a stylistic perspective, the net is interesting because it demonstrates Wright’s deployment of magical or supernatural elements which are not

[99] Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Carlton South, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 23-24.
[100] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (1919; London: Penguin, 2003), 134, 155.
[101] Quayson, “Fecundities of the Unexpected,” 729-730.

directly related to Indigenous mythology or culture. On one level the net is a "net of security" (85), an invisible shield that white people place around Desperance "for the purposes of protecting the town against encroachment from people who were not like themselves" (33-34). However, Norm Phantom and other Indigenous people believe the "safety net" should also stretch to their homes, on the outskirts of the town, on the basis that "they had rights too for the same municipal goods and services as anyone else" (100). Norm's bid to obtain the same protection from the net that it allegedly secures for white people is a satirical take on the politics of exclusion. Despite Norm lobbying the shire council, the councillors refuse to extend the net to cover his place (109), or those of the Prickleblush people (321). On the other hand, Mozzie Fishman, the firebrand religious leader, attacks the town net as "useless, invisible," and talks of a "real" net "thrown out by the police" (419). Similarly, the Gurfurrit mining company's New York skyscraper is said to be able to "cast a security net over the whole social reality in Desperance" (444). The invisible net, then, is a metaphorical tool of colonialism, to capture and exclude the country's original inhabitants while maintaining an enforced separation from the white community. The net also offers control for the multinational resource giant over the entire township, both black and white communities. The net, therefore, is both familiar (security) and strange (exclusion); the net is uncanny.

Similarly, the concept of law is uncanny in that it is both familiar and strange: for Indigenous people, Indigenous Law is familiar but colonial law is strange; while for white 'settlers' the reverse holds true. Mozzie Fishman sums up the relativity of legal concepts when he thinks "the law was being aided and abetted by all the governments" – local, state and national – "because who knows by what Act of Law the white man calls himself in his many disguises" (134). *Carpentaria* exposes the arbitrariness of white law enforcement through the town police constable, Truthful E'Strange, who sexually harasses Norm's daughter, Girlie (228), and is believed to molest boys (349). The policeman's behaviour is symptomatic of the denial of basic legal civilian and human rights to which Indigenous Australians have been subjected for more than two centuries. Since the first inhabitants were

denied the right to vote or citizenship until the 1960s, they were essentially stateless in their own homeland.

Human rights in practice are only "natural" as "the positive rights of citizens," and not of "humans *qua* humans," says Joseph Slaughter. Despite the ideal of every person having inalienable human rights, in reality those rights are usually only exercisable if a person has citizenship of a nation-state. To be stateless is to be in a kind of rights limbo. Slaughter draws a distinction between "modern" human rights, as enshrined in national law after the American and French revolutions, and "contemporary" human rights, as espoused by the UN and regional organisations after the Second World War. Human rights law, he argues, is "a complex of contested – and often contradictory – principles still in formation" that involves "discontinuities" and "inconsistencies." In other words, human rights abuses can still occur in countries that may not have legislated those same rights in sovereign law. For Indigenous Australians, this was evident in the forced separation of children from their families, Indigenous deaths in custody and the denial of native land rights. *The Swan Book* highlights this historical denial of basic rights by invoking the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted in 1948. The narrator says that the army's internment of Indigenous people in "detention camps," like the swamp in which Oblivia lives, "excluded" them from their rights under international law (47-48). The futuristic novel also depicts a counter-factual scenario with a "Brolga Nation Government" that has Indigenous self-government with its own laws and traditional lands (106). However, this is said to have resulted from an Indigenous elder fighting in the "World Court" to obtain "Indigenous People's Rights" in a "2020 Constitutional Agreement" (103-104). Slaughter argues that the novel as a genre, and in particular the *Bildungsroman* sub-genre, has been a "correlative" to human rights law since its European inception in the eighteenth century. Following nineteenth-century writers like Charles Dickens and Gustave Flaubert, whose novels are suffused with social criticism, many contemporary postcolonial *Bildungsromane* highlight the nation-state's "franchise" in having a stranglehold of the "global order of human rights." Moreover, contemporary fiction often foregrounds "the dislocation of the *Bildungsheld*" from these rights,

says Slaughter.[102] Indeed, this is one way in which to read both *Plains of Promise* and *The Swan Book*. In the former, Mary must come to terms with the succession of 'stolen' children within her family – including herself – in order to discover and embrace her Indigeneity. In the latter, Oblivia emerges from a decade underground during which the ancestral spirits have taught her the Law, only to realise the apparent saviour of herself and her people is a cynical political opportunist who supports the rapacious greed of multinational businesses rather than his Indigenous community.

One particular episode in *Carpentaria* exemplifies the denial of basic legal and human rights to Indigenous Australians, which is depicted in a supernatural manner. The town policeman arrests three Indigenous "petrol sniffer boys," aged ten, eleven and twelve, under the false pretence of killing Elias Smith (310). They are not told why they have been incarcerated (320) and are "kept like lizards in a zoo" (313). The mayor, Stan Bruiser, conducts a kangaroo court even though there is no evidence against them (327). There is a sense of inevitably about the boys' fate as the white residents of Desperance rationalise events as though justice is being played out. The mayor and constable bash the boys so severely they look "as though they had been put through a mincing machine" (334), prompting the boys to hang themselves in their cell by their T-shirts (358). The sequence then switches into the seemingly fantastical after the policeman allows the boys' bodies to rot in the cells for days. Finally, the voice of one of the dead boys speaks through the mayor's mouth: "You are going to die for this." The narrator adds: "Everyone heard Bruiser speak like a boy and thought it was a horrible miracle" (362). The episode, I contend, illustrates how Wright utilises magical realism to accentuate not only the links between the living and the dead, but also the links between historical injustices of the past and those of the present. In a postcolonial context, the voice of the Indigenous ghost returns as a reminder that the spectral haunting will remain until justice is restored.

[102] Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2007), 7-28.

In conclusion, the final lines of *The Swan Book* encapsulate Wright's sense of the fragility of Indigenous Australian culture and her fear that it could, without constant nurturing, die out. "Maybe Bujimala, the Rainbow Serpent, will start bringing in those cyclones and funnelling sand mountains into the place. Swans might come back. Who knows what madness will be calling them in the end?" (334) It is noteworthy that at the end of her latest book she reintroduces the Dreamtime and its primordial creator, the Rainbow Serpent, which appears in the opening lines of *Carpentaria*, thereby forming a narrative link between the two texts. Critically, the Rainbow Serpent's potential action mentioned at the end of *The Swan Book*, recalling the cyclonic destruction of white-settler Desperance in *Carpentaria*, is posited in the subjunctive. The implication is that it is far from certain whether the Rainbow Serpent will, or can, make reparations for Indigenous people. Similarly, the black swans, the mythological custodians of traditional knowledge, "might" return; it is not definite they will. Throughout this chapter I have shown how Wright uses magical realism as a postcolonial strategy to reassert an Indigenous sense of 'reality.' Wright utilises Indigenous myth in order to convey this reality as well as to recuperate and conserve Indigenous culture. In doing so, she revitalises magical realism as a literary style, bringing in new elements that change the generic kind's porous borders. However, Wright also employs non-Indigenous myth, which in turn complicates our conception of postcoloniality by broadening discourse beyond the binary of coloniser and colonised, and allows us to contextualise her works in the world literature system. Moreover, I have argued that her depiction of Indigenous Australians living in a still-colonised nation merits a revision of how her fiction falls within a postcolonial framework as well as a reassessment of Stephen Slemon's influential theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse. Finally, I have shown how Wright's work allows for an examination of magical realist fiction in terms of human rights discourse. In the next chapter, I shall explore how many of these attributes – especially indigenous mythology, as well as the recuperation and conservation of indigeneity – exist in the magical realist work of two indigenous writers from another antipodean former British colony, New Zealand.

Chapter Two

"Carrying your ghosts on your shoulders": recuperating pre-colonial Maoritanga in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* and Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*

Pacific pioneers: reclaiming tribal pasts in the urban present

New Zealand Maori writer Keri Hulme was one of a number of international authors of magical realism that Indigenous Australian Alexis Wright had looked to for inspiration, as someone who had "ancient ties with their land" and was from a colonised society.[1] Although I had mentioned this link in the previous chapter, it is worth reprising in order to highlight the parallels between the modern histories of the neighbouring antipodean countries. Separated by the Tasman Sea, the nation-states of Australia and New Zealand both emerged from white-'settler' colonies of the British empire in the nineteenth century. The 'settler' adjective, however, is a misnomer, as Indigenous Australians and Maoris suffered from wars of invasion, the dispossession of traditional lands and cultural deprivation by European colonists. From a literary perspective, the rise of the publishing of indigenous fiction and non-fiction in both countries emerged at a similar time, taking off in the 1970s on the back of civil rights movements and government funding. The growth in indigenous literature was part of a broader cultural renaissance for both Indigenous Australians and Maoris as they sought to reclaim and reassert their heritage and identity. Notwithstanding the similarities, there are three important differences in light of this thesis. First, while Indigenous Australians can legitimately claim to be Australia's only non-migrants, Maoris are themselves migrants, having originally travelled across the Pacific Ocean centuries ago in the Great Migration to New Zealand, or Aotearoa. Second, while Indigenous Australians were deprived of their civil rights after colonisation until they were belatedly granted full citizenship in the 1967 referendum, Maori people were granted civil rights early in the colonial period through the

[1] Alexis Wright, "Politics of Writing," *Southerly* 62.2 (2002): 11-12.

Waitangi Treaty of 1840, which included political representation. Third, whereas Indigenous Australians make up a relatively tiny proportion of the Australian population, at around three per cent, Maori people consist of about fifteen per cent of New Zealand's population, which has given them greater proportionate influence at a national level in terms of political, economic and cultural issues.[2]

Hulme (born 1947) sees herself as following in the "printsteps," as she calls it, of pioneering Maori writers such as Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, who "came on stream" in the 1970s, initiating a "huge blossoming" of Maori literature.[3] Ihimaera (born 1944) authored not only the first collection of Maori short stories to be published, *Pounamu, Pounamu* (1972), but also the first Maori novel, *Tangi* (1973), which was released in the same year that the Maori Artists and Writers' Society was formed. "Foremost in the minds of these trailblazers – and those who followed – was the desire to portray the alienation of urban existence, to remind their people of the tribal past and of the need to get renewed strength and inspiration from it," says Georges-Goulven Le Cam of the early Maori writers.[4] This chapter focuses on two key texts that are typical of this trend: Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984)[5] and Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987).[6] Both books explore what it means to be Maori in a contemporary environment, and the struggle by Maori people to ensure the survival of their pre-colonial culture in a postcolonial nation dominated by the descendents of Europeans, known as Pakeha.

In this context of this thesis, these two texts are valuable as counterpoints to Wright's fiction as they provide contrasting examples of how indigenous writers employ magical realism in a neighbouring white-'settler' colony. Most noteworthy is that all three writers employ magical realism as a postcolonial strategy by using mythopoeia to present an

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[2] Anne Brewster, "Indigenous writing in Australia and New Zealand," in *Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature,* ed. Ato Quayson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 533.

[3] John Bryson, "Interview with Keri Hulme," *Antipodes* 8.2 (1994), 132.

[4] Georges-Goulven Le Cam, "The Quest for Archetypal Self-Truth in *The Bone People*: Towards a Re-definition of Maori Culture?" *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 15.2 (1993), 67.

[5] Keri Hulme, *The Bone People* (1984; reprint, London: SPIRAL in association with Hodder and Stoughton, 1985); hereafter cited by page in the text.

[6] Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1987); hereafter cited by page in the text.

alternative, indigenous reality to the empirical rationalist reality imposed by their British colonisers. While they each adapt and update traditional myths to convey deeper truths about contemporary society, they do so in markedly different ways. Although Hulme's novel – her first and only one to date – attracted a considerable amount of critical analysis after it won the Booker Prize in 1985, relatively little additional commentary on it has emerged over the past two decades. James English remarks that the Booker win led to *The Bone People* becoming the first Maori novel to be "firmly established" in the canon of world literature.[7] Certainly, the novel is frequently included by scholars in lists of international magical realist fiction, mostly due to its inherent literary value rather than the consecration of prestige endowed by the award. However, I propose to revisit and reassess the novel, partly by focusing on its Gothic elements, which in turn opens up another avenue by which to interpret the novel as world literature. Yet the Gothic, which is associated with the supernaturally gifted young Irish-French boy Simon, also highlights the literariness of magical realism due to its porous nature and capacity to frequently spill over into other generic kinds such that the distinctions between the two are often blurred. The Gothic, which involves a metafictional kind of magical realism in Hulme's novel, contrasts with the ontological kind of magical realism that features towards the end of the novel and is associated with Maori mythology. In this regard, *The Bone People* is an interesting case study in literary history of a book that was published at the beginning of the emergence of magical realist fiction from postcolonial countries outside of Latin America. While it shares the ontological strain and mythopoeia of much Latin American fiction, the novel also develops the narrative mode beyond the cultural context of the setting. However, I shall argue that the ontological kind of magical realism that is evident seems forced or too highly structured, because it appears like a coda in the final section of the novel, threatening to descend on occasions into cliché and the postcolonial exotic. Hulme utilises Maori mythology to resolve the storylines for the principal characters Kerewin Holmes and Joe Gillayley, both products of an urban environment who struggle to rediscover their Maori heritage and recover a sense of spiritual renewal.

[7] James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 319.

Ihimaera's novella *The Whale Rider*, on the other hand, is artistically a more successful execution of magical realism in that the Maori mythology permeates the entire narrative. The book reads like a charming modern-day fable about an eight-year-old Maori girl, Kahu, who fights to prove to her emotionally distant and misogynist grandfather, a tribal leader, that she is worthy of his love. Ihimaera updates traditional mythology by giving the novel a feminist twist, allowing Kahu to save a beached ancestral whale by riding it out to sea, thereby revealing that she herself is a reincarnation of the ancient Maori ancestral whale rider. As a result, Kahu reconnects her community with their Maori heritage. *The Whale Rider* also highlights issues involving translation in relation to magical realism. I shall explore how the international edition of the book, in which Ihimaera removed sections of Maori language from the original edition, shows how cultural elements that underpin the ontological magical realism may be won or lost through linguistic translation. In addition, I argue that the 2002 film adaptation demonstrates how the narrative mode can be successfully translated from a book into another medium, but at the same time this particular film loses the postcolonial subtext of the original work. In this chapter I will also discuss how *The Bone People* opens up debate about who has the ethical right to write in an ontological vein of magical realism, and how the broader disciplines of ecocriticism and feminism can be brought alongside the narrative mode, two areas which have been under-explored by scholars of magical realism.

"Heart, spirit, and inclination": new interpretations of old myths in *The Bone People*

One of the key themes of this thesis is that magical realism's inherent shape-shifting nature means it often crosses over into other generic kinds, making the narrative mode difficult to define and equally as difficult to identify at times. This is particularly evident in Hulme's invocation of the Gothic, which overlaps with a metafictional kind of magical realism in relation to the supernatural powers of Simon. I propose a magical realist interpretation of Simon in order to arrive at a holistic understanding of *The Bone People*. Whereas the novel's protagonist, Kerewin Holmes, who becomes a kind of substitute mother to the boy, and the antagonist, Joe Gillayley, his foster father, are heavily identified with Maori mythology and

spirituality, Simon is definitively non-Maori. Various clues in the text suggest Simon is Irish, which links him with Gaelic mysticism and the Gothic. Hulme's choice of Irishness is curious because it separates Simon from the English and Scottish, who were the dominant British races associated with the colonisation of New Zealand, and therefore complicates the novel's postcolonial critique. On the other hand, many New Zealanders have some Irish ancestry, especially as a result of the Irish migrants who flocked to the gold rush on the South Island in the 1860s.[8] In contrast to the main Maori characters, Simon is a *tabula rasa*, a character with no real defined background, at least in the novel. His lack of an official identity means that Joe cannot formally adopt him (88). The mystery surrounding Simon is due to his indeterminate past: Joe discovers him badly wounded on a beach after a boat sinks on a reef during a storm near Whangaroa in the South Island. Simon is the only survivor, with a man and a woman, and possibly one or two more adults, perishing (83-85), none of whom are his parents (87). Joe subsequently takes in Simon as his foster son, but three years later his own wife and ten-month-old son die of influenza (88).

Simon's Irishness is suggested by his "silverblonde hair" (16) and "seabluegreen" eyes (17), and his belief that his name, or surname, is "Clare," reminiscent of County Clare. But even that tenuous possibility remains elusive. "He doesn't know if that's his name," says the narrator (112). Joe thinks the people in the boat were named O'Connor (87). Kerewin later discovers that Simon is possibly related to an Irish lord, the Earl of Conderry, after her investigations reveal that a coat of arms on the ring of Simon's rosary match that of the earl's. Afterwards, she gives Simon the nickname "ould Ireland" (184, 188, 198, 223). Adding to the mystery, the earl writes to Kerewin that his "younger grandson" – presumably Simon's father – was "disinherited for disgraceful propensities" four years before moving to New Zealand (99). After Kerewin hires a diver to salvage the boat in which Simon was shipwrecked, it becomes apparent that whoever was responsible for the boy was also attempting to smuggle nearly twenty pounds of heroin worth $3 million (436). Apart from these scant details, *The*

[8] Christina Stachurski, *Reading Pakeha* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009), 86.

Bone People offers little else to establish Simon's identity, which effectively fashions his past into a mystery thriller subplot.

Three years after the novel was published, however, Hulme filled in Simon's background in a short story titled "A Drift in Dream." The short fiction reveals that Simon's father, Timon Padraic McDonnagh, eighteen at the start of the story, was not only Irish, but also a violent drug dealer and arsonist who had tried to kill his grandfather (presumably the Irish earl). Timon partners with a French woman twice his age, Marie-Clare de Vraiencourt, immediately after she renounces her vows as a nun. On the run from police, he flees with Marie-Clare to New Zealand where Simon is born. Timon makes a substantial amount of money from dealing drugs but is responsible for killing his wife in a high-speed car accident in Auckland, which Simon survives.[9] In *The Bone People*, Joe belatedly discovers that Timon had ended up a heroin addict, spending his last months with the reclusive hermit and Maori elder Tiakinga Meto Mira (also Joe's spiritual saviour) before dying at the hermit's bush hut (378). The police, however, mistakenly think that both Timon's wife and child were killed in the car accident. The short story and the novel, therefore, leave it unclear who Simon's carer was at the time of the shipwreck.

This dual narrative background is important because it establishes Simon as having twin Irish-French heritage and a mother who was a former nun, which add to the Gothic elements. The novel keeps reinforcing Simon's Gothic nature by adding more elements. When he first appears, having broken into Kerewin's home, he seems like "some weird saint" who is "haloed in hair, shrouded in the dying sunlight." There is also something "distinctly unnatural" about the boy. At the moment Kerewin sets eyes on him, thunder erupts outside (16). Simon possesses an extra-sensory intelligence as he has the ability to see lights around people: "coronas," "auras" or "soul shadows," as Kerewin calls them (93). Simon even has the power to see a Maori ghost, who sings a goodbye lullaby to the boy before he departs Kerewin's holiday home (251-252). Kerewin's main abode, the tower, the physical

[9] Keri Hulme, "A Drift in Dream," in *The Windeater / Te Kaihau*, Keri Hulme (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 195-209.

locale in which she and Simon initially establish their relationship, is itself a Gothic feature of the novel, as it has six floors and a "large brass and wood crucifix" that hangs on a wall (15). Kerewin's tower, in other words, acts like a castle, or a fortress from the outside world in which the magical is allowed to flourish.

If the "Gothic represents a ruined or fractured realism," as Terry Eagleton asserts, the Gothic genre overlaps with magical realism in that the narrative mode often also reflects societies that are fractured, disintegrating or under threat from exogenous forces.[10] In *The Bone People,* Simon's Irishness represents a fractured realism in three distinct respects: an ancient culture that itself has been colonised by the English; a disintegrating noble class as evidenced by the earl; and the drug addiction and cognate criminality of his late father. While Simon may not be Maori, his Irish heritage symbolises another decaying, colonised culture that serves as a parallel to the Maori experience. From an artistic perspective, Hulme requires a different mode of writing for Simon than the ontological kind of magical realism that she reserves for the Maori characters Kerewin and Joe. The Gothic enables Hulme to imbue Simon with supernatural characteristics that allow him to stand apart from his substitute parents. At the same time, the supernatural is critical for Simon because as a result of his otherworldly powers he acts as a catalyst in each of the individual lives of Kerewin and Joe, while at the same time bringing them together, thereby empowering them to reconcile with their Maoritanga (Maori way of life) and communities. Simon During remarks that the Maori cultural elements in *The Bone People* are "absorbed and controlled" by the novel's "profoundly Occidental narratives," pointing out various modernist narratological devices such as the characters' psychologisation, the symbolism, and the narrative frame of journeys "beyond death to regeneration."[11] I would argue, however, that Hulme's use of the Gothic is another example of an Occidental narrative in the novel.

The Gothic novel has defined generic boundaries that separate it from magical realism. The Gothic novel, as Christopher Warnes points out, makes "coherent use of codes

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[10] Terry Eagleton, "The Nature of Gothic," in *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek and Others* (London: Verso, 2003), 19.
[11] Simon During, "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?" *Landfall* 39.3 (1985): 373-374.

of the natural and of the supernatural, yet present[s] them in such a way that their co-existence is rendered a source of unease or anxiety – thus leaving the antinomy unresolved."[12] Warnes is here referring to Amaryll Beatrice Chanady's criterion that magical realist fiction requires a "resolution of logical antinomy" in relation to the "conflicting" codes of the supernatural and the natural. Chanady originally proposed that the author "abolishes the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural on the level of textual representation, and the reader, who recognizes the two conflicting logical codes on the semantic level, suspends his judgment of what is rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world."[13] However, Chanady subsequently recanted her influential theory almost two decades later, withdrawing her "formalist-idealist quest for generic certainty" and her "infelicitous" binary distinction between resolved and unresolved antinomies. "Magic realism rejects the certainties of Western reason with its dichotomies (rather than resolving them), or at least ignores the rigidity of rational codes and conventions in favor of the imagination, literary, popular or religious," says Chanady, revising her earlier theory.[14] My argument is that the magical and the real in magical realism represent an infinite number of points along a continuum rather than points at the polar ends of a spectrum, therefore the narrative mode does not require a resolution of antinomies. Consequently, both the Gothic and magical realist fiction create a sense of unease or anxiety tied to the co-existence of the supernatural and the natural. In *The Bone People*, the supernatural Celtic elements surrounding Simon are disturbing, especially given the extreme violence he suffers at the hands of his foster father, Joe. Simon's supernatural powers make him both a constructive and destructive figure in terms of the effect he has on other people's lives. On another level, the trope of unreason located in a confined space, which represents the cultural metaphor of marginality, is different in essence between the two generic kinds. In the Gothic novel's phenomenon of the haunted house, the

[12] Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3-4.
[13] Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1985), 25-26.
[14] Amaryll Chanady, "Magic Realism Revisited: The Deconstruction of Antimonies," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 30.2 (2003): 432.

magical stays within the boundaries of the building, whereas in magical realist fiction, magical events emanate beyond the walls out into public spaces.[15] In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), for instance, Sethe's ghost daughter Beloved ventures outside her mother's home at 124 Bluestone Road. In *The Bone People*, Simon's life exists mainly outside of Kerewin's tower.

Simon's heightened spiritual awareness seems to be at odds with his muteness, a developmental trait he shares with Oblivia in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013). Despite his young age, Simon displays a remarkable ability to communicate by writing and his own kind of sign language. An ear, nose and throat specialist tells Joe there is "no physical reason" why Simon should not speak (85). As the narrative unfolds, however, it becomes clear that Simon's muteness, like Oblivia's, is likely due to experiencing excessive abuse and trauma as a juvenile. The violence that Joe metes out on his foster son is excruciating to read and creates a moral ambivalence in the text, especially given his tender age: a news item about Joe's conviction for assault on the boy puts his age at seven, with the prosecution counsel describing him as "a defenceless handicapped child" (328). Critic and author C.K. Stead says the book's presentation of "extreme violence against a child" while demanding "sympathy and understanding for the man who commits it" creates a moral ambiguity.[16] The reasons for Joe's personal frustrations are reasonably clear: the loss of his wife and child; disconnection from his Maori heritage; being beaten by his white grandfather as a boy (227); and being "thwarted" in his attempts to train as a priest and, later, a teacher (231). Moreover, there is the suggestion that Joe's sadomasochistic treatment of Simon might somehow be connected to his own conflicted sexuality, having previously experienced a brief "sadsweet" relationship with another man that he recalls as being "gentle," "kind" and "good" yet also "wrong" and "unnatural" (175). Nevertheless, even Joe's Maori family is repulsed by his abuse of his foster son. "You've turned sour, Joe. You're bent," says Joe's cousin, Piri Tainui.

[15] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 160.
[16] C.K. Stead, "Keri Hulme's "The Bone People," and the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 16.4 (1985): 108.

"You're spoiling something special and bright and you fucking know it" (132). Kerewin only complicates the situation: whereas at the start of her relationship with Simon and Joe she offers a respite, possibly even protection, from the domestic violence, she ultimately becomes complicit in Joe's behaviour. "I'm as culpable as you are," confesses Kerewin to Joe (326), after realising she had effectively given Joe permission to brutally bash the boy, based on the trivial justification that Simon had stolen her prized knife (307). This single assault results in Simon's hospitalisation and Joe's three-month jail term.

Some critics argue that Joe's violence against the boy and Simon's muteness represent the historical violence in New Zealand between the Pakeha and Maori. Antje Rauwerda, for instance, thinks that Simon symbolises the "sinister inner images of the white colonist" and that the "violence the child suffers suggests that whiteness must be punished in order that Maoriness can regain pride of place in New Zealand." Rauwerda adds that Simon's silence is a reversal of the muteness that colonisers usually impose on the colonised.[17] However, this line of argument is undercut by the abhorrence felt by Joe's family towards his actions, which suggests violent retribution is not justified. Moreover, Hulme herself has commented that the novel is not about "oblique revenge," adding that: "All violence does is breed violence." Rather, the author says she wanted to write "a story of three rather strange people" in order to show her father's English family that, on the one hand, "there are wonderful riches on the Maori side of things," and, on the other hand, that "not everything the *pakeha* brought was unwelcome" (original emphasis).[18]

I would argue, however, that the violence and muteness associated with Simon should be read in a wider postcolonial context than just New Zealand, and that it is consistent with magical realism's capacity to convey historical traumata. Eugene Arva identifies what he calls the "traumatic imagination" that is inherent in much magical realist fiction. The narrative mode involves "an empathy-driven consciousness that enables authors and readers to act out and / or work through trauma by means of magical realist images," says Arva. Magical

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[17] Antje M. Rauwerda, "The White Whipping Boy: Simon in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 40 (2003): 23, 25, 30.
[18] Bryson, 132-133.

realism enables the depiction of historical events that are too extreme to be portrayed through realism – such as massacres, genocide, or natural disasters – by "*re*-present[ing] the unpresentable" as experiences rather than as they might have actually occurred.[19] This is especially evident during the scene in which Joe carries out the near-fatal bashing, during which Simon's supernatural extrasensory powers come to the fore. "Joe is surrounded by pulses and flares of dull red light," says the narrator. "The world is full of dazzlement, jewel beams, fires of crystal splendour." Simon feels that he is "on fire" (308).

Simon's disability of muteness symbolises historical trauma in a much wider context than just the Pakeha and Maori in New Zealand. Indeed, the trope of physical disability in magical realist fiction is common within a postcolonial context. Other examples include: Oblivia in *The Black Swan*; Kevin Phantom, the young man who suffers a brain injury after his first day at work in the mine in Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006); and Boonyi the former Kashmiri beauty who grows into an obese invalid following a disastrous affair with the American ambassador to India in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). Ato Quayson argues that the presence of disabled characters in postcolonial fiction generally reminds us of "a struggle to transcend the nightmare of history" in terms of the marginalisation of the colonised. "For colonialism may be said to have been a major force of disabling the colonized from taking their place in the flow of history other than in a position of stigmatized underprivilege," says Quayson. In postcolonial magical realist texts, the disability is often associated with supernatural powers, which in turn accentuates the 'magical' nature of the colonised society's knowledge systems versus the naturalism of the coloniser's society.[20] The disabled, the most vulnerable of society, are typically the first to be abused. Joe, who himself was physically abused by his grandfather, perpetuates the classic cycle of inter-generational – and in this case, inter-racial – abuse. Intriguingly, Hulme revisits the theme of disability in her short story "Kiteflying Party at Doctor's Point," which was published

[19] Eugene L. Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2011), 5.

[20] Ato Quayson, "Looking Awry: Tropes of Disability in Post-colonial Writing," in *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction*, ed. Rod Mengham (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 66.

three years after *The Bone People*. The story is magical realist in that the narrator, an unnamed academic with a mediocre career, is kidnapped and held hostage by people he does not know and for reasons he does not know. The narrator's imprisonment descends into a surreal state of being, where the demarcation between what is real and what is unreal becomes blurred. The narrator believes that "all deformed monsters should be painlessly destroyed at birth" because the "pain they cause to those who are closest to them is unbelievable." The narrator's belief, it appears, has been shaped by his partner killing her baby and herself after the child "wasn't born right," in a moment of "puerperal insanity." [21] There is a connection, therefore, between "Kiteflying" and *The Bone People* in that extreme violence is inflicted irrationally on disabled children.

Yet there is more to this trope of the disabled child who is subjected to repeated violence. Quayson sees "quasi-religious significations" in Simon, in that the boy is "a sort of sacrificial figure" who, like Hamlet, is made to carry "the 'slings [stings] and arrows of outrageous fortune'."[22] Similarly, Georges-Goulven Le Cam regards Simon as a Christ-like figure: his foster father is named Joseph and his figurative mother, Kerewin, is a virgin. "By enduring increasing physical pain through his beatings, Simon is taking the sins of the world upon himself," says Le Cam.[23] By taking a magical realist interpretation of Simon, however, it is not necessary to view him as a Messiah-like figure in a post-sacred world, but rather as a character with a supernatural capacity to absorb punishment in order to pacify the aggressors and in the process gain some kind of redemption for society. This metaphor appears in other magical realist fiction. In Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, for instance, the mysterious European seaman Elias Smith is an everyman immigrant with overtones of Christian saintliness who is persecuted by the white townspeople of Desperance and eventually killed after he grows close to the local community of Indigenous Australians. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, set in 1873, shortly after the American Civil War, the baby Beloved

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[21] Keri Hulme, "Kiteflying Party at Doctor's Point," in *The Windeater / Te Kaihau*, Keri Hulme (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 153, 156.
[22] Quayson, "Looking Awry," 63.
[23] Le Cam, 74.

is murdered by her mother, Sethe, who commits the atrocity because she does not want her child to be forced into slavery.[24] Around eighteen years later, the ghost Beloved returns to visit her mother, leading to Sethe's traumatic reconciliation with the past. In all of these examples of magical realist fiction, the supernaturally endowed character's role is to absorb physical punishment in order to make atonement for past wrongs and subsequently bring about some greater good.

In contrast to the metafictional kind of magical realism associated with Simon that appears throughout *The Bone People*, the Maori mythology and its concomitant ontological magical realist elements are mostly incorporated in the fourth and final section. My argument is that Hulme's attempt to resolve the main characters' personal issues, and by association comment obliquely on wider societal issues, by leaving the Maori mythology until the final section means that the Maori supernatural elements seem like a coda rather than an integral component of the entire text. The main theme of *The Bone People* is the spiritual devastation that results from the loss of traditional culture. The difference with Wright's novels *Carpentaria* and *The Black Swan* is that, whereas Norm Phantom and Oblivia Ethyl(ene) are in tune with their Indigenous Australian spiritual and cultural heritage, Hulme's key characters are not. While Wright's novels are about the propagation and survival of Indigenous knowledge, Hulme's book is about alienation and reconciliation. *The Bone People* traverses a number of genres – romance, domestic drama, mystery thriller, quest narrative – but at its core the novel is about reconnecting with an indigenous culture.

Kerewin is a thirtysomething (24) New Zealander who feels as if "the best part of me has got lost in the way I live" (62). Although Kerewin speaks Maori, and exhibits signs of traditional knowledge, such as a familiarity with making natural remedies from plants (161), she feels cut off from her Maori heritage. Reflecting New Zealand's multi-racial history, Kerewin is also part-Pakeha, having blue eyes, brown hair and fair skin (61). Yet although Kerewin describes herself as being "an eighth Maori" genetically, she identifies as being "all Maori" in terms of "heart, spirit, and inclination" (62). Her cultural dislocation has resulted in

[24] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; reprint, London: Picador, 1988), 149, 164.

an existential crisis. Despite winning the lottery and being liberated from having to work for a living (28), Kerewin has lost her artistic powers and can no longer paint, complaining she is "dead inside" (264). In addition, there is the implication of barrenness, or loss of fecundity, as she confesses to having no sexual urge and claims to still be a virgin (266). Joe, thirty-three, is similarly of mixed Maori and Pakeha heritage and initially feels estranged from his traditional culture. Joe, too, concedes he has lost the Maoritanga (62). Early in life Joe had aspirations to overcome his disadvantaged childhood – his father died when he was four (226) and his mother was a criminal (227) – but dropped out of his attempts to train as a Catholic seminarian and teacher in order to start a family (229). Having lost his wife and son, Joe is stuck in a dead-end job as a factory worker (89) and battles a life in decline.

Set in 1980, *The Bone People* reflects a time when New Zealanders were attempting to come to terms with the country's bicultural make-up, with a sizeable indigenous population who had nevertheless been marginalised since colonial times. The novel's "rapturous reception," as Simon During says, owes a considerable amount to "the desire of New Zealand to see a reconciliation of its postcolonising and postcolonised discourses." By postcolonising, During means communities and individuals who profit from and are heirs to the colonisers, whereas the postcolonised are people who have been dispossessed by the work of the colonisers and are heirs to a culture "more or less undone."[25] In *The Bone People*, this process of national reconciliation is personified in the respective spiritual journeys of Kerewin and Joe to reconnect with their Maori heritage. The theme of discovering and reconnecting with one's lost cultural heritage, in particular an indigenous one, is common in magical realist fiction, especially that from postcolonial settings.

However, Kerewin's and Joe's embracing of Maori spiritualism and mythology in the fourth section of the novel is problematic because their acts threaten to descend into cliché and so risk being categorised as, to borrow Graham Huggan's phrase, the "postcolonial

[25] Simon During, "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?" *Landfall* 39.3 (1985): 369-370, 374.

exotic."[26] This difficulty has been remarked on by various critics in different ways. Quayson says the narrative "falls apart," becoming "highly religious and esoteric in tone, following Joe on a visit to a shaman in a quest for atonement for his cruelties and, sporadically, Kerewin, on a journey that seems not to have any clear direction."[27] Margery Fee refers to the novel's plot points in this last section as being "implausible, even melodramatic."[28] C.K. Stead argues the novel suspends disbelief with Joe's rescue by the Maori elder and Kerewin's self-medication that saves her from cancer. "I found it, read either as Maori lore or as fiction, almost totally spurious," says Stead of Joe's mythological redemption.[29]

After being released from jail, Joe tries to kill himself by jumping off a cliff, but is rescued by a Maori *kaumata* (elder) named Tiaki Mira, who nurses Joe back to health with Maori ointment and "bush lotion" in his hut (348-349). Tiaki, who has an "archaic moko" tattooed on his face (346), symbolising a link to pre-colonial times, also rehabilitates Joe on a spiritual level, saying that he had been waiting for Joe since before he was born (353), so that Joe can take over the role as "keeper" of a sacred stone and one of the canoes in which their Maori ancestors had originally travelled to New Zealand. Tiaki's mystic grandmother, dead for four decades, had told him to wait for a trio of the "broken man," the "digger" and the "stranger" (360), which, at face value, could be taken to mean Joe, Kerewin and Simon, respectively (although I shall discuss this in more detail below). The coincidental timing of some of these plot points tests credulity, even allowing for the 'magical' to occur in magical realism. For instance, Tiaki's Pakeha lawyer unquestionably believes that Joe is "the new watcher," and, without any qualms, hands over ownership of Tiaki's land (almost eight hundred acres) to Joe after the hermit's death (376-377). The lawyer's trust is simply based on Maori calligraphy Tiaki had drawn on his will on his death bed, to match a design he had previously given the lawyer to prove that he would name his beneficiary with a sound mind.

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[26] Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 28.
[27] Quayson, "Looking Awry," 63.
[28] Margery Fee, "Inventing New Ancestors for Aotearoa," in *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*, ed. Robert L. Ross (Chicago and London: St James Press, 1991), 53.
[29] Stead, 107.

Similarly, Simon's hospitalisation acts as a catalyst for Kerewin, who subsequently dismantles her tower in order to roam the countryside in a quest for spiritual renewal and self-discovery. Along the way, she believes she is suffering from cancer, possibly of the stomach (414), but refuses conventional Western medical treatment based on her belief that it exists "in a queer state of ignorance" (416). Instead, Kerewin obtains natural remedies – capsules, mushroom extract, a hallucinogen that is also a painkiller (417) – and retreats to a hut on a beach (423). During her period of self-medication, she is visited by a mysterious "thin wiry person," possibly a ghost, who is "brown" and of an "indeterminate" age, sex and race. The visitor does, however, speak Maori (424). Eventually, Kerewin is cured of the cancer and sets about rebuilding the Maori hall at Moerangi, turning it into a marae with the help of locals (431). The project completes Kerewin's spiritual redemption and her return to the Maori communal fold. Although the final episodes in Kerewin's story help to resolve the novel's overall narrative, the New Age mysticism that Hulme employs to get there is cliched.

Joe's salvation, in a magical realist context, might have retained some sense of plausibility if Hulme had not pushed it an extra step, by implying that the whole of New Zealand's fate depends on how Joe performs his role as "the watcher." Under instructions from Tiaki, Joe's role is to guard the god that came with the canoe. The god, in turn, "broods over the mauriora" (363); that is, the "life principle" or talisman that protects the vitality of people, animals and plants (449). The god, says Tiaki, "is the heart of this country. The heart of this land" (364). Critics have read this aspect of the novel as national allegory. Margery Fee offers an idealised interpretation of the book that seems to read too much into the plot. "Hulme has written a novel that is intended to change New Zealand, to rewrite it into a place where Maori and Pakeha can not only live together but also evolve a distinctive culture that takes in the best of world civilization while retaining its heart in the traditions of the Maori past," says Fee.[30] Stephen Slemon, in a more considered response, views *The Bone People* as an example of an allegorical text in postcolonial settler societies, such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada, which are part of "an interventionary, anti-colonialist critique." In these

[30] Fee, "Inventing New Ancestors," 56.

texts "indigenous or pre-contact allegorical traditions engage with, and finally overcome, the kinds of allegorical reading which a universalising European tradition would want to impose." In other words, these fictional allegories establish their cultural heterogeneity and difference to the dominant discourse by subverting the codes of recognition that colonial discourse has imposed on postcolonial cultures.[31]

However, as Laura Wright astutely observes, Tiaki's trinity myth of the broken man, digger and stranger – which echoes the Christian trinity doctrine of the father, son and holy spirit – is complicated and therefore destabilises an allegorical reading of the text. There is no one-to-one correlation because all of the main characters exhibit each of these three characteristics. Kerewin dreams of digging, Simon digs into the ground to find rabbits (203), and Joe plants a tiri tree at the foot of Tiaki's grave (377). All of the main characters are broken: Simon physically by Joe's abuse; Joe by jumping off a cliff; and Kerewin's supposed stomach cancer. And all three are strangers in one way or another, to themselves, to one another, and to others. "Hulme's characters resist allegory because they can neither be read as one part of a duality nor as a middle variable—'something midway between the two'—that creates the space of taboo, and such a lack of correlation between a prophetic designation and a singular character operates to destabilize binary readings that often inform colonial discourse," says Wright.[32] Tiaki's myth, therefore, is one of hybridisation.

Despite the structural flaw of the novel's fourth and final part, the text's appeal to the re-establishment of a pre-colonial culture crosses over with much other magical realist fiction of the ontological vein. Joe's role as the watcher of the god of the canoe harks back to the mythology of "the great Migration" around a thousand years ago when the Maori travelled in canoes to New Zealand from the mythical Hawaiki in the central Pacific Ocean.[33] Tiaki laments the loss of a pre-capitalist Maori society and "the mess" that the Pakeha had made

[31] Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-colonial Writing," *Kunapipi* 9.3 (1987): 10, 12, 13.
[32] Laura Wright, "Diggers, Strangers, and Broken Men: Environmental Prophecy and the Commodification of Nature in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*," in *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, eds. Bonnie Roos, Alex Hunt and John Tallmadge (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 66.
[33] Witi Ihimaera, *Maori* (Wellington: A.R. Shearer, Government Printer, 1975), 7-9.

of the land with farming, pollution, roads and development. “Maybe we have gone too far down other paths for the old alliance to be reformed, and this will remain a land where the spirit has withdrawn,” fears Tiaki just before he dies (371). In this respect, Hulme’s text is reminiscent of Fredric Jameson’s dictum that “magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features.” Jameson advocates what he calls “the anthropological view of literary magical realism,” in that this kind of fiction highlights the contrast between a primordial past and industrial modernity. Jameson argues that the realism is not transfigured by a “magical perspective” acting as a “supplement,” but rather reality “is already in and of itself magical or fantastic.”[34] Jameson’s comments reflect the kind of reality portrayed in *The Bone People* in the last section. Joe’s retreat to Tiaki’s natural wilderness, for which Joe becomes custodian, symbolises the flight from modernity to a pre-modern world that is culturally alive and inherently magical. The corollary is that modernity, or the materialism and spiritual vacuity associated with capitalism, strips pre-modern societies of their cultural heart. Jameson’s theory, however, is more relevant to Latin American magical realist fiction during the so-called literary boom, featuring authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Asturias, because his approach is focused on the nexus between pre-capitalist and nascent capitalist societies. Jameson’s analysis does not hold up with much postcolonial magical realist fiction, which is often set in the late-capitalist phase. This is part of the problem with *The Bone People*, which is definitively set in late-capitalist New Zealand. Tiaka’s cultural and environmental sanctuary is more an historical oddity, physically separated from contemporary New Zealand society, than representative of an “overlap” of pre-capitalist indigenous society and the nascent capitalist colonial regime (which in New Zealand occurred in the nineteenth century).

The final section of Hulme’s novel is typical of the lament by much magical realist fiction of a fading pre-modern society that has been attacked by colonialist forces in economic, ideological, political and cultural terms. Magical realism, argues Michael Valdez

[34] Fredric Jameson, “On Magic Realism in Film,” *Critical Inquiry* 12.2 (1986): 311.

Moses, "expresses the nostalgia of global modernity for the traditional worlds it has vanquished and subsumed." The magical realist novel, he continues, is a "sentimental" fiction that encourages "readers to indulge in a nostalgic longing for and an imaginary return to a world that is past, or passing away."[35] Perhaps, then, this is an indication that *The Bone People* is better viewed as sitting on the cusp of the development of postcolonial magical realist fiction outside of Latin America, which was heralded by Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. In other words, Hulme's novel, in its last section at least, has more in common with the earlier Latin American magical realist texts than those of the later postcolonial authors of magical realism.

The problematic nature of how Maori mythology is incorporated in *The Bone People* led to C.K. Stead's contentious argument that Hulme ought not to have been considered a Maori author in light of the 1984 Pegasus Prize for Maori Literature, which she won. My purpose in revisiting this incident is to explore the ramifications for authors who write in the ontological vein of magical realism but who might not be automatically identified with, nor indeed even come from, the cultural setting in which their fiction is based. Stead states that Hulme is a Pakeha, despite the author's proclamation that she identifies mostly as a Maori, and so therefore should not have been in contention for the Pegasus Prize. "What is 'a Maori writer?'" asks Stead, rhetorically. He says Hulme is not a Maori writer because: only one of her eight great-grandparents was Maori; she did not grow up speaking Maori; and the Maori mythology in the novel is "unconvincing," "self-conscious" and "not entirely authentic."[36] The Pegasus Prize was founded in 1977 by global resource company Mobil (now called ExxonMobil) "to promote international, and especially North American, awareness of local literary cultures that have been marginalized by linguistic and / or economic circumstances".[37] The award was selected from a different country each time, and in 1984 it was New Zealand's turn. In that year the prize was to go to a novel or autobiography written

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[35] Michael Valdez Moses, "Magical Realism at World's End," *Literary Imagination: The Review of the Association of Literary Scholars* 3.1 (2001): 105-106.
[36] Stead, 103-104.
[37] English, 314.

by a Maori, and published within the previous decade, in English or Maori.[38] Hulme's win occurred at a time when many Pakeha were "ceding some authority" back to Maoris in a cultural sense.[39] So Stead's comments, even though he regards Hulme as "a powerful and original literary talent" and the novel as "a work of great simplicity and power,"[40] ought to be viewed in light of the national debate about cultural and racial reconciliation at that time.

Hulme does not shy away from her mixed heritage: she is of mixed Maori (Kai Tahu), Scots (Orkney) and English (Lancashire) ancestry. Yet she identifies mostly with her Maori ancestry, believing that "within Maori terms you are part of a continuum of ancestors, and through your ancestors you have access, in a way, to what they experienced, what they did, how they thought and felt."[41] Hulme's implicit argument, therefore, is that as long as someone has indigenous ancestry somewhere, no matter how remote, that is sufficient to identify as an indigene if one wishes to. Margery Fee rebuts Stead's argument by saying that biology is not the sole determinant of racial identification, adding that indigeneity should be assessed on how a person has been socialised as a member of an indigenous, or minority, community. Fee concedes this issue raises a broader debate about who can authentically write as the indigenous or Other. Hulme's identification as a Maori was, in fact, accepted by the Maori literary community.[42] Yet the issue of whether majority group members can ever speak as minority members is not always clear cut. The fourth section of *The Bone People*, as Ankhi Mukherjee points out, serves as a reminder that Maori people were, like Europeans, originally emigrants, too, and that being Maori "is more a state of mind than an ethnicity," as reflected in Joe's and Kerewin's spiritual transformations.[43]

This conflation of ethnic identity and authorial authenticity was paramount in the case of Australian author Colin Johnson, whom I mentioned in the previous chapter. Johnson was

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[38] Stead, 103.
[39] Rauwerda, 39, footnote 13.
[40] Stead, 105, 107.
[41] Bryson, 131.
[42] Margery Fee, "Why C.K. Stead didn't like Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*: Who can write as Other?" *Australian & New Zealand Studies in Canada* 1 (1989): 12, 14.
[43] Ankhi Mukherjee, *What is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 129.

once celebrated as a pioneering Indigenous Australian novelist and critic until it was revealed in 1996 that his heritage was not, in fact, Indigenous Australian, but Anglo-Irish and possibly African-American. Despite Johnson's protestations that because he identified as an Indigenous Australian he should be regarded as one, his cultural and literary authenticity was subsequently placed in doubt. Indigenous Australian critic and author Anita Heiss, for instance, refuses to refer to Johnson by his Indigenous name, Mudrooroo Narogin. "It is sad but true that after 30 years as 'the Aboriginal author' Johnson must now reassess everything he has thought about himself and his writing," says Heiss. "But it is perhaps more important that he find out who he is rather than continue to write as an Aborigine."[44] Johnson subsequently fled to self-imposed exile in India and Tibet.

When it comes to ontological magical realism, rather than reduce the debate about cultural authenticity to one of ethnicity, I propose that the imaginary powers of the author ought to allow the text to stand or fall on its own merits. The proviso, however, is that the work must be subject to the reception of the minority community of the cultural context in which the fiction is set. This approach is in keeping with a key argument of this thesis, that magical realism is shape-shifting and porous, that it is a narrative mode which syncretises binary opposites, and that it promotes plurality. Amitav Ghosh argues that if the "appropriation" argument – which is Stead's – were to be extended across all fiction, "it would destroy the very possibility of any kind of imaginative work." While Ghosh concedes that cultural authenticity is vital to autobiographies, essays and other kinds of non-fiction, he says that if authors were to write only about their own "identity group," then all of the narrative arts – literature, drama, film, and so on – would be reduced to a certain kind of "testamentary" writing relating to their own direct experience.[45]

[44] Anita M. Heiss, *Dhuuluu-Yala: To Talk Straight: Publishing Indigenous Literature* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003), 7.

[45] Ghosh, Tapan Kumar, and Makarand R. Paranjape, "An Interview – Amitav Ghosh: In Conversation with Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Makarand R. Paranjape," in *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*, ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2013), 27-29.

"The oneness is still with us": transcending the subnational in *The Whale Rider*

Like Hulme, Witi Ihimaera also uses magical realism as a postcolonial strategy through the utilisation of mythopoeia in *The Whale Rider*. Both authors present a Maori view of reality, which is based on communal society, ties with the natural environment and ancestral spirits, as an alternative to the dominant Western perspective in New Zealand, as imposed by the Pakeha, which incorporates individualism, exploitation of natural resources and empirical rationalism. However, Ihimaera differs from Hulme in that he adapts traditional Maori mythology in *The Whale Rider* to a greater extent than Hulme does in her novel. The central motif of Ihimaera's novella – the whale – overlaps traditional myth and what we might call generic myth to such a significant degree that the narrative transcends its subnational cultural context. Similarly, Ihimaera injects a contemporary twist to traditional myth by privileging a feminist perspective through the young heroine Kahu, thereby inverting the patriarchal hierarchical structure of traditional society. Ihimaera's purpose, I contend, is to make traditional myths relevant to New Zealand society by reshaping their content in order to illuminate deeper truths about contemporary issues. In addition, Ihimaera, like Hulme, is from a mixed heritage (Maori, Scots and Irish in his case) and therefore depicts the Maori way of life within the broader context of a multicultural nation.[46]

At only one hundred and twenty-two pages, Ihimaera's novella is more compact structurally than Hulme's sprawling diverse novel, featuring an ancient bull whale as a central figure, both metaphorically and in terms of the plot. As a result, *The Whale Rider* contains a structural and thematic unity that reinforces the 'magical' code which keeps intervening in the extratextual world. The ancestral bull whale symbolises the presence of Maori culture and spiritualism, but critically the Maori villagers must choose to embrace the returning whale, otherwise they risk losing their links with the past as well as their collective identity. Ihimaera's adaptation of the Maori myth of the whale rider, Kahutia Te Rangi, is typical of the way in which writers of magical realism frequently utilise traditional myths not to convey any

[46] Nan Bowman Albinski, "Glimpses of Childhood," in *International Literature in English: Essays on the Major Writers*, ed. Robert L. Ross (Chicago and London: St James Press, 1991), 39.

truths intrinsic to the myths themselves, but, as Donald Shaw highlights, to express their own attitudes and ideas. “In magical realism it is normally not what the myths are, but what they are used for, that matters,” says Shaw.[47] Alejo Carpentier’s pioneering magical realist novel, *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), established a template for this approach with the crippled slave Macandal, who is thought by his fellow Haitian slaves to have been “invested with superhuman powers as the result of his possession by the major gods.” After the revolutionary is arrested by soldiers and held for public execution by burning, the slaves believe Macandal escapes by breaking free of his bonds and flying overhead. However, the text makes it clear the soldiers had, in fact, thrust Macandal’s head into the fire.[48] In this way Carpentier shows how the myth of Macandal the superhuman is “an illusion,” and yet its power among the collective subconscious is so great that it helps to bring about historical change in the form of the Haitian revolution against French colonial rule.[49]

In a different context, the ancestral whale in *The Whale Rider* becomes the catalyst for the indigenous, marginalised people to re-connect with their own cultural history and thus reverse the legacy of postcolonialism. At the narrative’s dramatic climax, two hundred whales beach themselves on the remote Wainui Beach on the North Island and die, despite desperate attempts by Maori and Pakeha residents to save them. Subsequently, the ancestral twenty-metre bull whale beaches itself, although it brings with it a “mythic” whale herd that hangs back in safer waters.[50] The geographical location is typical of a magical realist space in that it is liminal, set between two boundaries, in this case between the land and the sea. The shoreline upon which the bull whale chooses to strand itself is representative of the third space between the ‘magical’ and the ‘real.’

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[47] Donald L. Shaw, “The Presence of Myth in Borges, Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo and García Márquez,” in *A Companion to Magical* Realism, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Rochester NY: Tamesis, 2005), 50-51.

[48] Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onís (1949; Ringwood, VIC: Penguin Books Australia, 1975), 23, 31-32.

[49] Shaw, 49.

[50] Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2010), 65.

Koro Apirana, the septuagenarian community chief, recognises the ancestral whale's beaching as a symbolic event. Koro is plagued by his own impending mortality and the effects of a disappearing Maori culture and lifestyle, amid increasing urbanisation and the drift of younger people away from the local regional community. This is personified in the book's first-person narrator, Rawiri, twenty-four, Kahu's uncle and a labourer who leaves to live in Sydney and Papua New Guinea for several years before returning home. Koro is obsessed with ensuring his chiefdom is passed on correctly down the family line. The trouble is, Maori custom dictates that leadership is hereditary and is normally passed on to the eldest son (14), whereas Koro's eldest son, Porourangi, has only two daughters, the eldest of whom is Kahu. Kahu keeps trying to win the approval of the misogynistic Koro but to no avail. For instance, she dives into the sea to recover – with the help of dolphins – a special stone her grandfather had thrown overboard as a leadership test for the community's young boys (74).

Koro understands that the bull whale, which has "a sacred sign tattooed on its head" (96), a "swirling moko" (93), represents a last chance for his community to recover their Maori way of life. This is no ordinary whale but an "ancient bull whale" that was "succoured" as a young whale by Kahutia Te Rangi in mythological times after its mother was attacked by sharks. That the "golden human" develops a "master" relationship implies that the whale plays a subordinate role (10). In other words, Ihimaera's book operates within mythic time rather than linear time, in a similar vein to Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* or Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, thereby foreshortening history so that the book's time scheme becomes symptomatic of the long process of colonialism and its residual legacies. Kahutia Te Rangi, also known as Paikea, is the Apirana family's ancestor, a former high chief in mythical Hawaiki, the original place from where the Maori migrated in mythical canoes, who travelled to New Zealand "on the back of a whale" (26).

Curiously, Koro addresses the Maori men about the vital importance of saving the bull whale in a speech that, due to its lexicon, could just as easily describe the essence of magical realist fiction. Man, says Koro, with the passing of time grew arrogant and drove "a wedge through the original oneness of the world." Man, meaning the Pakeha, divided the

world into the “real and the unreal,” the “natural and the supernatural,” the “scientific and the fantastic.” Belief in Maori gods, he adds, “has often been considered irrational.” Koro rhetorically asks the men if the whale is “natural or supernatural,” answering that it is both. “It is a reminder of the oneness which the world once had,” says Koro. The Maori chief then highlights the stakes to their local community. “If we are able to return it to the sea, then that will be proof that the oneness is still with us. If we are not able to return it, then this is because we have become weak. If it lives, we live. If it dies, we die” (96). Despite the adults’ best efforts, the whale remains determinedly beached. It is not until young Kahu climbs on to the whale and rides it “as if it was a horse” that the whale returns to the open sea (106). Kahu subsequently goes on a deep-sea adventure with the herd of sixty whales, until found three days later unconscious in the ocean, “floating in a nest of dark lustrous kelp” and guarded by dolphins (117). Because of this epic act, Koro finally acknowledges his granddaughter as his rightful successor as chief and the reincarnation of the mythical whale rider. “Boy or girl, it doesn’t matter,” he concedes (121).

The Whale Rider, as Lars Eckstein says, is “about belief as much as about fantasy” and the need to affirm an indigenous identity “in times of cultural crisis.” In this respect the book shares a commonality with the novels of Keri Hulme and Alexis Wright. However, Eckstein’s comment that Ihimaera’s book exhibits “an affirmative cultural mode more in line with [Alejo] Carpentier’s model of the marvellous” misunderstands the essential properties of magical realist fiction.[51] As I argued in the Introduction, Carpentier’s concept of *lo real maravilloso* relates to a particular geographical and cultural reality of Latin America which, at the time, seemed ‘supernatural’ to European sensibilities. Carpentier’s “marvellous real,” therefore, is an indigenous Latin American perception of localised reality, whereas magical realism refers to a literary mode. *The Whale Rider*, I contend, does not refer exclusively to a Maori or South Pacific ‘marvellous’ reality but rather transcends its cultural context and subnational origins. It does so by embedding the fable-like storyline within and around the

[51] Lars Eckstein, “Think Local Sell Global: Magical Realism, The Whale Rider, and the Market,” in *Commodifying (Post)Colonialism: Othering, Reification, Commodification and the New Literatures and Cultures in English*, ed. Rainer Emig and Oliver Lindner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 96-97.

central motif of the whale, a deep-sea creature that evokes mythological meaning in many cultures beyond New Zealand, such as Jonah and the whale in the *Old Testament* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851). That humans and whales are both mammals underpins the universal nature of whale mythology in a biological sense.

Interestingly, Ihimaera employed whale mythology at the start of his writing career, in the short story "The Whale," which was published in his 1972 collection, *Pounamu, Pounamu*. The themes and characterisation are very similar to those in *The Whale Rider*. An ageing Maori elder worries the Maori language and respect for customs are "disappearing" (118).[52] Believing he is dying, the elder visits his village's meeting house "for the last time" (115) and observes panels that recount the history, or mythology, of the Paikea riding a whale to Aotearoa (New Zealand) (118). He walks down to the beach to see a stranded whale that is already disintegrating physically: its flesh has been "stripped" by seagulls; and its blood has turned the seawater red. The story finishes with the elder crying out as the whale, in response, "lifts a fluke of its giant tail to beat the air with its dying agony" (122). This short story, then, parallels *The Whale Rider* in a number of ways: a dying whale symbolises a dying Maori culture; a Maori chief identifies personally with his aquatic mammalian ancestor; and there is direct communication between a Maori person and a whale. In other words, both the short story and the novella blur the boundaries between the animal and human worlds, which is typical of much magical realist fiction. Ihimaera's strategy is to address subnational issues in a way that attracts a wider readership beyond the New Zealand audience.

This approach is particularly evident in the manner in which Ihimaera employs the Maori language in various forms for different editions of *The Whale Rider*. Although the text is predominantly written in English, it does include extensive use of Maori language for dialogue and narrative passages. This bilingual technique underscores the Maori culture and especially the mythology that permeates the text. Keri Hulme and Alexis Wright also insert indigenous language into their mostly English-language novels for much the same reasons:

[52] Witi Ihimaera, "The Whale," in *Pounamu, Pounamu*, by Witi Ihimaera (Auckland: William Heinemann, 1981); hereafter cited by page in the text.

to add authenticity to an indigenous perspective and alternative reality. However, Wright's deployment of Indigenous Australian language is more sparing than Ihimaera's use of Maori in *The Whale Rider*, and whereas Hulme provides a lengthy glossary of Maori words at the end of *The Bone People*, Ihimaera does not for his novella. The conclusion is that Ihimaera is asking more of his non-Maori readers to navigate and interpret the Maori passages than the other two authors. While the meaning may be evident through contextualisation in some Maori language passages, it may not in other passages. The non-translated Maori language in *The Whale Rider*, argues Eckstein, creates an untranslatable zone between Maori and Pakeha culture, thereby illustrating the gaps and silences proposed by Stephen Slemon in postcolonial magical realist fiction, which I referred to in the Introduction.[53] Put another way, Ihimaera exploits the Maori language as another part of his postcolonial strategy to present an alternative sense of reality. The Maori language was not officially recognised as the official New Zealand language, alongside English, until 1987, and so at the time of the book's original publication Maori was effectively still a largely 'foreign' language to the Pakeha.

However, Ihimaera reversed his position on a significant non-translated zone for the international edition of *The Whale Rider*. According to Eckstein, Ihimaera took it upon himself to excise much of the Maori language for this later edition that followed the release of the movie adaptation of the book. Eckstein thinks the de-Maori-ised version "loses a central element of its local and cultural grounding in favour of global compatibility"[54] An analysis of the 2003 international edition, which is called the "American edition," demonstrates the loss of a linguistic cultural specificity present in the original edition.[55] For example, in the prologue of the American version, Ihimaera replaces the Maori words *karanga* with "song," *taniwha* with "whale," *tipua* with "sea monster," and *moko pattern* with "tattoo" during the initial description of the ancestral whale (5). A non-Maori speaker could have divined the meaning of each of these Maori words without much difficulty through contextualisation. Similarly, in the subsequent two pages of the American edition, during the mythological introduction to

[53] Eckstein, 101.
[54] Eckstein, 104.
[55] Witi Ihimaera, *The Whale Rider* (London: Robson Books, 2003); hereafter cited by page in the text.

Paikea, the ancestral whale rider, the author replaces *mauri* with “spear” and *karakia* with “prayer.” Moreover, Ihimaera feels compelled to insert English translations to two Maori phrases: *karangai mai* (“call me”); and *hui e, haumi e, taiki e* (“let it be done”) (6-7). What is most perplexing about the author’s self-initiated translations within the text is that he adds a two-page glossary of English translations of Maori words in the American edition (151-152), whereas there is no glossary in the original edition. Given the new glossary, the in-text translations seem unnecessary. Why not just keep the original Maori words and add a translation at the back of the book for those readers who want to check the actual meaning? One possible explanation is that Ihimaera was striving to eliminate any elements of the original edition that might potentially alienate American readers. The removal of an entire paragraph of Maori language at the start of second section, “Summer Halcyon’s Flight,” which, admittedly, is virtually impossible to decipher for a non-Maori reader, suggest Ihimaera may have wanted to make the American edition as simple to read as possible for English speakers. Eckstein says Ihimaera had told him that he removed much of the Maori language for the American edition because he wanted to reach an international audience and that he felt he “had done justice to the politics” of Maori writing with the original 1987 edition as well as a Maori-language edition in 1995.[56] However, the excision of much of the Maori language has another, perhaps unintended effect, in that it compels the non-Maori reader to engage with the Maori aspects of the book, especially the mythology, at a deeper, non-linguistic level. In other words, the deletions imply the narrative is Maori in spirit, not merely through the effect of vernacularisation. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the Maori passages in the original version reinforce the ontological kind of magical realism associated with the whale rider mythology, and act as a resistance to claims of exoticism.

Emily Apter’s observation that any fictional work which transcends its local market and is transported into realm of world literature becomes vulnerable to charges of “cultural betrayal and loss of authenticity” is not only true of Ihimaera’s international edition but also of

[56] Eckstein, 104.

the film version of the book.[57] So far in this thesis I have been discussing magical realism as a generic kind in relation to the novel, which is itself a generic form. However, Ihimaera's story enables an examination of how the narrative mode translates into a different artistic and narrative genre altogether: film. *Whale Rider* (2002) is a globally successful film that garnered an Academy Award nomination for best actress. Although Ihimaera is credited as an associate producer, the film was written and directed by New Zealand-born Niki Caro and deviates substantially from key elements of the book, even though it does remain largely faithful to the core story and themes. Notably, the film loses the postcolonial subtleties inherent in the novella. The text includes repeated references to the dominance of the Pakeha, the descendants of the colonists, and the difficulties faced by Maori people in asserting their indigenous culture and autonomy against the whites. Yet virtually no Pakeha appear in the film. Instead, the movie focuses on the local Maori community. This point was echoed by *The Guardian*'s film critic, who questioned why the "Anglos" who "dispossessed" the Maoris "don't feature in the movie."[58] Similarly, in the book the narrator Rawiri is able to comment on different postcolonial territories in nearby Australia and Papua New Guinea, which provides a broader geopolitical and historical context to the immediate New Zealand story. However, the film turns Kahu's father into a global traveller (but without the same insights) and reduces Rawiri to a comic, out-of-shape jovial uncle who teaches Kahu how to fight like a Maori warrior.

The film does retain the spine of the story and the Maori whale mythology: the key characters remain Kahu (renamed Pai, short for Paikea the whale rider) and Koro; the grandfather's obsession with patriarchal lineage and the resultant alienation from his granddaughter; a focus on Kahu / Pai attempting to prove her worth to Koro, culminating in her rescue of the ancestral whale; and the trope of a child against a hostile world. However, the film reduces the frequency of both Maori language and mythology such that cultural

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[57] Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 325.

[58] Peter Bradshaw, "Whale Rider," *The Guardian*, July 11, 2003, accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/jul/11/artsfeatures2.

specificity is mostly communicated through images, like the repeated cutaways to a statue of the mythical whale rider on top of the village marae. Moreover, the movie loses most of the significant magical realist elements in the book: Koro's speech that Maori myths are both real and supernatural (96); the ancestral whale's *moko* (traditional tattoo) on its forehead (5); the ancestral whale changing its physical shape so that Kahu can climb aboard and hold on for deep-sea diving (105, 107); and Kahu's ability to communicate with dolphins (another species of mammal), which help her find Koro's stone (74) and guard her at sea following her deep-sea adventure with the whale herd (117). The conclusion is that on one level *Whale Rider* does show that magical realist fiction can be successfully translated into the entirely different genre of film, and that mythical time and space can be compacted into one hundred and one minutes of celluloid drama. *Variety*'s reviewer even praised the film's combination of a "straightforward coming-of-age narrative with Maori mysticism," and the blending of "hinted magic" with domestic drama and humour.[59] This reinforces the argument that much magical realist fiction, even that of the culturally specific, ontological kind, has the capacity to enjoy a transnational reception with an international readership. On the other hand, the film version does lose a significant amount of cultural detail and, most importantly, the elements that enable Ihimaera to utilise magical realism as a postcolonial strategy in the book.[60]

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[59] Dennis Harvey, "Whale Rider," *Variety*, September 18, 2002, accessed January 10, 2015, http://variety.com/2002/film/reviews/whale-rider-3-1200546121/#.

[60] Film reviewers tended to focus on the movie's exoticism, both in terms of Maori spiritualism and the lush landscape of New Zealand. Although the film mostly received a favourable critical reception, with child star Keisha Castle-Hughes winning over hearts, the adaptation could provoke polar opposite responses. The late US legendary film critic Roger Ebert, for instance, thought the film's ending "uplifting" and "transcendent." Whereas *The Guardian*'s critic derided the film as "picturesque, risk-free ethnography" and "a cross between *Free Willy* and a 90-minute Benetton ad." For the former, see Roger Ebert, "Whale Rider," www.rogerebert.com, June 20, 2003, accessed January 10, 2015, http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/whale-rider-2003.

Updating perspectives: ecocriticism, feminism and analysis of magical realism

Although ecocriticism has flourished as a field of academic literary inquiry since the mid-1990s, its links with magical realism have been under-theorised. As Begoña Simal states, "little (if any) research has been devoted to exploring the precise interconnections between ecocritical writings and magical realist motifs."[61] An analysis of environmental factors in the fiction of Hulme and Ihimaera offer a prime opportunity to partly address this paucity of scholarship. Ecocriticism, as defined by Cheryll Glotfelty, is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" that "takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies."[62] Ecocriticism focuses on a biocentric view of the world, in which humans are just one part of the entire ecosphere. Both traditional literary criticism and fictional realism have been criticised – correctly – for largely taking an anthropocentric view, in which humans are placed at the centre of the physical universe. Moreover, anthropocentrism underpins the rationalist, Cartesian ideals of the Enlightenment, and provided the philosophical justification for the rapid expansion of European colonialism around the globe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a postcolonial context, and therefore for much magical realist fiction, ecocriticism ought to play a vital role. As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin point out, the history of European conquest involved not only a massive environmental impact through the introduction of foreign people, plants and animals, but often also the treatment of the colonised peoples as being "part of nature," sometimes even as animals.[63] European colonialism's capitalistic structure and concomitant insatiable appetite for commercial profit resulted in significant environment damage to colonised territories through changes to land use, in particular agriculture and mining.

While there is debate about the nature and primary purpose of environmental literary criticism, this approach takes as its basic premise the connection between human culture

[61] Begoña Simal, "Of a Magical Nature: The Environmental Unconscious," in *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures*, by Jesús Benito, Ana Ma Manzanas and Begoña Simal (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009), 195.

[62] Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks of Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.

[63] Huggan and Tiffin, 6.

and the physical world, and the reflexive relationship between the two; in other words, how humans affect the physical world and vice versa. Or, as Glotfelty says, ecocriticism at a theoretical level "negotiates between the human and the nonhuman."[64] Although postcolonial theory in its early stages may have been skewed towards an anthropocentric view and slow to embrace an environmental awareness, postcolonial studies is increasingly finding common ground with biocentric philosophies. Postcolonial ecocriticism, as Huggan and Tiffin highlight, combines the common concerns of postcolonialism and environmental studies in terms of colonisation, racism, sexism and the interactions between the invader societies and indigenous cultures. The result is that postcolonial criticism performs an advocacy function in that it demonstrates through imaginary spaces how the real world might be transformed.[65] It is within this broader framework of postcolonial ecocriticism that I propose magical realism ought to be considered in terms of its relationship with environmental literary cricitism. If magical realism, as Simal says, "concurs with environmentalism and its common disclosure of the interconnectedness of all ecosystems,"[66] then the narrative mode offers writers a way in which to express this interconnectedness through imaginative forms. Magical realism's capacity for breaking down binaries, for creating a third space between the real and the unreal, enables a biocentric view of the world in which humans are presented as merely part of the biosphere and not at the heart of it.

Koro, for example, adopts a biocentric philosophy during his speech to the Maori village men in *The Whale Rider*, when he accuses the European colonists of "arrogance" by driving "a wedge through the original oneness of the world," as well as the "natural and the supernatural" (96). By oneness, the Maori chief means humanity's inter-connectedness with the physical world, as well as the spiritual realm. His granddaughter, Kahu, resolves this conflict, this separation of the human and non-human, by fulfilling her destiny as the Paikea and becoming 'one' with the ancestral bull whale, leading him back out to sea. The young girl is literally and 'magically' conjoined with the whale as it changes its surface to create

[64] Glotfelty, xix.
[65] Huggan and Tiffin, 6, 9.
[66] Simal, 213.

"footholds and handholds," while its "rippling skin" forms "a saddle with fleshy stirrups for her feet and pommels to grasp" (105). The three factors of the biosphere – human, animal and environment – merge when Kahu spends several days diving beneath the ocean as the reincarnated mythical whale rider.

Ihimaera's novella also portrays various instances of *man*kind – the examples given are gender-based, associated with men rather than women – destroying the environment through intervention for material profit or political domination. Early in the book Koro warns the younger Maori men about over-fishing their local waters, for fear of bringing about "retribution" by their guardian ancestors and depleting fish supplies. However, Koro concedes that in the past Maori men and other licensed commercial fishermen had failed "to resist [the] temptation" to make money from over-fishing, as well as profiting from whaling (40-41). This motif of killing for greed is symbolised in the grotesque imagery of five men – presumably Pakeha – dismembering one of the beached whales with a chainsaw and removing the lower jaw. The "human butcher[s]," as they are described, are covered in blood and provoke "sorrow and anger" among the locals for their horrific killing of a "vanishing species" (84). This fleeting act of barbarism is juxtaposed with the (unsuccessful) attempt by the community to save the beached whale herd. Ihimaera's choice in depicting the butchering of a whale encapsulates the depths of depravity that humanity (or perhaps mankind) may stoop, and its disconnection with the natural world, given that the text endows the whale with a special, mythical relationship with Maori people that extends back millennia. The imagery of the chainsaw also becomes metaphoric for what Harold Fromm calls the "Myth of Voluntary Omnipotence" to describe humanity's use of technology to mediate our relationship with nature, thereby causing physical and spiritual alienation from the environment. "It is the contemporary form of the Faust legend, a legend which in all of its variants ends the same way,"[67] says Fromm. Even Faust cannot avoid death, despite his Mephistophelian pact. *The Whale Rider* depicts a more horrifying example of the Myth of

[67] Harold Fromm, "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks of Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 35.

Voluntary Omnipotence with a nuclear explosion in the Pacific Ocean, which the ancestral bull whale recollects. The detonation occurs while the whale herd swims in a sea trench in the mythical Hawaiki, the "Place of the Gods." A "flash of bright light" scalds the sea, leaving "contamination" and "radioactive death." Importantly, Ihimaera endows the ancestral whale with both a consciousness and a point of view, not to mention a rational understanding of science. "He was afraid of the genetic effects of the undersea radiation on the remaining herd and calves," says the text (48-49). This passage is a clear critique of nuclear colonialism, "the systematic programme by which the post-Second World War arms race turned large swathes of the Pacific into a military zone and, more specifically, a nuclear arena."[68] Not only were the Britain and the United States perpetrators of this late twentieth-century form of environmental annihilation, but so, too, was France, which was still testing nuclear warheads in the Pacific when Ihimaera was writing his novella. The ancestral whale's stream-of-consciousness, if I may call it that, in relation to the oceanic nuclear bomb tests demonstrates how ecocriticism may cross over with magical realism, in that the whale is imaginatively accorded the 'supernatural' power of scientific human thought. In addition, the whale herd experiences the nuclear explosions while visiting the mythical birthplace of the original Maori, thereby applying mythic time to the act, implying that humanity's Faustian self-deception is timeless.

By presenting whales as having consciousness, memory and rational thought, *The Whale Rider* moves beyond basic ecocriticism to zoocriticism, which is concerned with the rights and representation of animals.[69] I argued in the previous chapter that magical realism has an important role to play in emerging discourse on humanitarian fiction, in that it often involves an appeal to intrinsic human rights, as occurs in Alexis Wright's work. Ihimaera's novella demonstrates how this argument may be extended to include magical realism involving an appeal to intrinsic animal rights. A zoocritical philosophy accords animals equal status with humans in regards to their right to exist. *The Whale Rider* interweaves references

[68] Huggan and Tiffin, 54.
[69] Huggan and Tiffin, 18.

to the cognitive and emotional lives of whales with the implicit assumption they have the right to roam freely throughout the world's oceans without being threatened by human intervention. For example, the ancestral bull whale accesses "the massive banks of his memory" to "compute" a course through the Pacific for the herd to take "sanctuary" in "the underwater cathedrals" so they may avoid their "greatest threat," that is, "man" (24). Later, when the bull whale consciously decides to beach himself and prepare for death, he is described as having a "primal psychic force" (94). By dissolving the boundaries between human and animal, between rational consciousness and instinct, and between hunter and prey, Ihimaera's book demolishes what may be termed a "species boundary," in the sense of "a strict dividing line" between what is human and what is animal.[70] The rights of whales to enjoy an unfettered life may be read in the wider context of magical realist fiction's tendency to give voice to the voiceless, to reposition to the centre the marginalised and the oppressed.

Intriguingly, Hulme also uses a whale in a zoocritical narrative in a short story published in the same year as Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* and three years after *The Bone People*. "One Whale, Singing" juxtaposes a pregnant humpback whale with a pregnant woman; the two maternal beings are brought into intimate physical proximity when the boat the woman was on sinks, having been struck by the whale. The story contrasts the two pregnant females' intuitive connection with the sexist, species-centric view of a male scientist, who appears to be the woman's partner. "We can conclusively demonstrate that to man alone belong true intelligence and self-knowledge," says the man. But the woman, a poet, challenges his assumptions, thinking that non-human species may also be able to pass on knowledge to their offspring "in ways beyond our capacity to understand." The narrative supports the woman's speculation. The humpback whale sends "dark pictures" to the calf in her womb, including "memories" of fleeing killer whales (65), in preparation for the calf's skills in self-survival. The pregnant whale also sends out messages via low frequencies to "the sea-people," or other whales. The reconciliation between human and non-human occurs when the pregnant woman treads water in the ocean, experiencing the whale's "long

[70] Huggan and Tiffin, 139, footnote 2.

moaning call" that "reverberates through her". "She is physically swept, shaken by an intensity of feeling, as though the whale has sensed her being and predicament, and has offered all it can, a sorrowing compassion," says the text.[71]

However, zoocriticism is absent from *The Bone People*, although the novel does ultimately take a biocentric perspective in the closing chapters. Hulme's novel shares with *The Whale Rider* an overt environmental awareness, which occurs mostly in the fourth and final section that is suffused with Maori mythology. It is significant that the environmental alarmism is raised by a Maori elder, as in Ihimaera's book, which underscores an integral link between the indigenous culture and the overall environment, land as well as sea. Tiaki the hermit laments that the Maori have "changed" and "ceased to nurture the land" (364). Tiaki personifies this societal alienation from the land through his parents, who lived on a farm but "were no longer Maori," despite occasionally speaking the language. "They were husks, aping the European manners and customs," says Tiaki. "Maori on the outside, with none of the heart left" (359). Traditional knowledge is passed down from two generations removed, as it is left to Tiaki's grandmother, who has supernatural powers, to instruct him in the trinity myth that will ensure the family's undeveloped landholding remains in its pre-colonial state. Consistent with an ecocritical approach to postcolonialism, Tiaki is acutely aware of the Pakeha's destruction of the environment through farming, pollution, roads and urban development, and worries that this might be an irreversible trend given that "the spirit has withdrawn" from the land (371). Tiaki's relatively modest patch of land stands in marked contrast to the Maori peoples' displacement from their traditional lands as a result of colonisation. Tiaki's trinity myth, as Laura Wright observes, is ecological in its essence.[72] His grandmother, who had died forty years previously, made him promise that: "I *must* wait until the stranger came home, or until the digger began the planting, or until the broken man was found and healed. Then they could bear my charge. They could keep the watch" (original emphasis) (360). Rather than Joe representing all three of the figures – stranger, digger and

[71] Keri Hulme, "One Whale, Singing," in *The Windeater / Te Kaihau*, by Keri Hulme (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 62-66, 70-71.
[72] Laura Wright, 73.

broken man – or Joe, Kerewin and Simon each representing one of them, the text suggests all three of the main characters share facets of each of them, as I outlined earlier. As a result, Tiaki effectively hands over custodial responsibility for his family's land to all of them. Given the characters' complex racial and cultural heritages, the subtext is that the ecological future of New Zealand lies in the hands of both Maori and Pakeha, not just the former. This complicates a binary postcolonial reading of the novel as Maori being preservers and Pakeha destroyers of the environment, and also acts as a resistance to reading the trinity myth as an allegory, since no one character equates with just one of the mythical figures.

The Bone People and *The Whale Rider*, then, both illustrate the benefits of bringing an ecocritical perspective to magical realist fiction, in that this approach highlights the environmental degradation inherent in postcolonial territories as well as a biocentric (as opposed to anthropocentric) view of the world. The latter is particularly applicable to magical realism given that the narrative mode typically breaks down binary constructions, in this context between humans and the environment, and between humans and animals. Magical realist fiction is, in essence, transgressive, shedding light on the third plane of reality that lies between the magical and the real. What is particularly noticeable about Hulme's and Ihimaera's fiction is the depiction of Maori ontology as being ecocritical in its nature. For the Maori, human existence is inextricably tied to the land and the sea, reflecting mythology about the Great Migration across the Pacific. This suggests ecocriticism has an important function when analysing ontological magical realist fiction that emanates from a cultural context in which the indigenous society has close ties to the land.

The links between magical realism and feminism is another underexplored critical aspect of the narrative mode, although this is perhaps more a reflection of the predominance of primary male characters and male authors in the generally accepted international canon of works. On the other hand, there are a significant number of magical realist texts with feminist orientations.[73] Wendy Faris believes the narrative mode exhibits a "female spirit" – as distinct

[73] For instance, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a meditation on motherhood, the loss of offspring and the ramifications of slavery. Angela Carter's *Nights At The Circus* is an overtly feminist magical realist novel in that

from calling magical realism a "feminist genre" – due to its commonly used elements of diffusion and polyvocality, as well as attention to issues of embodiment, an earth-centred spirit world and collectivity.[74] I shall test Faris' hypothesis against the fiction of Hulme and Ihimaera. However, it is important when discussing feminine aspects of magical realism to not inappropriately apply concepts from Western-based feminism to texts from non-Western cultures if they bear no relation to one another. As Indigenous Australian academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson warns, "white middle-class women's privilege is tied to colonisation and the dispossession of Indigenous people".[75] In other words, the ideals and political gender analysis by feminists who originate from a Western, postcolonial heritage may be biased by this privilege.

Ihimaera updates Maori tradition by introducing a provocatively feminist element: the right for a female to take over as the hereditary village chief. Kahu's tender age of eight suggests the author is also advocating for generational change. The magical realist element lies in Kahu's claim to the title being dependent on her grandfather accepting her as a reincarnation of the mythical whale rider, the Kahutia Te Rangi. Kahu achieves this by physical bravery and a mystical connection with nature. Yet the child has a feminist role model in her grandmother. Nanny Flowers takes delight in taunting Koro, the village chief and her husband, that she is a descendent of ancestral royalty, "the old Muriwi", who was "the great rangarita of my tribe" (14). In the book, Nanny Flowers represents a tradition of strong, feisty Maori women who stand up to the men and ensure the survival of their culture. It is Nanny who oversees Kahu dive for the stone that Koro had thrown into the sea to test possible future (male) leaders, and it is Nanny who presents the stone to Koro at the end of

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the central character, the Cockney aerialiste Fevvers, who is born with feathered wings, symbolises the rise of women's independence at the dawn of the suffragette movement in 1899. Raised in a brothel, where women only turn their "belly to the trade" if "pricked by economic necessity" (39), Fevvers grows up to be a professional circus "freak" (161). Fevvers' stories consist of "the histories of those woman who would otherwise go down nameless and forgotten, erased from history as if they had never been" (285). Angela Carter, *Nights At The Circus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984).

[74] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 170.

[75] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xx.

the book so that he finally realises what has already been apparent to others: that Kahu is the Paikea.[76]

Ihimaera returns to the figure of the Maori matriarch in his play *Woman Far Walking* (2000), which has several magical realist characteristics.[77] First, the central character, Te Tiri O Waitangi Mahana, is the impossible age of one hundred and sixty, having been born in 1840, the same year as the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Maori and Pakeha. Tiri invokes feminine performativity by reliving in her memory key historical events for the Maori: as a soldier fighting alongside Te Kooti in the land wars against the Pakeha in 1888; the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918; and protests against the South African Springbok rugby tour in 1981. Tiri's incredible age and a life that parallels her nation's history is reminiscent of Herbert Badgery, the unreliable narrator in Peter Carey's Australian magical realist novel *Illywhacker* (1985), who claims he is one hundred and thirty nine. The second magical realist element of *Woman Far Walking* is the compression of historical time into the present, as Tiri acts out the various historical events in a dreamscape. Time exists as a continuum, becoming non-linear and spiral. The third element is the rainbows that the weavers, for whom Tiri works as a child, magically weave into their "sacred thread" (22). The play also has multiple layers of postcolonial critique. Tiri tells her sons (in vain, as it turns out) that they should not enlist to fight in World War One because, as Maoris, they will be fighting with, not against, the Pakeha. "Let the Pākehā fight the Pākehā," she says. "Maybe they'll kill each other" (64). Clearly, Tiri's view is that this is an imperialist war, and not a war for which the colonised should die. Similarly, she recognises French nuclear bomb tests on Moruroa Atoll in the Pacific as nuclear colonisation, a form of subjugating "the land and the sea" (76). In addition, when Tiri meets the "Queen of England" on Tiri's one hundred and fiftieth birthday in 1990, she tells Her Majesty: "I was named after the Treaty which your forefathers signed to guarantee our ownership. You have failed us. You have dishonoured my name. You have broken the Treaty" (89). Disturbingly, Tiri as a younger woman is raped by four men who

[76] Unfortunately, the film *Whale Rider* turns Nanny into a meek and submissive character, who is unable to face down Koro's misogynistic aggression, thereby losing a feminist aspect of the book.
[77] Witi Ihimaera, *Woman Far Walking* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2000); hereafter cited by page in the text.

break into her house, in a metaphoric representation of the "rape" of Maori people and the dispossession of their land and lifestyle by British colonists. Tiri, however, decides to keep the offspring of this sexual violence, raising her white son Pirimia (94-95). Like the Pakeha child Simon raised by two Maoris in *The Bone People*, *Woman Far Walking* points to the need for reconciliation in a bicultural society, overcoming the historical violence and collective traumata, although the play suggests this might be achieved through the leadership of visionary women.

In *The Bone People*, Kerewin, as a thirtysomething woman, is a much more complex figure than the child Kahu, and is not a relatively straightforward heroine like Ihimaera's female characters. Kerewin, who is a visual artist, is searching to fill a spiritual void that exists on at least three levels, each of which is inter-related. The first is an estrangement from her family. The text implies that Kerewin suffered some sort of emotional abuse at her family home, the reasons for which are never explained. "We rowed irreparably," says Kerewin. "We wounded each other too deep for rifts to be healed" (90). The second aspect of the void is estrangement from Maoritanga, or the Maori way of life. And the third is estrangement from herself, which is reflected in the loss of her creative drive. "I can't paint," she tells Joe. "I am dead inside" (264). Kerewin's journey is one of self-discovery by re-engaging with her Maori heritage, which in turn provides a communal or familial society as well as an avenue for her creativity (she takes charge in restoring the town's marae). However, Kerewin's femininity is complicated by her propensity for physical violence, which is usually associated with supernatural phenomena. She attacks Joe on the beach during a brief holiday, managing to evade Joe's punches with unnatural powers. "Her hand flows in between his moving fist and her face somehow creating a vacuum that sucks his hand upwards, outward, over her shoulder." Joe retaliates by "powering his fists in a flurry of blows into her" but "none of the blows connect. It's like beating on air" (191). Kerewin also threatens Simon, who sees particular auras around people when they are violent, that she might throw something heavy at him if he plays up (188) Yet the violence that Kerewin employs is portrayed as being destructive: she collapses after punching Joe, complaining of "an ulcer"

that eventually metastasises into cancer; and her tacit agreement for Joe to beat Simon results in the boy being hospitalised. The subtext is that physical violence only perpetuates estrangement, to her Maori heritage, to other people and to herself.

However, Kerewin exemplifies what Faris identifies as the issue of embodiment, in that her cancerous growth may be read as the physical embodiment of knowledge, assuming the disease is associated with spiritual alienation from her cultural heritage. The embodiment principle, in turn, may be regarded as another feminine aspect of magical realism as it breaks down the binary divisions of mind and body, intellect and soul, rational thought and intuitive feeling, subjective and objective perceptions. In much magical realist fiction "flesh is literally inscribed with or transformed by an idea," says Faris. Magical realism's application of embodied knowledge has "epistemological resonances" because "to experience something in one's body is to know it in a particular way," to interact with it bodily rather than to view it from a position of "objective detachment."[78] This trope of embodied knowledge is brought full circle in *The Bone People* as Kerewin retreats to a hut to self-medicate with traditional medicines. In doing so she re-connects with her Maoritanga, through natural healing, and also cures herself of the cancer. Her physical recovery, then, becomes symptomatic of her spiritual and cultural rejuvenation.

In conclusion, *The Bone People* and *The Whale Rider* demonstrate how Hulme and Ihimaera employ magical realism as a postcolonial strategy by using mythopoeia to present an alternative, indigenous reality to the empirical rationalist reality imposed by their British colonisers. While they adapt and update traditional myths to convey deeper truths about contemporary society, they do so in markedly different ways. Hulme describes being able to tap into a "continuum of ancestors" for her fiction. "Carrying your ghosts on your shoulders," is how she explains writing as a Maori and someone with mixed Pakeha heritage. "We are never entirely alone, no matter how alone, or lonely, we may feel."[79] Wright invokes the Gothic in relation to the Irish-French child Simon, who has supernatural abilities, which in

[78] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 190.
[79] Bryson, 131.

turn overlaps with magical realism. The inter-connection between the two illustrates the literariness of the narrative mode, as well as its porous nature by spilling over into other generic kinds. The magical realist elements relating to Simon are more of the metafictional kind, which contrasts with the ontological strain of the narrative mode that is concentrated in the final section of *The Bone People* in conjunction with Maori mythology. However, the mythology Hulme deploys in order to resolve the plot points appears more like a forced coda rather than an integral component of the overall narrative. Ihimaera updates traditional Maori mythology with a feminist twist in *The Whale Rider*. The novella also demonstrates how indigenous language may be used as a postcolonial strategy to highlight the “gaps” and “silences” inherent in magical realist texts that accentuate the oppositional codes of the colonised and colonising societies. While the movie version of Ihimaera’s book shows that magical realism may be successfully translated from one genre (literary fiction) to another (film), it also illustrates how the postcolonial subtext may be lost. Finally, I have explored in these New Zealand texts how ecocriticism and feminism may be used to analyse magical realism fiction. In the next chapter, I shall investigate a highly metafictional kind of magical realism that exploits intertextuality in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995).

Chapter Three

"Cognitive estrangement": colonial archives and questioning the limits of knowledge in Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*

Introduction: Amitav Ghosh's nebulous magical realism

It could be argued that Amitav Ghosh is *sui generis* among writers of magical realism, in a league of his own. This arises from his characteristic style of mixing fictional genres, as well as blending fiction and non-fiction, often within the same text. If a fundamental facet of magical realism is its capacity to break down borders, then Ghosh's writing intensifies this aspect by virtue of its own mosaic-like literary architecture. Underlying this is the constant presence of the author's perspicacious and trenchant observation of human behaviour, which is informed by his training in social anthropology.[1]

Attempting to describe the magical realism found in Ghosh's work is further complicated by the fact that he employs the narrative mode in a relatively small portion of his work. Of his eight novels to date, only three of them contain magical realist elements. While magical realism is incidental to two of them, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), the narrative mode is integral to the narrative structure throughout *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995). Across the whole of his fictional works, Ghosh is generally renowned for a mainly realist style, which fits particularly well with his sweeping historical narratives. Like a number of fiction authors who have employed magical realism – Toni Morrison and Peter Carey, for instance – Ghosh denies that the narrative mode is present in his work. Commenting on his debut novel, *The Circle of Reason*, he said: "I didn't even think of it as magical realist." But perhaps Ghosh protests too much, and, like some authors and critics, he still thinks of magical realism as a form of writing necessarily linked with non-Western

[1] Ghosh says anthropological training – he completed a Doctorate of Philosophy in social anthropology at the University of Oxford – taught him how to observe people and to "translate raw experience onto the page." See Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Makarand R. Paranjape, "An Interview – Amitav Ghosh: In Conversation with Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Makarand R. Paranjape," in *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*, ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2013), 25.

societies and culture, with the exotic Other. For Ghosh maintains “the ordinary view” is that “magical realism … comes out of the non-European world.”[2] In the same interview, Ghosh talks of a desire among Western publishers, when he first began to get published himself in the 1980s, to “reproduce” the commercial success that resulted from the Latin American “boom” with magical realist writers in India and South Africa. Unfortunately, this statement reflects a not uncommon misconception about magical realism that perseveres to this day, despite the proliferation of magical realist fiction from a multitude of postcolonial and other countries over the past three decades. Ghosh’s comment, while admittedly given in an interview and perhaps not pre-meditated, echoes what Michael Bell has dubbed an “ethnographic exceptionalism” within a particular perception of magical realist fiction that stubbornly persists.[3] What Bell means by this term is that the influence of Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez was so great during the emergence of magical realism, from the 1940s to the 1970s, that for many people the narrative mode remains associated predominantly, if not exclusively, with South and Central American fiction. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, however, this is no longer correct; magical realism is an international form of writing embraced by writers from around the world.

Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a pre-eminent example of the fact that magical realism is primarily a textual narrative mode and not a contextual one. The novel is also central to why Ghosh should be regarded as a key figure in what might be called the second wave of Indian authors of magical realism who write in English. They are second, chronologically speaking, to Rushdie, who made such a pivotal and indelible impact in the development of the narrative mode with the publication of his canonical magical realist novel, *Midnight’s Children* (1981). Rushdie’s second novel heralds the beginning of what might be thought of as a second phase of magical realism following the flourishing of the narrative mode in Latin American fiction. But whereas Rushdie’s style of magical realism in his early works, *Midnight’s Children* and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), is noted for its enthusiastic

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[2] Frederick Luis Aldama, “An Interview with Amitav Ghosh,” *World Literature Today* 76.2 (2002): 87.
[3] Michael Bell, “Magical Realism Revisited,” in *English Now: Selected Papers from the 20th IAUPE Conference in Lund 2007*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Lund: Lund University Press, 2008), 127.

clashes between East and West, overt supernatural elements, verbal pyrotechnics, swirling narratives and the literalisation of metaphor, Ghosh's form of magical realism is, as Maggie Ann Bowers says, "less exuberant, and less ubiquitous" than that of Rushdie's.[4] It exhibits, by contrast, subtlety, understatedness, a mosaic-like structure and, above all, a strong textual core. In a broader literary context, Ghosh is considered to be "one of the central figures" of Indian English authors to emerge over the past three decades, especially after Rushdie's early success with his own kind of experimental writing opened up international Anglophone markets.[5] This new breed, which also includes writers like Vikram Seth and Kiran Desai, is characterised by writing about India as a country interconnected with other countries around the world.[6] Ghosh has made the theme of interconnectedness paramount to his overall work, which is characterised by the porous nature of borders and boundaries, both external and internal, geographic and personal. In a magical realist context, however, Ghosh ought to be also regarded as a central figure in Indian fiction written in English, as he journeys in different directions to Rushdie, developing the narrative mode in idiosyncratic ways.

What is particularly distinctive about Ghosh's fiction is that it is more historically based than purely imaginative. That is, Ghosh supplements history as it is written in the official records with his fiction, adding another interpretive layer about what occurred, or might have occurred, in the past, particularly in India and nearby countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand. Ghosh is one of those authors who, as A.S. Byatt notes, are drawn to historical "factual fiction" as a result of a "political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded."[7] Furthermore, Ghosh, in his fiction, recuperates a reimagined history for those people "who constitute the footnotes of history," to borrow

[4] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 55.
[5] Anshuman A. Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1.
[6] Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya, "Introduction," *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*, ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2013), 3.
[7] A.S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 10,11.

Brinda Bose's phrase.[8] *The Calcutta Chromosome*, for instance, is set in India at the height of the British Raj in the late nineteenth century. *Sea of Poppies* explores a slightly earlier period – 1830's India – when the British empire relied on funds generated by the opium trade, with the raw product sourced from India and sold (by enforcement) to China. *The Glass Palace* (2000) spans three generations of a family over the course of a century from the late 1800s, and is set mostly within Burma (now called Myanmar), covering the British invasion, the First and Second World Wars, the struggle for Burmese independence and the rise of the military junta. What is especially distinctive about *The Calcutta Chromosome* is that Ghosh exhibits an acute awareness of the intertextual nature of both history and fiction, and in turn explores the crossover between the two. History, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us, is only accessible through texts: "We know the past (which really did exist) only through its textualized remains."[9] In this novel, Ghosh mines the textual archive of the British Raj in order to create a fictional text that is itself a matrix of intertexts, as I shall discuss in detail shortly.

Critics have mostly focused on *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a work of science fiction, an approach that was reinforced after the book won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best science fiction novel in Britain in 1997. As is typical of his fiction, however, the novel traverses a wide range of genres, including also historical novel, quest narrative, detective story, thriller, gothic melodrama and ghost story. Yet what I propose is a magical realist reading of the novel, which illustrates why Ghosh is a leading figure of the narrative mode, both in the context of Indian fiction in English and that of transnational literature. In addition, Ghosh's novel offers a unique opportunity to re-examine our assumptions of how we conceptualise magical realism by comparing the narrative mode with science fiction, exploring where the two generic forms cross over within the text and where they diverge. This critical exercise will reveal the limitations of the conventional taxonomical approach to

[8] Brinda Bose, "Introduction," in *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Brinda Bose (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), 18.
[9] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 119.

defining magical realism, because a novel such as *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which slides between so many genres, highlights that category borders are amorphous.

Notwithstanding the broader issue of genre, there are two particular aspects of the magical realism within *The Calcutta Chromosome* that warrant detailed examination: the recuperation of localised knowledge; and the peculiar intertextual mosaic that underlies the narrative mode. Critical discussion of magical realism in Ghosh's novel has been limited in scope, with the few critics who have identified the narrative mode in the book dwelling on the central supernatural element: the discovery by Mangala, the Indian subaltern laboratory assistant, of a "weird strain" of malaria that can transfer human personality traits from one individual to another.[10] Yet Ghosh employs magical realism to recuperate localised knowledge – in this case, Indian science – in order to challenge the orthodox British colonial version of history, which insists surgeon-scientist Sir Ronald Ross was the sole discoverer of the cause of malaria, the female *anopheles* mosquito, in the 1890s. Ross won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1902 for his 'discovery.' This aspect of the novel illustrates magical realism's capacity to present alternative modes of knowledge production. But what differentiates Ghosh's treatment is his portrayal of localised science, which is based on faith and intuition, co-existing with the British colonial science, which is derived from the European Enlightenment and underpinned by empirical rationalism. The suggestion is that both forms of knowledge develop through cross-cultural fertilisation. Ghosh's fictionalised recovery of localised Indian science is achieved by rewriting history, in an example of historiographic metafiction, which is common among magical realist texts, but in a manner that relies heavily on intertextuality. Ghosh writes against the grain of colonial history by constructing a counter-narrative, by reinterpreting various colonial texts, such as memoirs, diaries, letters, notebooks, histories, both actual and fictional, and by reimagining the spaces in between those texts. In doing so, Ghosh makes the novel quintessentially postcolonial. Moreover, it is

[10] Amitav Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995; reprint, London: John Murray, 2011), 247; hereafter cited by page in the text.

the complex interplay of this mosaic of intertexts from which the ‘magical’ elements of the novel are derived.

Critical response to the presence of magical realism in Ghosh’s fiction has been patchy. At least four critics note Ghosh’s use of the narrative mode in *The Circle of Reason*, but do not go into much detail. Ghosh is described as having a “tendency to flirt” with magical realism.[11] The novel has variously labelled as “a postcolonial” magical realist text,”[12] a “fantastic” magical realist book,[13] and the juxtaposition of “police fiction” with elements of fantasy or magical realism.[14] Surprisingly, there is an absence of critical commentary about magical realism in *Sea of Poppies*. Yet the magical realism in each of these two novels is readily apparent.

The Circle of Reason satirises the West’s preoccupation with scientific rationalism through the character of Balaram, a primary school teacher in the village of Lalpukur, north of Calcutta, who is obsessed with science and, in particular, phrenology. Balaram’s nephew is named Alu, meaning potato in Bengali, reflecting the young boy’s “extraordinary head” that is “huge” and “curiously uneven, bulging all over with knots and bumps.”[15] Alu’s physical deformity echoes Rushdie’s unreliable narrator in *Midnight’s Children*, the big-nosed Saleem Sinai. This link with Rushdie was effectively noted by Anthony Burgess, who, in his review of *The Circle of Reason*, made the sardonic comment: “A deformed protagonist is to be expected in some brands of magic realism.”[16] *The Circle of Reason* has two overt magical realist events. The first occurs when villagers believe a war plane that crashed in the grounds of Balaram’s school conceived the child of the school master’s wife. The plane was “a

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[11] Bose, 25.

[12] Samrat Laskar, “Trapped in the Circle: A Postcolonial Critique of ‘Reason’,” in *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*, ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2013), 103.

[13] Marakand R. Paranjape, “Mutations of *The Calcutta Chromosome*? Amitav Ghosh and the Mapping of a “Minor” Literature,” in *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*, ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2013), 41.

[14] Mondal, 72.

[15] Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 3; hereafter cited by page in the text.

[16] Anthony Burgess, “A Little Dementia in the Name of Progress,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1986, accessed December 7, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/1986/07/06/books/a-little-dementia-in-the-name-of-progress.html?pagewanted=all.

gigantic chrome-plated penis" that had "an element of the supernatural" (98). The second episode occurs when migrant workers in the Gulf port of al-Ghazira believe the ghost of a dead sheik saves Alu after a building under construction collapses on him. Alu is the only worker inside the Star at the time of the accident. He survives due to a "huge slab of concrete" coming to rest on two antique sewing machines, thereby preventing the rubble from crushing him (240). Although the rational explanation for the collapse is that the contractors mix too much sand in the cement, enabling them to sell the surplus cement offshore (244), the migrant workers believe Alu's survival is a "miracle" enacted by the dead sheikh, whose grave lies under the site of the Star (275). The Star collapse has a particularly postcolonial theme, given that the new commercial site is "almost another country," barely "minutes away from the border," and designed to attract retail business away from the ancient Souq marketplace in the "heart of the old town" (194). The tale, as Robert Dixon points out, can be read as an allegory "about the cultural logic of global capitalism destroying the ancient trading cultures of the Middle East".[17] These two magical realist events in *The Circle of Reason* – the impregnating warplane and Alu's miraculous survival under a collapsed building – are fairly conventional in that each episode has a rational explanation. Yet the audiences in the texts – the Indian villages and the Gulf migrant workers – choose instead to believe the supernatural causes. The reader, in turn, does not hesitate to also accept the supernatural versions.

More than a decade later, Ghosh utilises a more nuanced kind of magical realism in *Sea of Poppies*, and, although the magical realist incidents in this later novel are sparing, they are nevertheless germane to the overall plot.[18] The central narrative is framed by the Indian poppy farmer Deeti's supernatural vision of a British ship, the *Ibis,* sailing upriver in 1838. The text makes it clear that Deeti's "apparition" in her mind's eye is a form of premonition, for she lives four hundred miles inland, "had never seen such a vessel before" (3), and receives her vision when the ship lays anchor a great distance from her home. "It

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[17] Robert Dixon, "'Travelling in the West': The Writing of Amitav Ghosh," in *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, ed. Tabish Khair (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 17.
[18] Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (London: John Murray, 2008); hereafter cited by page in the text.

was accepted [by the people of her village] that it was the river itself that had granted Deeti the vision: that the image of the *Ibis* had been transported upstream, like an electric current, the moment the vessel made contact with the sacred waters," says the narrator (9). Even the children regard Deeti as "a witch" (5). Deeti eventually joins other migrants on the *Ibis* as it transports them to the island of Mareech, which provides the third and final part of the novel. The other main supernatural episode occurs when Baboo Nob Kissin believes his aunt and would-be lover, Ma Taramony, fulfils her deathbed promise that "your body will be the vessel for my return," and that her spirit will manifest itself in him in order to "achieve the most perfect union." Ten years after her death, Baboo Nob Kissin thinks he hears Ma Taramony's voice telling him to sail on the *Ibis* (152). Once aboard, Baboo Nob Kissin feels her spirits "gestating within" him (388), causing him to free the imprisoned characters Raja Neel Rattan and Kalua on the ship (460). Thus Baboo Nob Kissin's actions serve as catalysts for important plot points.

What we also see in Ma Taramony's spirit inhabiting the body of her besotted nephew is Ghosh reworking the main supernatural element of *The Calcutta Chromosome*: the interpersonal transference that is made possible by the mysterious malaria chromosome. This ought not to be surprising as one of Ghosh's literary trademarks is to revisit themes and issues across different texts. For example, *The Circle of Reason* foreshadows *The Calcutta Chromosome* through Balaram's "vision" of Calcutta as a city of scientific importance. Balaram the would-be scientist thinks about the city as the site where the British scientist Ross "discovered the original of malaria," and where Indian scientists such as physicist Satyendra Bose and astrophysicist Meghnad Saha did their groundbreaking work (41). Similarly, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, as Samrat Laskar correctly identifies, is an "extension and continuation" of the postcolonial critique of Western reason in *The Circle of Reason* through Mangala's immortality quest. "In magic realism, there is a re-engagement with the real – a kind of renewed perspective to examine real objects," says Laskar. "What one understands as the 'real' is defamiliarized; it expands, shifts, transforms to juxtapose

elements normally considered opposites."[19] *The Calcutta Chromosome*, as Pradip Ranjan Sengupta argues, breaks down the binaries of "the magical and the real" by merging the two stories of Mangala and Ross, of the Indian subaltern and the colonial scientist.[20] Bowers also regards as a magical realist element the super-computer Ava, which reveals successive clues in the narrative to the Egyptian-born Antar, a programmer and systems analyst who lives in New York.[21] However, to my mind the computer is more super than supernatural, an extension of present-day reality (even when the novel was published in the mid 1990s), or an imaginative dramatic depiction of what computers may plausibly become.

An alien view: how science fiction enables a reassessment of magical realism

In addition to being literary forms that came to the fore in the twentieth century, magical realism and science fiction also share the distinction of being problematic for critical theorists attempting to define them. While I have drawn attention to magical realism's nebulous nature throughout this thesis, I shall now turn, briefly, to the question: What is science fiction?[22] Two of the earliest critical definitions of science fiction – interestingly, by novelists – allude to the genre's crossover with magical realism, albeit unwittingly. Kingsley Amis, in 1961, ventured that science fiction was not necessarily about science or scientists. "Science fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesised on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin," wrote Amis.[23] It is Amis' notion of a "pseudo-science," something that emanates from an extra-textual reality but which cannot be fully explained rationally, that shares a commonality with magical realism. C.S. Lewis, in 1966, outlined five "sub-species" of science fiction, the fifth of which

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[19] Laskar, 109.

[20] Pradip Ranjan Sengupta, "*The Calcutta Chromosome*: A Study," in *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*, ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2013), 139.

[21] Bowers, 55.

[22] Ghosh says his personal interest in science fiction, and science, was sparked in his childhood by the Bengali writer and filmmaker Satyajit Ray. See Amitav Ghosh, "Satyajit Ray," in *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, ed. Tabish Khair (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 5.

[23] Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961), 18.

involves a “pseudo-scientific apparatus” that might even be regarded as “supernatural.”[24] This supernatural element is a clear link to magical realism. Lewis classified his third sub-species of science fiction as “speculative,” in that writers imagine “the probable nature of places or conditions which no human being has experienced” but which have been alluded to already by science.[25] More than three decades later, novelist Margaret Atwood used the same term – speculative – to describe a type of fiction that she argued is *not* science fiction. Science fiction, asserts Atwood, involves “things that could not possibly happen” (books descended from H.G. Wells), while “speculative fiction” depicts “things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books” (books descended from Jules Verne).[26] Atwood’s distinction between the two genres, however, seems to be arbitrary, because it is impossible to say with certainty at any time that a thing could never possibly happen. Nobody has a crystal ball for the future. I would argue, therefore, that speculation about things that could plausibly happen is a key characteristic of science fiction. If those things cannot be explained by known laws, then such fiction may also be magical realist.

Patrick Parrinder offers a simple definition of science fiction. Drawing on H.G. Wells, Parrinder argues that the genre involves an “initial premise” which “requires of the reader no more than the willing suspension of his disbelief.” This initial premise is speculative, concerning either the anticipation of future possibilities, which is extrapolated from “contemporary social and technological trends,” or a “purely hypothetical scientific ‘fantasy’.” “Though backed up by a display of scientific patter, the premise, whether of time-travel, invisibility or (to take more recent examples) teleportation or telepathy, is comparable to the traditional marvels of magic and fairy-tale,” says Parrinder. “Once the premise is granted,

[24] C.S. Lewis, “On Science Fiction,” in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 68. Patrick Parrinder says Lewis first delivered his analysis of science fiction sub-species at a talk given to the Cambridge University Club in 1955. See Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: Its criticism and teaching* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), xv.
[25] Lewis, 63.
[26] Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011), 6.

however, its consequences are explored in a spirit of rigorous realism."[27] Taking Parrinder's definition, science fiction is similar to magical realism in that both kinds of writing require the reader to suspend his or her disbelief, and both are embedded in, or an extension of, realism. Claire Chambers observes that Parrinder's idea of the "initial premise" can be applied to the mysterious biology behind the interpersonal transference in *The Calcutta Chromosome*.[28]

While Parrinder's definition of science fiction is a simple, workable one, the comprehensive definition that seems to gain most critical acceptance is that offered by Darko Suvin. Suvin argues science fiction is the "*literature of cognitive estrangement*." Science fiction, he continues, is "*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*" (original emphasis). By cognition, Suvin means a reflecting both of and on reality. Cognition, he says, "implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment." By estrangement, Suvin refers to fiction's capacity to defamiliarise the familiar, to question the nature of reality. The process of defamiliarisation, of course, is a key characteristic of magical realism. But so, too, is the cognitive aspect, in that the unexplainable factor of magical realist fiction prompts the reader to reconsider the nature of the real world from which the unreal emanates. Suvin also provides a secondary definition of science fiction that is not too dissimilar from Parrinder's "initial premise." Science fiction, adds Suvin, "*is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*" (original emphasis).[29] The "novum" in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is, again, the weird strain of malaria that enables interpersonal transference.

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[27] Parrinder, 11.
[28] Claire Chambers, "Postcolonial Science Fiction: Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 38.1 (2003): 59.
[29] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), viii, 4, 7-8, 10, 63.

Suvin's definition of science fiction has been described as "foundational"[30] and "pathbreaking."[31] Fredric Jameson considers Suvin's concept of "cognitive estrangement" to be "influential," and one that builds on the Russian Formalist notion of "making strange." Indeed, Jameson zeros in on science fiction's defamiliarising aspect to argue that what the genre essentially achieves is to "restructure our experience of our own *present*" (original emphasis). Contrary to much popular belief, Jameson asserts that science fiction does not – and cannot – imagine the future, but rather the genre's "mock futures" transform our present "into the determinate past of something yet to come." In other words, science fiction "enacts and enables a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the present as history." Science fiction, Jameson concludes, therefore results in "a contemplation of our own absolute limits."[32]

Jameson's analysis has a direct bearing on *The Calcutta Chromosome*'s narrative. The novel creates a "mock future" around Antar, a programmer and systems analyst who used to work for the mysterious non-profit organisation LifeWatch, a global public health consultancy and epidemiological data bank (8, 34), and is now employed in New York by LifeWatch's parent company, the equally mysterious International Water Council. Antar is investigating the mysterious disappearance of a former colleague, the Indian L. Murugan, who was principal archivist at LifeWatch, with the help of the super-computer Ava. Antar's investigations involve the 'present' – the year 1995, when the novel was published, and when Murugan travels to Calcutta from New York to complete his own research on Ronald Ross. But these two time periods – the near future and the 'present' – serve as the means by which to reassess the past, the forgotten history of localised Indian scientific knowledge. Critically, the initial premise or the pseudo-science – namely, the interpersonal transference – is not set in the future, in Antar's era, but in historical time during the British colonial rule of India more than a century ago. This is a vital part of the novel's construction because it makes the text

[30] Andrew Milner, *Locating Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 23.
[31] Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), xvi.
[32] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), xiv, 286, 288-289.

quintessentially postcolonial, enabling as it does a reassessment of both the history of the British Raj in India and the supposed independence and dominance of colonial science. In addition, Jameson's key insight and the novel's construction challenge a commonplace misconception of science fiction that the genre mostly involves a *future* scientific invention or pseudo-science.[33]

The Calcutta Chromosome demonstrates, then, a central crossover between magical realism, science fiction and historical fiction (Ghosh's predominant style of writing) in that all three rework temporal mapping and question received assumptions about time. In all three styles time ceases to be linear but is instead portrayed as a non-linear or holistic phenomenon, in which the past, present and future are ever-present. Furthermore, all three kinds of writing have the capacity to challenge orthodox approaches to historiography, by disrupting standard notions of cause and effect, and linear progression. The overlapping between magical realism, science fiction and historical fiction is not confined to just temporal mapping, however, for they share the additional characteristic of reimagining the basis of knowledge. Jameson's description of science fiction as a genre that illuminates humankind's "absolute limits" overlaps with magical realism's capacity to present alternative knowledge systems and reveal the gaps in that in-between space that may be unknowable. Indeed, Kenneth Wishnia, in a rare critical attempt to examine the parallels between magical realism and science fiction, highlights that both generic forms "are fundamentally about the unknown outside of the known, and the unknowable within the known, the ultimate limits of consciousness, perception, experience, or seeing our own world through 'alien' eyes to understand it better or at least to acknowledge its gaps."[34] In turn, historical fiction reconstructs the mindsets and attitudes of past times from a contemporary perspective that has the benefit of the accumulated wisdom of the intervening years. In *The Calcutta*

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[33] The *OED*, for example, defines science fiction as: "Imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, *freq. set in the future* or on other planets and involving space or time travel" (my emphasis). J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn., vol. XIV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 649.

[34] Kenneth Wishnia, "Science Fiction and Magic Realism: Two Openings, Same Space," *Foundation: the Review of Science Fiction* 59 (1993): 30.

Chromosome, the limits or gaps in mortal knowledge are dramatised as the Silence, which represents the history of localised Indian knowledge that has remained silent due to colonial history's dominating narrative of science. The Silence, which I shall discuss in detail later, is the unseen force or power behind Mangala and her "counter-science" (103) disciples. Both science fiction and magical realism, then, postulate an unexplainable event or episode that enables the text to defamiliarise the present in order that the reader can apply a cognitive reassessment of the real world that leads to an understanding of the present in relation to the past.

This is particularly true of postcolonial magical realism, in which the narrative mode is employed to critique the ramifications of colonial rule. Science fiction writers, as Michelle Reid notes, are increasingly drawn to postcolonial approaches to the genre in order to explore "translation and transition in the margins between cultures," the same in-between space that is frequently examined by magical realist authors. [35] Or perhaps, more broadly, this highlights that magical realism and science fiction both work well as historiographic metafiction, or texts that are self-aware and seek to critically rework history and fiction as "human constructs."[36] For as Karen Hellekson points out, science fiction, when used as a sub-genre of "alternate history," poses the central question: "What if the world were different?" [37] Magical realism, on the other hand, poses the additional question: "What if the world *is* different?" Or at least different from orthodox perception.

While Suvin's definition of science fiction appears to have gained critical preference, Carl Freedman insists that it requires two modifications to overcome inherent problems. First, Freedman substitutes "cognition effect" for cognition, thus placing priority on the attitude of the text itself to the estrangements, rather than the reader making an epistemological judgement external to the text. Second, Freedman suggests genre is best regarded as a

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[35] Michelle Reid, "Postcolonialism," in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2009), 256.
[36] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 4-5.
[37] Karen Hellekson, "Alternate History," in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2009), 453.

"tendency" rather than as a classification. His point is that the conventional approach to genre, as a "merely classificatory intellectual framework" by which "each literary text is expected to fit more or less unproblematically into one of them [genres]," does not accurately reflect the dynamics operating within a text. Instead, Freedman argues that "a generic tendency is something that happens within a text" – and, critically, "in combination with other relatively autonomous generic elements or tendencies" – with the result that most texts display the presence of multiple genres. "Few or no texts can be adequately described in terms of one genre alone," he adds.[38] Freedman's "radically different" reconceptualisation of genre in relation to science fiction is similar to what I have been arguing for in relation to genre and magical realism. My argument is that, building on Jacques Derrida and as outlined in the Introduction, any individual text participates in, but does not belong to, a particular genre or, more commonly, multiple genres.[39] In other words, a text may participate in magical realism but will never belong to magical realism, just as it may participate in science fiction but never belong to science fiction. Crucially, this flexible approach allows, to borrow Freedman's phrase, a recognition of other "relatively autonomous generic elements or tendencies" that are active within the text under consideration. A second order virtue of treating genre as a "tendency" rather than a class is that the focal generic kind under critical analysis – such as magical realism or science fiction – should not become a monumentalising rubric within which a particular text is analysed, for this would suppress the other artistic tendencies operating in the text. As I have shown, Ghosh's excessively hybrid novel contains elements that are reflective of both magical realist and science fiction tendencies, such as the weird strain of malaria that enables interpersonal transference, the silence of localised knowledge that highlights the gaps and limits of human wisdom, and the effect of cognitive estrangement that prompts the reader to reassess their underlying assumptions about present reality. In other words, Ghosh's book participates in both magical realism and science fiction without belonging to either of them. Moreover, the novel equally

[38] Freedman, 18, 20.
[39] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Acts of Literature*, trans. Avital Ronell, ed. Derek Attridge, (London: Routledge, 1992), 227.

participates in a wide range of other generic tendencies like the historical novel, detective novel, quest narrative, and so on without belonging to any of them. The conclusion in this instance, then, is that magical realism as a tool for literary analysis is only relevant if it is employed in conjunction with other generic tendencies, especially science fiction. Magical realism, in and of itself, is insufficient to aid a comprehensive understanding of what *The Calcutta Chromosome* is about or how it is constructed from a narratological perspective.

Postcolonial knowledge: cross-cultural fertilisation of the subaltern and colonial

In previous chapters we saw how magical realism can be used to reimagine indigenous history, when the writers of the texts are indigenous authors whose aim is to give voice to their marginalised people after they have been written out of the official histories of the colonised. Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimaera adapt Maori mythology to explore ways of reconciling the troubled history between the Maori and Pakeha in postcolonial New Zealand. Alexis Wright revitalises the spiritualism of the Indigenous Australian Dreamtime and Law in an attempt to ensure the survival of her people's culture in what she regards a perpetual colonising environment. Ghosh, on the other hand, does something very different in order to recuperate the past for the marginalised in India. The writer develops a highly literary style of magical realism to create a fictionalised version of an alternative history, of a localised Indian knowledge that he posits coexisted with the official British colonial version of history, with the colonised cross-fertilising the coloniser. In this sense, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is very much a postcolonial novel, although Ghosh himself – ever the contrarian when it comes to literary labels being applied to his own writing – denies the term is relevant to his work.[40]

The literariness of the novel primarily arises out of Ghosh creating this alternative Indian history by exploring the gaps in the colonial archive. Ghosh delves into the in-between spaces of magical realism, those gaps that lie between the magical and the real, to depict a

[40] Ghosh says he has "no truck" with the term postcolonial and that it "completely misrepresents the focus of the work that I do." Ghosh questions whether Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial theorists "have somehow invented this world which is just a set of representations of representations." See Neluka Silva and Alex Tickell, "An Interview with Amitav Ghosh," in *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Brinda Bose (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), 214-215.

third plane of reality that in itself reveals fundamental truths about the extratextual world. Ghosh assembles a vast array of secondary texts, both actual and imagined, in order to compose a primary text that purports to be the *real* history of the discovery of the cause of malaria in Calcutta towards the end of the nineteenth century. *The Calcutta Chromosome*, therefore, is a highly metafictional, or intertextual, novel, and in this regard is typical of much postcolonial magical realist fiction that seeks to recover and reinstate the forgotten history of the marginalised or oppressed. Other examples that utilise a textual backbone to the story include: Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), in which the gypsy Melquíades' parchments are a history of the Buendía family written in advance in Sanskrit; and Australian author Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001), in which the incarcerated convict William Gould (based on a real-life figure) writes in blood about his escapades in the nineteenth-century Van Diemen's Land penal 'settlement.' *The Calcutta Chromosome*, then, is historiographic metafiction that foregrounds the artificial construction of fiction and history.

Ghosh, however, goes further than the above examples by developing an excessive form of intertextuality that underpins the novel's supernatural elements. *The Calcutta Chromosome* subscribes to the postmodern notion of a text as a network of other texts. I am using here Roland Barthes' concept that "any text is a new tissue of past citations," in that any text is an intertext, any text incorporates texts that existed previously and reflect the surrounding culture.[41] In Ghosh's novel the magical realism is intertextual as much as the intertextuality is magical realist, because the magical or supernatural elements arise from the intricate mosaic of intertexts that tie together the various narratives in the book. Ghosh subtly interweaves 'real' history with imagined history to such an intricate extent that it becomes difficult to tell where the one ends and the other begins. Put another way, the novel creates an in-between history that seems more plausible than either of the other two. The highly intertextual structure of the book accentuates hybridity in a postcolonial context, the interplay

[41] Roland Barthes, "Theory of the Text" (1973), in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 39.

of multiple cultures, and also underscores the multilingual and heterogeneous composition of magical realism. In Chapter Five I shall examine another magical realist text that is also a work-in-progress novel in that a character or characters are involved in the act of writing, which in turns provides a commentary on the process of creation. Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine* (1992), like Ghosh's novel, develops a complex mosaic of intertexts from which the supernatural elements arise.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the key intertext is Ross' actual *Memoirs*, which the novel reads "against the grain in order to deconstruct and displace it."[42] Ross published his *Memoirs* in 1923, more than two decades after he left India to return home to England.[43] The *Memoirs* are, for the most part, a self-serving document in which Ross depicts himself as an isolated hero in a quest to solve the malaria riddle, battling an ignorant and uninterested bureaucracy in the Indian Medical Service, his then British employer, as well as other, European scientists whom he alleges at times plagiarised his malaria research. Ghosh acknowledges that in his own research for the novel he read Ross' laboratory notes and diaries, focusing on how "most of the connections [that Ross made] came from his servants."[44] But Ghosh has gone much further than just drawing on Ross' original source documents, and has created within the novel a variety of fictional sources from different characters, such as journal entries, diaries, scientific notes, letters, emails and oral recollections. At face value, Ghosh's simulation of a kind of colonial archive, which he invents alongside his raiding of the actual colonial archive, might seem to contradict magical realist norms, which tend towards chance and spasmodic events. Certainly the effort required of the reader to piece together the intricate, multiple storylines, enmeshed as they are within the various archived artefacts (both real and imagined), suppresses any spontaneity that may arise from specific episodes in the novel. Yet it would be a mistake to interpret Ghosh's technique as cancelling out the magical realist elements. On the contrary, what Ghosh achieves is an intertextual framework upon which the magical realist elements can grow. In

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[42] Mondal, 55.
[43] Ronald Ross, *Memoirs* (London: John Murray, 1923); hereafter cited by page in the text.
[44] Silva and Tickell, 220.

metaphorical terms, it is as though the author constructs a lattice (the intertexts) in order to cultivate a creeping vine with rich foliage (the magical realism) that clings to and depends on the criss-crossed woodwork. Nevertheless, the overall effect is a somewhat calculated style of magical realism, quite clinical in its execution, which may leave readers feeling they are being led towards a singular ultimate destination, rather than being allowed to imaginatively arrive at the end of the narrative by themselves.

The novel's relative lack of spontaneity is partly due to the fact that the postcolonial fictional narrative, which reads against the grain of Ross' colonial historical narrative, involves deconstructing this jigsaw of differing accounts, which is mainly done by the unreliable and obsessive protagonist, Murugan. He is obsessed with Ross, believing that "some person or persons" had "interfered" with the British scientist's experiments to push his research into "certain directions." Murugan calls this the "Other Mind" theory (36), and in 1987 writes an unpublished paper – another intertext – titled "An Alternative Interpretation of Late Nineteenth-Century Malaria Research: Is There a Secret History?" Murugan's efforts, however, are ignored by the academic community and he is regarded as a "crank and eccentric" (35). Undeterred, Murugan travels from New York to Calcutta to continue his investigations in 1995, but disappears and is thought to have committed suicide (33). As it turns out, Murugan determines that Mangala, one of Ross' lab assistants, discovered a "weird strain" of malaria plus an associated chromosome that exists only in non-regenerative tissue (or the brain), and which can transfer human traits from one person to another (247). In other words, this chromosome, which Murugan dubs the Calcutta Chromosome, offers the possibility of reincarnation and hence immortality. Murugan recounts his theories to his former colleague Antar, who in effect becomes a fictional audience forced by circumstances – his boss asks him to try and talk Murugan out of going to Calcutta – to listen to the main narrator's story. In this technique, Ghosh follows Rushdie's structure in *Midnight's Children*, in which Saleem Sinai recounts his life story to his wife, Padma. Unlike Padma, however, Antar ultimately becomes an active agent in the narrative, when at the end he is visited by a decomposing Murugan via an image created by the super-computer and is, presumably,

absorbed into the mysterious world of interpersonal transference. Given the time in which *The Calcutta Chromosome* was published, in 1995, before the ubiquitous use of email and internet browsing, Ghosh was perspicacious in making the internet a central component of the quest narrative, which revolves around Murugan's obsession to explain the supernatural chromosome. Ava the super-computer keeps providing Antar with various documents and objects so that Antar can pursue the mystery of what happened to Murugan after he disappeared in Calcutta. By virtue of the super-computer as a narrative device, Ghosh disrupts time and geographical space, as is typical in magical realist fiction, in order to foreground the notion of a timeless, spaceless world that mirrors the corporeal world. This is not a virtual world, however, in the sense of digital data that exists within computer servers, but rather an ancient world of accumulated knowledge that is symbolised in the novel by the Silence, which I shall discuss in more detail later.

Ghosh uses Ross' *Memoirs* as an intertext that he expands or amplifies into the author's alternative, fictionalised history of the Indian subaltern. By applying Gérard Genette's theories on poetics, we can explore more precisely the textual essence of this aspect of the magical realism operating in the novel. Genette defines "intertextuality" as "the literal presence (more or less literal, whether integral or not) of one text within another." Ross' *Memoirs* are literally within *The Calcutta Chromosome*, given that Ghosh often uses real dates, characters, events and descriptions in the novel, often communicated by Murugan. Genette's concept of "metatextuality," which he defines as "the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to the text it comments on," is critical here, because it reflects Ghosh's fictional narrative as a commentary upon the *Memoirs*.[45] In other words, the in-between space that Ghosh mines among the colonial archives provides the metatextuality that underpins the book: a critical reassessment of the colonial history of science. Ghosh's achievement is made more nuanced by not having Ross appear as a character in the novel

[45] Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 81.

at all, only by reference. Instead, the author foregrounds the Indian subaltern characters in the race to solve the mystery of malaria.

We may invoke here Michel Foucault's description in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) of the historical development of medical science as the process of the invisible being made visible. Since the start of the nineteenth century, says Foucault, doctors have strived to identify by sight and to describe through new language "what had previously been below and beyond their domain." The perceptual and epistemological structure that commands clinical anatomy "is that of *invisible visibility*" (original emphasis). In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh proposes that what becomes visible to the Indian subaltern eye remains invisible to the British colonialist's eye, at least until Ross' lab assistants bring it to his attention. Where Mangala's medical inquiries fall down, however, is in her inability to articulate the invisible made visible, or the mosquito's role in transmitting malaria. The development of science, says Foucault, depends on the definition of new scientific discourse. Science requires the opening up of language "to a whole new domain: that of a perpetual and objectively based correlation of the visible and the expressible."[46] By the subaltern, I take Ranajit Guha's basic definition of "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."[47] In Guha's words, what had been left out of the "un-historical historiography" of India was "the *politics of the people*" (original emphasis). By "people," a term which Guha uses synonymously with the subaltern classes, he means "the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate

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[46] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (1963; London: Routledge, 1993), xii, 165, 196.

[47] Ranajit Guha, "Preface," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 35. Guha's definition captures the underlying idea of the Subaltern Studies collective, of which he was founding editor, and which was formed in the 1980s to counter the historiography of Indian nationalism that had, up to that time, been dominated by elitism from both British colonialists and Indian bourgeois-nationalists. The collective's objective was to write the subaltern back into Indian history, from below, after adapting the concept of the subaltern from its originator, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci, a co-founder of the Communist Party of Italy, conceived of the subaltern group as those people who were repressed by the intellectual hegemony of the ruling class under *laissez-faire* capitalism, in particular the Italian peasantry. The subaltern, argued Gramsci, "has not yet gained consciousness of its strength, its possibilities, of how it is to develop, and which therefore does not know how to escape from the primitivist phase." Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 210.

strata in town and country."[48] In this sense, Mangala and her fellow laboratory assistant, Lutchman, become the primary representatives of the subaltern in the novel.

Mangala, insists Murugan, is a "genius" who is not conventionally trained and so does not carry "a shit-load of theory in her head," nor is she constrained by "formal classifications" (242-243) Mangala's verbal limitations are revealed when the "illiterate" (143) lab assistant hands some slides to the American missionary doctor Elijah Monroe Farley. Even though she "knew exactly what they contained" (143), she cannot describe in medical scientific terms what the slides illustrate. Instead, she resorts to simplistic, everyday language, saying the slides show "the creature's member entering the body of its mate, doing what men and women must do" (152). Taking Foucault's analysis of the interplay between language and scientific discourse a step further, it becomes even more apparent how Ghosh portrays the nuances of colonial appropriation of subaltern knowledge. Foucault refers to, rather hyperbolically, "the age of absolute happiness for medicine" when the "clinic" (in the sense of both clinical medicine and hospitals) was "a universal relationship of mankind with itself." In other words, before the early nineteenth century, medical knowledge in Europe was essentially a public good, shared among all. But with the advent of government-sponsored teaching hospitals and medical research, and with doctors increasingly supported and justified by institutions, the state's requirement for secrecy arises, which in turn concentrates medical knowledge in the hands of "a privileged group." It is this "esotericism of knowledge" that Ross represents, bound as he is to discover a cure for malaria on behalf of the British government and before any of his European scientific rivals beat him to it.[49]

Most cultures that dealt with malaria, says Murugan, knew there was a "common connection" between the disease and mosquitoes (69), implying a degree of public knowledge during Foucault's "age of absolute happiness for medicine." By contrast the real Ross, in his *Memoirs*, exhibits his proprietary attitude to scientific knowledge, claiming that "no one else was working at the mosquito theory" at the time he was (217) and describing his

[48] Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40.
[49] Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, 55, 89.

"Eureka!" moment (224) when he, as a sole agent, "discovered" the cause of malaria (225). The historical Ross formalises the effective privatisation of his scientific knowledge by writing up his discoveries in scientific journals, letters and, years later, his *Memoirs*. The publication of his writings is the process by which he can claim ownership of his ideas, through the Western legal concepts of copyright and intellectual property. Ghosh, however, turns this notion of individual ownership of intellectual property on its head by interrogating, in the novel, the validity of the real Ross' writings and, more generally, the historical archives. In this respect, the novel plays out what Foucault describes as the "archaeology" of historiography, in that the investigation of history involves digging through the "archive" of historical documents, which in themselves are "systems of statements" that may or may not be true. It involves the analysis of the formation and transformation of statements that constitute the archive; in this case, the archive that purports to tell the truth of Ross' scientific investigations into malaria.[50] The historical Ross quickly moved to commercialise his findings by quitting the Indian Medical Service and heading a tropical diseases unit at University College in Liverpool. In the novel, of course, Ross is never portrayed directly, but indirectly through the perceptions of the biased Murugan. Murugan describes Ross as having the mindset of a "lone genius" (57) who sets out to "solve the scientific puzzle of the century" (56). Lying below Ross' imperial attitude, however, is the ideology of the British empire, that any discovery must be appropriated on behalf of the empire and exploited for both state and personal financial gain. Ideology, as Foucault reminds us, always retains a hold over scientific discourse, dictating where it is deployed and how it functions.[51]

In the novel, Ghosh details to a significant degree Ross' methodology in exploiting his lab assistants in order to access localised medical knowledge and advance his own scientific research. Claire Chambers points out how the British military scientist mentions his Indian servant Lutchman in his *Memoirs*. In Ghosh's book, Lutchman works alongside Mangala and is one of her disciples. "Through his nuanced postcolonial science fiction Ghosh makes us

[50] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (1969; London: Routledge, 1992), 128, 130, 131.
[51] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 185.

realize that the kind of stories in which the tropical medicine of men such as Ross is ‘embedded’ are stories of exploitation and unequal power relations,” says Chambers. “He seems to suggest that it is only when one recognizes that science, and indeed any discourse, are processes akin to story-telling, that one can actually set off on the mutating, evolving course of knowledge.”[52] The Lutchman link warrants analysis. In the novel, Murugan tells how Lutchman enters Ross’ life on 25 May 1895 and volunteers to be injected with his “dead-mosquito concoction” (73). Lutchman, says Murugan, worked for Ross until 1898 and pointed out the dappled-wing mosquitoes that led to Ross’ “first major breakthrough” (77). In the *Memoirs*, Ross marks the arrival of the real Lutchman on the same date in 1895, describing him as “a healthy looking” twenty-year-old who claims to have never had a fever, hence making him an ideal subject for his malaria experiments (157). Ross describes Lutchman as a “dhooley-bearer,” thus a government servant (165). Towards the end of their three-year professional association, Ross praises Lutchman as a “faithful” servant, but laments that he never heard from Lutchman again after they parted company in 1898 (360), implying that Ross would have liked to have maintained contact. Besides Lutchman, Ross also hints at the involvement of other Indians in his malaria research. For example, the scientist notes how he sources his mosquitoes from an Abdul Kadir (160), and acknowledges that, prior to his own research, “some *savants* had *suggested* that the mosquito carries the infection in some way” (125) (original emphasis). In addition, Ross reveals how he inherited “a native laboratory-assistant” at Lieutenant-Colonel D.D. Cunningham’s laboratory in Calcutta, which Ross took over in 1898, and that while there Ross hired a Mahomed Bux as another assistant, choosing Bux “out of about twenty applicants because he looked the most rascally of the lot and was therefore likely to have considerable intelligence!” (262). Ross could only have been interested in Bux’s intelligence if he had needed his help. Ross’ tantalising asides provide the basis for Ghosh to elaborate and build upon, to create a plausible, alternative history of localised knowledge that co-exists with colonial science.

[52] Chambers, 68-69.

Critically, however, Ghosh's intertextual expansion, or his fictionalised metatextuality that comments on and critiques Ross' original text, is the origin of the magical realism that permeates the novel's entire narrative. As Foucault says, "the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut," since a book is "caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network."[53] Ghosh exploits this intertextual network by creating a new node, or a new tissue, by creating an alternative historiography that emanates from a historical reality that we know through historical texts. By mining the colonial archives, Ghosh re-imagines the transfer of localised scientific knowledge from the marginalised to the colonists.

The faith of science: magical realism as a transgressive mode

The "counter-science" (103) depicted in the novel that derives from indigenous Indian knowledge critiques the European Enlightenment tradition, of viewing the world in terms of a Cartesian duality, by elevating the role that faith plays in science. The novel, in other words, not only counters the colonialist version of scientific discovery by positing the importance of Indian scientific knowledge in assisting Ross' findings, but also counters the British colonialist vision of itself, as a technologically advanced, rationalist society superior to "primitive," faith-based cultures. *The Calcutta Chromosome* decentres this "master narrative of Western science" – which, as Lou Ratté says, advocates that "science is benevolent" and "a powerful source of legitimation for empire" – by promoting the idea that Ross was aided in his discovery by people "who live beneath the radar of imperial ideology and outside the narrative of the history of science."[54] The text postulates that a poor, uneducated Indian woman, Mangala, as one of Ross' indigenous lab assistants, guided Ross towards making the malaria discovery, thereby implying a colonial appropriation of localised scientific knowledge without attribution.

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[53] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 23.

[54] Lou Ratté, "Unlikely Encounters: Fiction and Scientific Discourse in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh," in *History, Narrative, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*, ed. Chitra Sankaran (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 17-20.

A primary characteristic of magical realism, says Wendy Faris, is that "the text contains an 'irreducible element' of magic," where the "'irreducible element' is something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse."[55] The irreducible element of magic in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is Mangala's quest for immortality, which she pursues with Lutchman and other cult members. Murugan may believe Mangala to be a "genius" (242) and a "god" (249), but to the British colonial scientists she is a mere "sweep-woman" who is "a little touched" (141) and "illiterate" (143). Mangala, continues Murugan, has stumbled across "a technology for interpersonal transference" (106). This is no ordinary, human-made technology, however, but a naturally occurring technology that can transfer information about a person – or "a matching symptomology of yourself" – from one individual to the next. This transference occurs chromosomally, allowing a person to "improve" themself in the "next incarnation" (107). The magical nature of this technology is that the chromosomes are not transmitted through normal methods, not by sexual reproduction, but by a mysterious "process of recombination" that occurs in the non-regenerating tissue of the brain (247). In other words, Ghosh invents in Mangala's supernatural technology a quest narrative for optimal self-actualisation, an ongoing process of a kind of reincarnation that ultimately results in a state of spiritual transcendence. Importantly, this so-called "interpersonal transference" is presented in a secular manner, with no suggestion of a divine being, or beings, lurking in the background or controlling events.

So why has Ghosh employed this particular magical realist narrative device? For what purpose? Mangala's "technology," I would argue, serves as a metaphor for the self-improvement of the forgotten subaltern, striving to rise above their marginalised state of oppressed physical existence to attain a higher level of spiritual (in the secular sense) fulfilment. It is through their own knowledge system – not that of the indigenous political or social elite, nor that of the coloniser – that the subaltern may achieve this. This is the

[55] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 7.

underlying political subtext of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and so Ghosh is employing magical realism, as is typical of writers using the narrative mode, to convey a political message.

The plausibility of Mangala's quest for immortality through transference is reinforced by a strong presence of the phenomenal world, or an extratextual reality, which is another another key characteristic of magical realism. Not only does Ghosh position his fictional tale within the historical narrative of Ross' race to discover the cause of malaria, but the novel also refers to a second Nobel laureate scientist, the Austrian psychologist Julius Wagner-Jauregg, who discovered that artificially induced malaria could cure syphilis in the dementia paralytica stage (54). Wagner-Jauregg received his Nobel in 1927, a quarter of a century after Ross won his gong. This historical precedence adds weight to Murugan's theory that Mangala suffers from hereditary syphilis and, through her attempts to find a cure for it, stumbles across her own discovery about the immortality chromosome. But because Mangala had hit a cul-de-sac in her own theorisation about the cause of malaria, she pushes Ross towards making his own conclusions. As Murugan says, Ross "thinks he's doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it's him who *is* the experiment on the malaria parasite" (78) (original emphasis). Ghosh's fictional story has historical precedence. David Arnold, for instance, argues:

> It is hard to see how, even at a superficial level, Western science could have functioned in many parts of the world without being able to draw upon 'local' knowledge and 'native' agency of various kinds, without local savants, scribes, interpreters and artists, fisherman and forest-folk, to guide and inform it. Increasingly, in conscious reaction against such ethnocentricity, many of the scientific discoveries formerly claimed for the West have been traced back to earlier sources of indigenous knowledge.[56]

[56] David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13.

Note that Arnold's reference to "savant" accords with Ross' use of the term, mentioned above, to describe indigenous people who had some knowledge about the connection between mosquitoes and malaria. Murugan highlights the plausibility off this forgotten indigenous scientific history when he cites the Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, who developed important mathematical theories without almost any formal training in mathematics. Murugan asserts that Mangala, like Ramanujan, is a natural "genius" unhampered by conventional theory (242).

Ghosh's key insight in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is to reinsert the 'magic' or faith back into science, placing belief and intuition in the foreground of scientific development, and to dramatise the cross-cultural fertilisation of scientific ideas between the colonised and the colonisers. As a result, the transgressive narrative dissolves the Western binary categories of faith / science, intuition / intellect, belief / empiricism, colonised / coloniser, primitive / advanced, woman / man and inferior / superior. What is largely overlooked in critical discussion of the novel, however, is how much of this holistic philosophy is present in Ross' own writings. In other words, the actual, historical Ross complicates the novel's representation of the British scientist as an empirical rationalist. Claire Chambers mentions that Ross, in his *Memoirs*, invokes "the Angel of Fate" as guiding him to his historic discovery, implying that "his science rests on conviction as much as on reasoning".[57] But the *Memoirs* contain numerous, additional references to his research being akin to a religious quest. For instance, Dr Peter Manson, a London-based medical scientist who acted as a mentor to Ross, and to whom Ross wrote one-hundred-and-ten letters containing more than one-hundred-thousand words in the late 1890s, urges Ross to look at the cause of malaria as "a Holy Grail and yourself as Sir Galahad and never give up the search" (154). Ross tells Manson that "faith" carried him through all the years of turmoil and setbacks (285), and reflects that his breakthrough was "a miracle of luck" (227).

[57] Chambers, 68.

Ross also had a literary bent, as a published poet and novelist, which reveals his trust in the imagination and the creative arts as much as empirical science.[58] "To my mind art and science are the same," wrote Ross in 1909, in the preface to the second edition of his collection of poems, titled *In Exile*.[59] In the preface to the third edition (1930), Ross remarked that "men flatter themselves when they call themselves rational beings." His caustic comment is a bitter reaction to the "ridicule" he was subjected to by the medical and academic communities "for many years" until his malaria findings were finally accepted.[60] The poem that Ross wrote the day after he had his "Eureka!" moment, on 20 August 1895, which he coins "Mosquito Day," when he identified how the malaria parasites occur in the *anopheles* mosquito, deserves particular attention. The following day, on 22 August, Ross made several amendments to the poem, which are useful for understanding Ross' mindset. In the original draft, Ross writes: "I have found thy secret deeds / Oh million-murdering Death." But in the final version, he changes this to: "Seeking His secret deeds / With tears and toiling breath, / I find thy cunning seeds, / O million-murdering Death."[61] The extra lines clarify Ross' view that he had to unlock some "secret" of God's, with the implication that this involved a degree of faith, rather than merely divining the cause of malaria ("O million-murdering Death"). Moreover, Ross changes the first line in the original, which refers to a "designing God," to read "relenting God." This reinforces the notion that Ross' deity gave up the secret of malaria to this particular assiduous believer. The final version of the poem is published in Ghosh's novel, as it is inscribed on a memorial to Ross at the Presidency General Hospital in Calcutta, which Murugan visits a century after the poem was written.

So why does Ghosh misrepresent Ross in his novel as a one-dimensional character who lurks off-stage, as it were, as a more or less passive agent? Why does the author raid

[58] The real-life Ross was so committed to his literary aspirations that, years before his malaria discovery, he was seriously "thinking of taking to literature as a profession" after his first pension became due in 1897, having been inspired by Rudyard Kipling and other former British officers in India who had became successful writers of fiction.[58] Although Ross did not live up to his literary dreams, he did realise limited achievement. In 1896, Ross' novel *Spirit of Storm*, published by Methuen & Co, sold out its first edition of 2,000 copies. See Ross, *Memoirs*, 106.

[59] Ronald Ross, *In Exile* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1931), v.

[60] Ross, *In Exile*, ix.

[61] Ross, *Memoirs*, 226.

the colonial archive only to deliberately distort the central figure in the quest narrative regarding the discovery of the cause of one of the world's major diseases? In simple terms, the mischaracterisation of Ross serves Ghosh's polemic: that British colonial forces suppressed the development of subaltern Indian people during the Raj; that the European colonists' mentality was one of narrow-minded rationalism, whereas the subaltern world view was imbued with intuition and imagination plus a communal, rather than individualistic, vision of science. If Ghosh were to have attributed his fictionalised Ross with any artistic temperament or creative desire, it would have muddied the neat binary oppositions that his polemic requires. Moreover, Ghosh's approach is typical of what often occurs in magical realism with a historiographic metafictional element, in that the author consciously alters some of the historical aspects in order to highlight the impossibility of really knowing exactly what happened in the past. Although it is a fact that the real Ronald Ross wrote and published poems and novels, how can we know, from a contemporary perspective, to what extent he truly adhered to his comment that "art and science are the same"? Or how much Ross truly believed that his famous scientific discovery was due to "God" finally "relenting" and giving up "His" secrets? The real Ross was certainly conceited and arrogant. So was he trying to paint himself in a more favourable light through his poetry? In the next chapter, I shall examine a similar approach, when Rushdie distorts the historical reality of Kashmir in *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) for his own polemical ends.

What complicates the fictional portrayal of the real-life Ross even further is the historical figure's assumption of superiority in regards to "race," which reflects European attitudes of the late nineteenth century. Ross regards India as a civilisation in decay, "ruled by superstitions" and held back by "nescience," which he defines as "the opposite of science."[62] Michael Adas shows how Europeans in Ross' era assumed that their self-perceived scientific and technological advancement proved their innate superiority over Asians and Africans, the non-white subjects of the European empires. This attitude was used "to justify European conquest, commercial expansion, and efforts to educate and uplift the

[62] Ross, *In Exile*, v-vi.

'benighted' peoples of the non-Western world."[63] Yet Adas warns that it is incorrect to label these "superior" Europeans as racist, given that they placed a priority on science and technology – and not race – as central factors in what it meant to be civilised. "The majority of nineteenth-century Europeans used the term 'race' interchangeable with 'nation,' 'people,' or 'ethnolinguistic group'," argues Adas.[64] Nevertheless, Adas concedes that European white superiority not only impeded the spread of Western knowledge and technology, but also "undermined techniques of production and ways of thinking about the natural world indigenous to African and Asian societies." Adas adds: "Their demise means the neglect or loss of values, understandings, and methods that might have enriched and modified the course of development dominated by Western science and technology."[65]

This is precisely Ghosh's rhetorical point. Ghosh's project is in accordance with the aims of the Subaltern Studies collective in that the novel re-imagines the recuperation of a subaltern history of science which, in its fictionalised form, goes beyond that achieved by the ruling British colonial scientific administration, and indeed influences the course of events for the British empire's scientific representative, Ross. The primary agent for this alternative knowledge in the historical narrative is Mangala, who complicates the overall narrative for a variety of reasons. Mangala is marginalised on multiple levels: for her gender, class and colonised status. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak observes, the subaltern woman is "doubly effaced" because of the dominance of the male in society due to the ideological construction of gender.[66] Mangala's complexity, therefore, makes her more than just a stand-in for the non-Western Other. Through her character, Ghosh foregrounds the complexity that existed (and still exists) within the subaltern components of Indian society, highlighting that the "subaltern" is anything but a homogenous sub-stratum. This indicates a conscious attempt by Ghosh to abide by the philosophy of the Subaltern Studies group, in that it is the

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[63] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 342.
[64] Adas, 339.
[65] Adas, 15.
[66] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 41.

responsibility of intellectuals to acknowledge and somehow recuperate for signifying registers the history and presence of the subaltern.[67]

Ghosh takes his postcolonial critique of the subaltern a step further by creating a counterpart for the colonised Mangala in post-independence India. Urmila Roy, whom we see living in Calcutta in 1995, is in many respects Mangala's antithesis: a young, single, urban, educated, highly literate professional woman who is financially independent from working as a journalist for a news magazine. Nevertheless, Urmila still struggles to evade the strictures of traditional society and family expectations: for example, Urmila supports her elderly parents and younger brother financially, and resists her mother's attempts to marry her off and quit her "awful job" (131). Above all, Urmila acts rationally. Yet whereas Ghosh initially sets up Urmila as a foil for Mangala, by the end of the novel the two characters effectively merge into the one. Murugan concludes that Urmila is the person whom Mangala's spirit has chosen to be reincarnated (304). So what is Ghosh saying about the subaltern in this Mangala-Urmila pairing from antithesis to synthesis? On a prosaic level, the counterpoint illustrates upward social mobility for women and the marginalised in a modern, capitalist society. But on a deeper level, Ghosh is suggesting that the subaltern knowledge from colonial India is something which ought to be inherited by, and passed on to, all Indians, and not just the subaltern, in the post-independence era. Urmila does not and cannot represent the subaltern, as she is an ambitious, middle-class, white-collar worker. But Ghosh ingeniously employs the supernatural – in the form of the Silence and the interpersonal transference technology – and magical realist techniques to demonstrate that Urmila is the natural inheritor, or beneficiary, of Mangala's knowledge. Moreover, that the rational Urmila ultimately accepts Mangala's mysticism suggests a breaking down of the rational and the intuitive, the scientific and the spiritual.

The novel's metaphor of the "Silence" represents the history of subaltern knowledge that has remained silent due to colonial history's dominating narrative of science.[68] Although

[67] Amitav Ghosh's essay "The Slave of Ms.H.6" was first published in the *Subaltern Studies* journal in 1992.

the Silence is never defined as such, we can infer that it is the unseen force or power behind Mangala and her "counter-science" disciples. The Silence is a metaphoric expression of religion, of a spiritual realm that guides the earthly believers and removes those who threaten to obstruct their progress. In the novel, the legendary Indian fiction writer Phulboni, who at eighty-five has spent his life searching in vain for the Silence, describes the Silence as "that most secret of deities" and Mangala as its "mistress" (31). During the television broadcast of an awards ceremony in the mid-1990s, Phulboni breaks down and, in tears, bemoans that he has tried "to find my way to her," to join her "secret circle." "I know my time is running out," says Phulboni. "I know that the crossing is nigh. ... Only once did I sin against the Silence" (122-123). The Silence, says Murugan, is for its followers "a religion," and one that chooses a handful of people "every once in a while" to take that religion forward in time (216). Besides Phulboni's televised breakdown, the only other occasion the Silence plays an active role in the text is when, in 1898, the Surgeon-Colonel D.D. Cunningham, a pathologist and Fellow of the Royal Society, who initially did not want Ross to transfer to Calcutta, abruptly retires, allowing Ross to take over his lab.[69] On his way back to England, Cunningham stops in Madras to attend a mystic session and has a "psychotic" meltdown. Mme Salminen, who is conducting the session, says: "There is nothing I can do: the Silence has come to claim him" (211). At this point, the text attempts to imbue the Silence with historical verisimilitude by depicting Mme Salminen as an interpreter of "the truth of Valentinian cosmology," which is based on the second-century Alexandrian philosopher and Christian Gnostic Valentinus. Valentinian cosmology, according to the novel, has as its "ultimate deities … the Abyss and the Silence, the one being male and the other female, the one representing mind and the other truth" (212). In terms of characterisation, the male is represented by Ross and the

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[68] Ghosh, when asked in an interview about what the Silence represents in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, replied: "I think silence is something which plays a very important part especially within Indian lives. ... [T]here were so many sorts of events which are just constantly, as it were, wrapped in silence." See Chitra Sankaran, "Diasporic Predicaments: An Interview with Amitav Ghosh," in *History, Narrative, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*, ed. Chitra Sankaran (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 12.

[69] The real-life Cunningham's lab in Calcutta was, in fact, placed at Ross' disposal after Cunningham, who was a Professor of Physiology, retired in 1898. The lab was where Ross made his critical malaria discovery. Ross describes the lab as "an isolated building close to a large European hospital, a native hospital and two jails. It has all necessary appliances." See Ross, *Memoirs*, 259, 260, 262.

female by Mangala. What is interesting about this Valentinian connection is that the novel proposes a holistic spiritual view of what would ordinarily be considered Manichean dualities. Moreover, as Mondal points out, by invoking the ancient Christian heretical concept of *gnosis*, or secret knowledge, the text suggests that "truth is beyond knowledge" and so "Ghosh is using a religious register to map the limits of scientific rationalism."[70] Put another way, the Silence represents the unseen, unobservable matrix of total knowledge that drives forward particular branches of knowledge. On another level, however, Ghosh is synthesising ideas of faith in Christianity and the Indian subaltern, thereby reconciling Ross' belief in the role of faith in scientific discovery and Mangala's reliance on faith in her counter-science of interpersonal transference. *The Calcutta Chromosome*, therefore, reflects what Eva Aldea regards as the fundamental nature of magical realist-fiction; that is, the magic and the real are "two sides of the same thing" even though at the same time they are radically different.[71] In other words, the magic of magical realism is that it sets up a "system of convergence" between two elements that appear disparate but which are part of the same ontological principle.[72] In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the Silence symbolises this unifying phenomenon by converging faith and rationality, the colonial and the subaltern, the secular and the religious.

Yet if we do take the Silence as a synecdoche for total, or unattainable, knowledge, the novel's ambiguous ending seems to offer a warning about this meta-knowledge, something inherently sinister, like Icarus flying too close to the sun. Antar, who has been investigating Murugan's disappearance, eventually sees Murugan in a hologram-type image generated by the super-computer Ava. Murugan has become a grotesque figure with "yellow, decaying teeth," "grime-caked eyes," a "swollen, distended belly," thighs "caked with mud and excrement," and maggots in his hair. The bodily grotesque, as Jenni Adams points out, is "a recurrent feature" of magical realist fiction, and is the literary embodiment or

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[70] Mondal, 60.
[71] Eva Aldea, *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature* (New York: Continuum Literary Studies, 2011), 44.
[72] Aldea, 34, 147.

representation of trauma.[73] Curiously, Murugan's hands are "bound together by a pair of steel handcuffs" (291-292). Why is he handcuffed? We don't know. But we can presume that Murugan did cross over to be reincarnated because he begged Urmila, who is Mangala reincarnated, to take him with her and she promised to do so (304), thereby implying that Murugan becomes the latest incarnation of Lutchman. On the novel's final page, Antar finds himself surrounded by a number of people. A "restraining hand" appears "upon his wrist" as voices whisper: "We'll help you across" (306). Handcuffs and a restraining hand are hardly symbols of freedom. On the contrary, they imply confinement or captivity.

This unsettling aspect of *The Calcutta* Chromosome, as well as the hauntology of colonised people, is conveyed through the metaphor of ghosts, which is a common fictional device in magical realist fiction. Ghosts, of course, are by no means unique to magical realism, and appear in all sorts of genres that tap into the paranormal, such as fantasy, gothic and horror. What is distinctive about ghosts in magical realist fiction, however, is that, in keeping with the rules of the narrative mode, the characters accept the ghosts as a quotidian occurrence and not something out of the ordinary. In García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for instance, Aureliano Segundo Buendía casually meets with the ghost of Melquíades "almost every afternoon" so that the spirit can infuse the young man with his wisdom of the world.[74] In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), the title character, Beloved, the late-teenage ghost of the baby girl who was murdered by her mother, is accepted back into the family home by her mother, her mother's boyfriend and her sister. Moreover, Ghosh cleverly employs the metafictional technique of having ghosts appear not as characters in the main narrative, but rather as spectral figures in the short stories of Phulboni and the anecdotes of Murugan, thereby reinforcing the textual essence of Ghosh's kind of magical realism. "The lively commerce in ghosts that we see in Ghosh's fiction and non-fiction

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[73] Jenni Adams, *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 82.
[74] Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Pan Books, 1978), 154.

testifies to a spectral ethics particular to postcolonial epistemological endeavors; the ghost, in this context, is a … corpse of lost or invisible knowledge," says Bishnupriya Ghosh.[75]

This statement invokes Jacques Derrida's notion of the spectre's role in history. Although Derrida was talking specifically about the spectre of Marxism in the late capitalist era, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, his concept is applicable in a wider context here. The "spectral moment," as Derrida highlights, does not belong to that particular moment in which it occurs, but rather acts as a link between the modalised presents – the past present, the actual present and the future present. Critically, the essential characteristic of the spectre, or the ghost, is repetition, but a peculiar type of repetition because it "*begins by coming back*" (original emphasis). It is this process of repetition, of the ghost's constant returns, that prompts us to question why the spectre keeps coming back, leading us in turn to examine our understandings of ontology and even teleology. "Let us call it a *hauntology*," suggests Derrida (original emphasis). Hegemony, he continues, organises the repression and thus confirmation of a haunting.[76] So just as the hegemonic ideologies of "neocapitalism" and "neoliberalism" in the post-Gorbachev era ensure the hauntology of Marxism, the hegemonic ideology of imperialism during the British Raj guaranteed the hauntology of a subaltern knowledge. The portrayal of this hauntology as a series of constantly returning ghosts in *The Calcutta Chromosome* illustrates that the repression of Indian subaltern knowledge is as much a problem for today as it was during the British colonial era. Similarly, the ghost of Melquíades recalls the hauntology of the Spanish conquistadors in Latin America, while the ghost of Beloved reveals the hauntology of slavery in post-Civil War America.

Ghosts appear at least twice in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Ava the supercomputer recounts Murugan's story, retrieved from an old email, about how the American missionary doctor Elijah Farley visits D.D. Cunningham and, after growing suspicious that Mangala is "a

[75] Bishnupriya Ghosh, "When Speaking with Ghosts: Spectral Ethics in *The Calcutta Chromosome*," in *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Brinda Bose (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), 117.

[76] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1993; London and New York: Routledge, 1994), xx, 10-11, 37.

false prophetess," discovers that she knows about Laveran's theory of mosquitoes yet is hiding this knowledge from her employer, Cunningham, who is Ross' predecessor at the Calcutta lab. Farley confronts Mangala's assistant Lutchman, who promises to reveal all if he accompanies him to his birthplace in Barich. Before leaving, Farley writes in a letter about the "phantom" nature of the circumstances, that "everything is other than what it appears to be." We may read the word phantom as alluding to Lutchman's spectral essence, as a reincarnation of the ghostlike figure Laakhan. Farley, however, disappears after disembarking from their train in Renupur and is neither seen nor heard from again (153). In this anecdote the phantom Lutchman / Laakhan represents an agent of the Silence, and acts to prevent a Westerner from getting too close to this occult-like subaltern knowledge.

The second ghost episode is more complex given its intertextual nature and postcolonial overtones, but like the other story it involves trains. Phulboni, whose pen name suggests a dual personality, since his real name is Saiyad Murad Husain (27), as a young man publishes a collection of short stories called *The Laakhan Stories*, which are said to be a message to remind people of a "kind of shared secret" (110). Urmila reveals a Laakhan story about Phulboni that is presumably not in his book but explains his quest for the Silence. In 1933, Phulboni, while working for a British firm that makes soaps, oils and household goods, a job that aligns him with Western colonialism, travels by train to Renupur and, against the station master's advice, sleeps the first night in the signal room. During the night, he is lured outside by a voice shouting "Laakhan." Phulboni wakes up lying on a mattress on the railway tracks and narrowly avoids being killed by a train. The train's engineer tells Phulboni that there has not been a station master at Renupur for more than thirty years. The guard's story suggests the young boy who once lived in the signal room, named Laakhan, was the Lutchman taken in by Mangala (253-280). Ghosh has confirmed that his Phulboni / Laakhan story was influenced by Rabindranath Tagore's short story "The Hunger of Stones" ("*Kshudhita Pāshān*"), which Ghosh translated from the original Bengali into English.[77] In

[77] Bishnupriya Ghosh, 121. Amitav Ghosh's translation of "The Hunger of Stones" is published in Amitav Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2002), 326-339.

Tagore's short story, an Indian tax collector is sent to the remote town of Barich (Lutchman's birthplace in Ghosh's novel) where there is an unoccupied white marble palace that is two-hundred-and-fifty years old. Despite warnings from an elderly clerk, the tax collector stays at the palace during the nights, and falls under the spell of ghosts which are themselves haunted by "unfulfilled desire and demented lust." Both stories, then, feature a central character who is Westernised and who has a supernatural encounter that reveals the limits of rational knowledge. Ghosh describes Tagore's short story as "'a sort of elaborate metaphor of colonialism and this man looking for an identity."[78] Elaborating on the author's explanation, Mondal says the Phulboni / Laakhan short story can be read "as an allegory of the ethnological encounter between colonisers and colonised peoples and cultures."[79]

What I propose, however, is a magical realist reading of the ghost stories in *The Calcutta Chromosome* in which the supernatural element – the various encounters between spectral beings and people – foregrounds the existence of an alternative and unclaimed knowledge system while also critiquing the limits of Western rationalism. The ghostly presences ought to be interpreted in a postcolonial context given that they resist the intrusion of the Westernised figures. The Laakhan / Lutchman spectre keeps reappearing in the narrative to serve as a hauntology of the Indian subaltern, enabling the repressed invisible people to become visible. Ghosts, as Nicolas Royle points out, are the most striking examples of what Sigmund Freud dubbed the "uncanny" (*das Unheimliche*), a concept I explored in Chapter One in relation to Alexis Wright. If the uncanny is "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" – either by something familiar unexpectedly arising in an unfamiliar context, or by something unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context – then the uncanny is a concept relatable to magical realism, which is characterised by the juxtaposition of the real (familiar) and supernatural (unfamiliar, at least to the reader).[80] David Mikics suggests the uncanny and magical realism share such strong affinities that magical realism is, in fact, "a mode or subset of the uncanny." "Both the uncanny and

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[78] Mondal, 60.
[79] Monday, 61.
[80] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1, 51.

magical realism narrate fantastic events not merely alongside real ones, but as if they were real," says Mikics. But whereas the uncanny is "a historical and cultural phenomenon," he argues that magical realism focuses "on a particular historical moment afflicted or graced by this doubleness" of the conjunction of the ordinary and the fantastic.[81] While Mikics is correct to highlight the parallels between magical realism and the uncanny, he goes too far in asserting that the former is a subset of the latter. For one thing, the supernatural elements in magical realist fiction are entirely familiar to the characters within the text, which complicates the parallel. For another thing, although a magical realist text may be set within a particular historical moment, the narrative mode's characteristic fracturing of time and place implies that the events occurring within the text have a resonance both before and after the narrative timeframe. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, for instance, Mangala's influence over Ross in India the 1890s has direct relevance not only to Antar in New York in the 1990s, but also to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

The problem of definition: how Ghosh's fiction defies magical realist categorisation

Ghosh's unique style of magical realism in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is problematic in that it almost defies categorisation. But perhaps this is more a reflection of Ghosh's distinctive style of writing overall, notable for its mix of genres, of fiction and history, as well as fiction and non-fiction. Ghosh, when asked about his blending of anthropology and other disciplines, replied that he does not see a "disconnection" between "my writing and other kinds of work." "I don't think of writing as something which is opposed to other forms of knowledge, other ways of knowing," says Ghosh.[82] On the other hand, Ghosh is, to an extent, representative of many postmodern writers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries who see no contradiction in hybrid writing. Robert Dixon notes that Ghosh's tendency to "move freely" between anthropology, history and fiction "is symptomatic of the extent to which traditional

[81] David Mikics, "Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and the Caribbean Writer," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 372-373.
[82] Silva and Tickell, 217.

boundaries between those disciplines have themselves broken down."[83] The outcome is a fictional style that is as fluid as the porous geographical borders that Ghosh portrays so effectively in his writing, and which suits the transgressive nature of magical realism. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a case in point. Claire Chambers observes that the book "defies categorization and resists an easy summary."[84] The novel has been variously described as science fiction, a thriller, detective story, gothic melodrama, historiography and pot-boiler.

Ghosh's cosmopolitanism, I propose, is an underlying factor of his porous approach to writing, and therefore has a bearing on his nebulous style of magical realism. I take Timothy Brennan's definition of a cosmopolitan as someone who is held up by reviewers as being "interpreters and authentic public voices of the Third World" and at the same time is "urbane," "worldly" and "free from provincial prejudices."[85] A cosmopolitan writer is also one who is critical of the after-effects of colonial rule. Ghosh's peripatetic life – his father's work in the Indian foreign ministry meant the young Ghosh grew up between India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Iran, and as an adult Ghosh has lived for many years in New York – gives the author an international perspective. Furthermore, the era of decolonisation during which Ghosh was raised – he was born in 1956 – has engendered what Ghosh terms "xenophilia," or "the love of the other, the affinity for strangers."[86] This cosmopolitanism is overlaid with Ghosh's background as a Bengali, through which he has inherited the rich intellectual and cultural tradition of the *bhadralok*, "the upper and middle sections of Bengali society that emerged in the nineteenth century as a consequence of the reorganisation of the Bengal economy under colonial rule."[87] It is a tradition that itself promotes cosmopolitanism as well as a national culture. Ghosh's Bengali birth places him in the same tradition as Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, both of whom influenced Ghosh. Marakand Paranjape dubs this

[83] Dixon, 13.
[84] Chambers, 57.
[85] Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (London: Macmillan, 1989), xiii. See also Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19.
[86] Amitav Ghosh, *Confessions of a Xenophile*, 14.
[87] Mondal, 3.

association the "*bhadralok* chromosome," meaning the genteel folk chromosome, which is carried on from one generation of Bengali writers to the next.[88]

Ghosh's cosmopolitanism aligns him with other cosmopolitan writers of magical realism, such as Salman Rushdie and Peter Carey, who, like Ghosh, gravitated to New York, rather than authors like Alexis Wright, Keri Hulme or Mo Yan, whose magical realist fiction generally has a more localised construction in terms of setting and cultural context and who have spent their entire lives in their home countries. This tends to have a bearing on the kinds of magical realism that the various authors utilise. The cosmopolitans usually gravitate more towards a type of epistemological magical realism, which is often characterised by a preponderance of metafictional techniques. Whereas the localised writers are noted more for their ontological magical realism, reflecting their adaption of culturally specific social mores, spirituality and mythology, such as that of Indigenous Australians for Wright and Maori people for Hulme. Having said that, the distinctions are by no means clear cut. Witi Ihimaera, for instance, who wrote The *Whale Rider* while living in New York, mostly employs the ontological strain of magical realism. On the other hand, Mo Yan, who has lived his entire life in China, mixes both kinds of the narrative mode, and much of his later works exhibit more of the epistemological strain of magical realism.

Similarly, the magical realism in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a blend. There are elements of an ontological approach by drawing on Indian mythology for the names of key characters. For example, Lakhaan, the ghost variant and reincarnation predecessor of Ross' lab assistant Lutchman, is an eastern Indian name, the Sankritised version of which is Lakshman. Lakshman is the brother of Ram, the hero of the Hindu epic *Ramayan*, who follows his sibling into a fourteen-year exile. "The name Lakhaan therefore conjures one who comes second, who follows, faithfully, but who remains partially eclipsed in the narrative," says Bishnupriya Ghosh.[89] So Lakhaan is an apt name for the one who dutifully follows Mangala. Ghosh also draws on Sanskrit words for other characters. Mangala, for instance, is

[88] Paranjape, 45, 61 (footnote 16).
[89] Bishnupriya Ghosh, "When Speaking with Ghosts," 137, footnote 15.

derived from the Sanskrit word *mangal*, which means goodness or welfare. Tara, the woman who enters Antar's life and brings him into the orbit of the Mangala cult, is named after the word of Sanskrit origin that means star. Antar, although an Egyptian character, has a name that sounds like a Sanskrit word meaning heart, but which may also mean distance or difference.[90] Each of these Sanskrit origins gives depth to the meanings of the relevant characters in the novel.

For the most part, however, the magical realism that appears in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is of the metafictional variety. But how to classify it is problematic. As a starting point, it is useful to focus on the metafictional elements of the text, especially the intertextual devices that build and layer the overall narrative, as I have outlined earlier. In addition, the novel has four major interlocking narratives that interweave among each other and their respective times and geographies. The plot is driven by Antar the computer programmer and systems analyst, who lives in New York in an indeterminate year in the early twenty-first century, and who embarks on a quest within his own apartment / office to determine what happened to his former colleague Murugan. Murugan generates the main action narrative with his own quest in Calcutta in 1995 to ascertain what really happened in Ross' laboratory a century before. The third narrative involves Ross' race to discover the cause of malaria while working in India in the 1890s. And the fourth narrative revolves around the supernatural reincarnation quest of Mangala / Lutchman and Sonali / Urmila, who exist outside time and space, and who have embarked upon their own searches to learn the mysteries of the Silence. The novel, therefore, is structured around four separate yet interwoven quest narratives, three of which are embedded within particular times and geographies, and one of which floats beyond temporal and terrestrial limitations. This complex mosaic enables Ghosh to transgress historical periodisation, cultural barriers and continental divides in order to question assumptions about epistemology and teleology. What is it that we know, and how do we know it? How restricted are we by our cultural blinkers? Is collective knowledge a progressive accumulation of facts and insights that moves forward in a linear fashion? Or is

[90] Sengupta, 137-138.

collective knowledge intuited randomly from forces beyond our limited reasoning and understanding? The multiple-narrative structure of *The Calcutta Chromosome* makes the story ahistorical, allowing it to transcend horological and cultural specificity. The novel is therefore quintessentially magical realist in its disruption of time and place, but at the same time is not bound by its cultural context.

So how to categorise Ghosh's magical realism? Is it epistemological? Yes, in the sense that his use of the narrative mode is metafictional and derived from aspects of knowledge. But no, in the sense that it is not derived from non-cultural sources. The magical realism in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is rooted in a retrieval of indigenous Indian knowledge. Ghosh's particular hybrid kind of magical realism may be closer to Christopher Warnes' "irreverent magical realism," which operates metaphorically. In irreverent magical realism, says Warnes, the event or presence that cannot be rationalised or explained "stands in place of an idea or a set of ideas," such as "the ways language constructs reality, or about the incapacities of binaristic thinking."[91] This concept of irreverence holds true for the novel insofar as the central supernatural conceit, Mangala's quest for immortality through the Calcutta chromosome, represents the idea of a silent (but not inert) subaltern knowledge that has been written out of orthodox, colonial history, and may indeed be beyond the limits of human understanding. The text implies that this subaltern knowledge includes "science," as defined in the West as knowledge accumulated through observation, but is also broader than "science." While it embraces an element of rationality, it is nevertheless embedded in a kind of spiritualism. Warnes' category, however, does not adequately capture the mysticism that underlies the narrative. Perhaps, then, Ghosh's own brand of magical realism warrants a broad classification, one that is expansive enough to allow the complexities of his fiction. Jeanne Delbaere's notion of an "intellectual" magical realism comes close, in that this strain of the narrative mode is characterised as being "playful, metafictional and experimental."[92]

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[91] Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 14-15.
[92] Jeanne Delbaere, "Magic Realism: the Energy of the Margins," in *Postmodern Fiction in Canada*, ed. Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 76.

The difficulty in categorising Ghosh's hybrid style of magical realism highlights the problems associated with applying a taxonomical approach to the narrative mode. Given that the fundamental nature of magical realism is to transgress boundaries and to break down binary divisions, it should come as no surprise, then, that this particular generic kind is resistant to being categorised itself into smaller and smaller categories. This finding supports my broader argument that critical analysis of magical realism requires a flexible approach, one that describes magical realist fiction as having a solitary trait, the presentation of the magical or supernatural in a quotidian manner, such that it is embedded within literary realism. Outside of this solitary trait there may – or may not – exist similarities with other magical realist texts.

In conclusion, the richly hybrid nature of *The Calcutta Chromosome* offers a unique opportunity to re-examine our theoretical assumptions about how we conceptualise magical realism. By taking a generic approach to the novel, by comparing magical realism with science fiction, it becomes apparent that while a text may have magical realist tendencies, it will also have tendencies of science fiction and a range of other generic kinds. In other words, a text may participate in magical realism but never belong to magical realism, just as it may participate in science fiction and other generic kinds without belonging to any of them. Magical realism, therefore, can only be an effective tool for literary analysis if it is used by critics in conjunction with tools to examine other generic kinds that operate within the text. The corollary is that a critic can only classify a hybrid work of fiction like *The Calcutta Chromosome within* the concept of magical realism if the critic is simultaneously classifying the work *against* magical realism. Notwithstanding these limitations, the rubric of magical realism does produce intellectual gains for Ghosh's novel because it illuminates how the text reinserts 'magic' or faith back into science, placing belief and intuition at the foreground of scientific development, and dramatising the cross-cultural fertilisation of scientific ideas between the colonised and the colonisers. Moreover, the rubric also reveals a specific kind of development of intertextuality from which the magical or supernatural elements are derived. The intertextual fabric of the novel demonstrates that magical realism can originate predominantly from a textual essence, thereby reinforcing the argument that magical realism

is, at its core, an aesthetic that exceeds contextual delineations despite engaging them in reading practices. In the next chapter I shall explore how Salman Rushdie moves beyond a decidedly postcolonial focus in his earlier magical realist fiction to a preoccupation with globalisation and the inter-connectedness of the contemporary world in *Shalimar the Clown*.

Chapter Four

"How the world joined up":

from local to global in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

From Amitav Ghosh I now turn to his fellow writer, the Indian-born Salman Rushdie, who is the author most associated with magical realism in Indian fiction in English. Rushdie's early novels are among the most popular and critically examined of all magical realist texts, in particular *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The former, which won the Booker Prize in 1981, was a pivotal novel that helped usher in a new wave of postcolonial magical realist fiction, especially among authors writing in English, following the apogee of Latin American magical realism in the 1970s. Rushdie's influential novel set a landmark for authors from erstwhile colonies, particularly former colonies of the British empire, who, too, would adapt magical realist techniques in order to reimagine the lost, suppressed or marginalised histories of their homelands through experimental forms and techniques. The diverse group of postcolonial authors utilising magical realism around the same time as Rushdie's breakthrough novel, or soon after, included Canadian Robert Kroetsch, Australian Peter Carey and Nigerian Ben Okri.

In contrast to writers who publicly distance themselves from magical realism, such as Ghosh and Carey, Rushdie at times endorses the narrative mode. At the start of his career, Rushdie compared his own fiction to that of García Márquez's, saying their works were regarded as "fantasy" in the West but as "realism" in their own respective homelands of India and South America. "I think that's quite true about 'magic realism' – what is important about it is that it is realism," he said.[1] Rushdie clearly views magical realism as being embedded within literary realism, which is a key theme of this thesis and one which I shall explore in relation to Rushdie's own fiction. However, in a 1989 interview he indicated that he sees himself as belonging to a literary tradition broader than the "South American writers in the

[1] Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, "Interview with Salman Rushdie", in *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, ed. Michael Reder (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 18.

generation around Borges and after," whom he associates with the development of magical realist fiction, going back to Charles Dickens and Nikolai Gogol, writers "for whom the processes of naturalism have not been sufficient." In the same interview, he also reveals that he does not think of himself as writing in a magical realist mode for every book, expressing what Christopher Warnes describes as a "rueful acceptance of the term in respect of his own writing." Ironically, Rushdie proclaimed at that time there would be "no more magical realism" for his next work, although, as I shall demonstrate, he kept returning to the narrative mode to refashion it in new ways.[2]

The intensive critical focus on the magical realism of Rushdie's early works has been at the expense of his later fiction, in that critics have not fully explored how his magical realist style has evolved since the turn of the millennium. In this chapter I shall focus on *Shalimar the Clown* (2005),[3] which has attracted a degree of critical attention but with a mixed reception. Outside of the magical realist rubric the novel is important as one of the early fictional attempts to address the rise of Islamist terrorism following the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. *Shalimar* illustrates Rushdie's shift away from a highly distinctive kind of postcolonial magical realism that permeates his earlier work to a type of magical realism which accentuates globalisation. By this, I mean that Rushdie adjusts his primary attention from national issues associated with post-independence India and Pakistan and focuses on the inter-relatedness of all nations and people in an increasingly fraught geopolitical world. Rushdie began this geopolitical and existential shift in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), a flawed novel about love and creativity that roams across India, the United States and Britain in an updated version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice featuring the pop stars and lovers Ormus Cama and Vina Aspera. The book's magical realism lies largely in Ormus believing he can travel to the underworld to speak to his twin brother, who was stillborn. Ormus' brother gives him rock songs that have not yet been written but will ultimately

[2] Ameena Meer, "Salman Rushdie," in *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, ed. Michael Reder, 110-122 (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2000), 111, 122. Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 98.
[3] Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005); hereafter cited by page in the text.

become famous. Globalism figures prominently, too, in *Fury* (2001), in which Rushdie captures the zeitgeist of the cusp of the millennium when debt-fuelled capitalism and materialist consumerism ran rampant in the Western world. The narrative of *Fury*, which was generally negatively received critically, takes place in London, New York and a fictional Pacific island nation that is embroiled in a revolution. Rushdie progresses from an investigation of the cultural aspects of globalisation in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* to the geopolitical, ideological and historical features of globalism in *Shalimar*.[4] In this chapter I will also argue that Rushdie modifies his use of historiographic metafiction to suggest the powerlessness of the individual against historical forces, especially ideology and culture. This is especially portrayed in the magical realist concept of felt history, or the bodily grotesque in relation to Boonyi. In addition, I contend that Rushdie's resort to literary realism in the sections depicting violence demonstrates not only the generic linkages between the magical realist and the realist modes, but also the paradoxical nature of Rushdie's writing. Moreover, I will show how Rushdie mythologises Kashmir as a terrainal paradise which diverges from historical reality but offers an idealised promise of a harmonious society yet to be gained.

Rushdie does not abandon postcolonial themes altogether in *Shalimar*, but rather complicates the concept of postcoloniality by questioning the manner in which we address "the paradigms of domination and resistance that have emerged out of the experience of colonialism and anti-colonial movements," as Florian Stadtler notes.[5] This occurs through the text's depiction of the destruction of Kashmir as a result of the military intervention by neighbouring India and Pakistan, two former colonies of the British empire, and the consequent rise of Kashmir's nationalist resistance movements alongside transnational Islamist terrorism. The latter is personified in the novel's protagonist, Shalimar Noman, who transforms from a loveable Kashmiri clown into a merciless *jihadi* assassin. What further

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[4] Marianne Corrigan, "Rushdie as an International Writer: *The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Fury, Shalimar the Clown* and *The Enchantress of Florence*," in *Salman Rushdie: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Robert Eaglestone and Martin McQuillan (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 40.

[5] Florian Stadtler, "Terror, globalization and the individual in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 45.2 (2009): 198.

complicates the novel's geopolitical aspect is the imperialist reach of the United States in South Asia, as embodied in the character Max Ophuls, who transforms from a Jewish hero of the French Resistance into an ethically compromised counter-intelligence chief for the US. My particular argument is that Rushdie has developed a different kind of magical realism in *Shalimar* in order to reflect the novel's international concerns. "Rushdie attempts to find a literary form appropriate to describe the transnational social and political relations that underpin globalisation,"[6] says Stephen Morton. In this respect, Rushdie's development as a writer of magical realism exemplifies one of the key arguments of this thesis: that magical realism, as a generic kind, endures by virtue of dynamic evolutionism, a constant process of reinvention. Not only does *Shalimar* change the kind of magical realism that Rushdie as a singular author practices, the text also changes the nature of magical realist fiction as a generic kind.

Anthony Giddens defines globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." Giddens emphasises the "time-space distanciation" of globalisation by which "the relations between local and distant social forms and events become correspondingly 'stretched'."[7] It is this notion of stretching between different localities that underpins the narrative tension of *Shalimar*, which explores Kashmir as a local setting buffeted by the geopolitical imperatives of neighbouring India and Pakistan and played out against the global strategic aims of the US. While Giddens includes the "nation-state system" and the "world military order" as two of globalisation's key dimensions, which are notable for their materiality and feature in *Shalimar*, Rushdie adds an additional dimension, which is intangible: ideology.[8] The power and influence of ideology is reflected in the encroachment of militant Islamism in the Kashmir conflict, as well as the spread of

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[6] Stephen Morton, *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 131.

[7] Anthony Giddens, "The Globalizing of Modernity," in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, ed. David Held and Anthony McGrew, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 60.

[8] Giddens, 62. Giddens' other two dimensions of globalisation are the "world-capitalist economy" and "industrial development."

jihadist terrorism around the globe. Giddens' specification of the two-way process of globalisation – by which "local happenings" equally shape events miles away – is crystallised in Shalimar's revenge killing of the former US ambassador Max Ophuls at his daughter's home in Los Angeles. Indeed, this forms an important part of how we may conceive of *Shalimar* as world literature, for the text involves what John Pizer calls a "'two-dimensional' reading" that indicates not only "where the global and the local are enmeshed," but also "where processes of globalization and uniformity are resisted and contested."[9] Resistance is symbolised both militarily through the Kashmir liberation fighters and culturally through the Kashmiri traditional dancers and clowns, both of whom, soldiers and performers, are eventually crushed by external forces.

In addition, the global construction of the novel provides another way of reading it as world literature. Works can enter world literature, says David Damrosch, by being set in international locales. "Writers who set their works abroad engage in a process of cultural translation, representing foreign customs for the writer's home audience," says Damrosch.[10] The epic narrative reaches out beyond South Asia to encompass France and England in the Second World War, the US, Africa and the Philippines, among other places. Shalimar, Max and Kashmira are each intercontinental citizens, rootless without a permanent home base, while Boonyi provides a counterpart as the Kashmiri peasant girl who yearns for another life outside her village but who is devoid of sufficient worldliness in order to achieve it. Of all Rushdie's novels, *Shalimar* is perhaps the most transnational in respect of geography and individual characters' perpetual migrancy, thereby making the text a product of multiple cultures rather than a discrete 'national' literature.[11]

The transnational structure of the narrative reflects the international style of magical realism that Rushdie develops for this novel. The supernatural elements in *Shalimar* are, on the whole, less culturally specific than in his earlier work. Notably, Rushdie imbues the book's characters, especially the protagonist, with supernatural powers largely to represent

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[9] John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 118.
[10] David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 87.
[11] Pizer, 4.

the negative, destructive capacity of human behaviour, whereas in his previous books the supernatural mostly relates to the positive, constructive characteristics of humanity. Moreover, after the mythical structure of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and the highly intertextual nature of the post-millennial *Fury*, Rushdie returns to his more traditional style of historiographic metafiction in *Shalimar*. The difference between *Shalimar* and, say, *Shame* or *Midnight's Children*, in respect of historiography, is the scale of the historical sweep, which spans from the Second World War to the 1990s across multiple continents to form a narrative that nominally feels like a socio-political and historical reality. I will show how Rushdie uses magical realist techniques to refine his view on historiography to a more bleak, fatalistic position than in his earlier fiction, suggesting individuals no longer have any power to influence historical forces. This is particularly apparent in the transformation of Shalimar's wife, Boonyi, from a desirable beauty into a village pariah.

In his memoir of the *fatwa* years, *Joseph Anton* (2012), Rushdie reveals how he consciously shifted the focus of his fiction to the ramifications of "the shrinking planet."[12] In the memoir's idiosyncratic third-person narrative, Rushdie writes:

> He was beginning to see that this, rather than India or Pakistan or politics or magic realism, would be his real subject, the one he would worry away at for the rest of his life, the great matter of *how the world joined up*, not only how the East flowed into the West and the West into the East, but how the past shaped the present while the present changed our understanding of the past (original emphasis) (68).

Rushdie's memoirist reflection echoes the narrator in *Shalimar*: "Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete" (37). Notice in the two texts the duplication of the word "flowed," which reinforces the idea of an inter-connected world in a constant state of flux. The death sentence, or *fatwa*, that Iran's then political and Islamic spiritual leader, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, imposed on Rushdie on 14 February 1989 for

[12] Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), 69; hereafter cited by page in the text.

alleged blasphemy against Islam in *The Satanic Verses* led to Rushdie living under the protection of the British police for a decade, until he moved to New York in 2000. The experience placed him in an ideal situation to witness and contemplate one of the most far-reaching developments in global politics over the past three decades: the emergence and proliferation of fanatical Islamism and associated terrorism.

Rushdie's creative shift applies to both form and content. Rushdie's early-career aim "to create a literary language and literary forms" expressing "the experience of formerly colonized, still-disadvantaged peoples" resulted in a "migrant's-eye view of the world," a style rejoicing in "hybridity" and "mongrelisation." It's a style that reflects his belief in metamorphosis as a metaphor for all of humanity.[13] His early style of magical realism is characterised by, to borrow Rushdie's own phrase, a literature of "excess, of too muchness,"[14] featuring looping narratives inspired by traditional Indian oral storytelling techniques, quotidian supernatural events and the literalisation of metaphor. For *Shalimar*, however, Rushdie requires a modified style of writing that befits the new themes of globalisation and terrorism. The prose style in *Shalimar*, therefore, is less florid and more direct. Structurally, Rushdie reverts to a modernist approach, assembling the novel in five parts, starting with Shalimar's assassination of Max Ophuls outside the Los Angeles apartment of Max's daughter, Kashmira, followed by four more sections told from the point of view of each of the main characters, Boonyi (Kashmira's mother), Max, Shalimar and Kashmira.[15] Generically, the novel unfolds as a detective story and psychological thriller, as Kashmira investigates the past to discover who murdered her father and why, in the process uncovering unsettling truths about her parents and the corrupted 'love' triangle with her mother's husband, Shalimar. The book crosses over into other genres, too, such as historical romance, revenge story and political intrigue, reflecting its broad historical sweep and a plot that is driven by the psychological desires of the main characters.

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[13] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 394.
[14] Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, *Salman Rushdie: The Essential Guide* (London: Vintage, 2003), 12.
[15] Boonyi calls her illegitimate daughter with Max Kashmira, but Max's wife, who raises the child, renames her India.

Rushdie's shift in content and style is acknowledged amid the novel's critical reception. Robert Eaglestone regards *Shalimar* as "another step in Rushdie's existential and aesthetic thinking,"[16] while Andrew Teverson says it "hints at the emergence of a mature style in his work."[17] Critics also highlight the book's focus on "the interconnectedness of the local and the global," which is depicted by showing "how regional disputes such as Kashmir are manipulated on a world stage."[18] The book's theme of globalisation is also portrayed in the proliferation of international terrorism, the causes of which the text attributes to Western and Eastern forces alike. *Shalimar* "deconstructs the post-9/11 predominant conception of terrorism and juxtaposes terrorist violence with other conflicts in both the West and the East," says Pei-chen Liao.[19] Several critics identify, in a positive sense, magical realist elements. Marianne Corrigan, for instance, observes that *Shalimar* expands upon "felt history," a principal theme of Rushdie's earlier work, which is "a magic realist technique to explore the connection between nation and individual."[20] The idea of felt history is especially played out in the character of Boonyi, which I shall discuss later. However, some critics expressed disappointment with the text's magical realist elements. Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times* praised Rushdie's "return to form" by creating "compelling characters," but criticised the book for lacking "the fecund narrative magic, ebullient language and intimate historical emotion found in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*."[21] Similarly, Theo Tait, while praising the novel in the *London Review of Books* for being "passionate, well-informed and

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[16] Robert Eaglestone, "Salman Rushdie: Paradox and Truth," in *British Fiction Today,* ed. Philip Tew and Rod Mangham (London: Continuum, 2006), 97.
[17] Andrew Teverson, *Salman Rushdie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 107.
[18] Maurice O'Connor, "A Paradise Lost: Kashmir as a Motif of Rift in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*," in *India in the World*, ed. Christina M. Gámez-Fernández and Antonia Navarro-Tejero (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 217.
[19] Pei-chen Liao, *'Post'-9/11 Asian Diasporic Fiction: Uncanny Terror* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27.
[20] Corrigan, 41.
[21] Michiko Kakutani, "In Kashmir, Toxic Love Breeds Terrorism," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2005, E1 & E7.

sometimes interesting," nevertheless claimed Rushdie "papers over the lack of depth with tired magic realist tropes."[22]

On the contrary, I would argue Rushdie has reinvented magical realist tropes by inverting his earlier treatment of the supernatural, associating it in this novel with the negative, destructive capacity of human behaviour. Shalimar is the book's central magical realist element, possessing telepathy and the ability to walk on thin air. As a consequence, he exists outside of chronological time, separating him from the living and the process of historicity. Shalimar, as the villain, is a contrast to Rushdie's earlier characters with supernatural powers – such as Sufiya Zinobia in *Shame*, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, Gibreel Farishta in *The Satanic Verses* and Moraes Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh* – who are all portrayed in a positive light. So why has Rushdie reversed his previous practice with Shalimar? Whereas the supernatural powers associated with Rushdie's earlier characters aid them in a positive process of *metamorphosis*, emancipating them from a constrictive or normative existence, Shalimar's supernatural powers aid him in a negative process of *transformation*, from a loveable village boy in Kashmir to a merciless *jihadi* assassin.

Shalimar's supernatural powers are neither religious nor 'god-given.' Shalimar's "actor-manager" father, Abdullah Sher Noman, who is also the "headman" of the fictional Kashmiri village of Pachigam, is portrayed as having a secular outlook, with a "modern-day open-mindedness" and a belief in interplanetary aliens. The father teaches his nine-year-old son the art of "airwalking," encouraging him to think of the rope as "gathered air" and "a magic space." "A rope could become air. A boy could become a bird. *Metamorphosis* was the secret heart of life" (my emphasis) (55-57). The word metamorphosis is critical here: not only does it reflect Rushdie's abiding love of Ovid and his treatment of metamorphosis as a positive metaphor for all of humanity, it also signifies the well-intentioned father's hope for his son to live an ethically good life. This is reflected in the supposedly harmonious co-existence of Muslims and Hindus residing in their village. Yet Shalimar's descent into murder and

[22] Theo Tait, "Flame-Broiled Whopper," *London Review of Books* 27.19, October 6, 2005, 17-18, accessed December 26, 2015, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n19/theo-tait/flame-broiled-whopper.

mayhem, I contend, means that he fails to achieve any kind of metamorphosis but transforms into a corrupted version of humanity. In other words, he fails to put the supernatural powers taught by his father to good use. Despite this, his supernatural abilities never leave him. Towards the novel's climax, during a mass prison break in California, Shalimar escapes the jail by running along a wall and continues "on his way as if the wall stretched out into the sky." This episode is represented in a typical magical realist manner, with rational disbelief pitted against unquestioning belief. While Shalimar's airborne escape is met with "universal scepticism" among police and the media, the guards and villagers "swore that they had seen the impossible" (394-395).

The text suggests Shalimar has a congenital propensity for 'evil.' His mother, Firdaus, has a premonition during pregnancy that "[s]omething shitty is beginning." The baby gives her the "shivers" while still in the womb, and she realises the "sweetest, gentlest and most open of any human being in Pachigam" is already "scaring her half to death" (72). After Shalimar expresses his intent to murder his wife and her lover, Firdaus thinks "an evil demon" or a "djinni" (an invisible spirit mentioned in the Koran that appears in human or animal form and influences humanity) has possessed her son (249-250).[23] But his mother's intuition of pre-determination is contrasted with the notion of self-determination and individual will. Shalimar, whose real name is Noman Sher Noman (46), adopts "Shalimar the clown" as his "professional name" among the travelling entertainers when he is a boy (46). Given that Shalimar means "abode of joy" and is the name of "the great Mughal garden of Kashmir" (14), the implication is that the young Shalimar initially perceives himself in a good light. This reading of Shalimar is consistent with Rushdie's other characters who share a propensity for 'demonic' acts, but who have a choice between doing what is right and wrong.

In *Shame*, Sufiya Zinobia contracts a "brain fever" as a child that results in an intellectual disability (100), but it also turns her into a "supernatural being" (197), as she develops the ability to absorb "all sorts of things that float around in the ether ... like a sponge" (122). As an adult, a "Beast" begins "lurking" inside her, prompting Sufiya to take revenge for

[23] Pei-chen Liao, 42.

the political and military corruption in newly independent Pakistan by ripping the heads off unsuspecting males. In *Fury*, Malik Solanka experiences "demons" crawling out of his body on the night he contemplates killing his wife as she sleeps (106). A drunk Malik believes his "satanic doll" is to blame (108), the Little Brain doll he created that became the basis for a hit children's television series, which made him a wealthy man. Eventually, it is revealed the root cause of Malik's personal fury, his own demons, is that he suffered sexual abuse by his stepfather as a young child, which in turn triggers his obsession with dolls. Malik chooses to avoid uxoricide by fleeing London to live in New York. In *The Satanic Verses*, Saladin Chamcha metamorphosises into a cloven-hoof, horned goat as he is arrested by the British police for being an illegal immigrant, in a literalisation of metaphor of the demonisation of immigrants during the Thatcher era (141). Saladin's devil-like figure is portrayed in a positive light, as he begins appearing to people in their dreams, and subsequently his "dream-devil" image is popularised by "blacks and Asians" on shirts, badges and posters, a symbol of "defiance" for socially marginalised immigrants (286). Later in the novel, however, Saladin's devilish side turns dark as he torments Gibreel Farishta by impersonating the voices of the supposed lovers of Gibreel's girlfriend. Saladin is depicted as playing Iago to Gibreel's Othello, with the narrator questioning "the enigma of Iago," that is, "the nature of evil" and how it takes "possession of a many-sided human soul" (424). Saladin's phone calls help push a schizophrenic Gibreel to shoot himself. Shalimar, therefore, is one of Rushdie's many characters who represent the 'devil' that potentially lies within everyone, only we have a choice how to act, whether for good or bad, right or wrong. This is encapsulated in *Shalimar* when Boonyi asks herself whether Shalimar will turn out to be "her epic hero or her demon king, or both" (50). The option of "both" signifies magical realism's capacity to break down binary oppositions.

The major supernatural element in *Shalimar* is telepathy, a power possessed not only by the title character, but also by Boonyi and Kashmira. Telepathy denotes a particular dialectic of both distance and proximity, the ability to converse or communicate with another who is physically distant but who seems psychically present. In this respect, telepathy in

Shalimar becomes an apt metaphor for the novel's overall theme of globalisation and the inter-connectedness of all lives, as well as Giddens' "stretching" of time-space between the local and the remote. By contrast, the kind of telepathy that underpins *Midnight's Children* represents an idealistic (although unfulfilled) desire for the citizens of newly independent India to be able to communicate with each other for the betterment of the nation, to overcome Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as "imagined communities" because all of their citizens can never hope to share a symbiotic sense of identity.[24]

Importantly, the telepathic connection between Shalimar and Boonyi does not occur until after her adulterous affair with Max Ophuls, once Boonyi has returned home in disgrace, abandoned by her former lover and ostracised by her village. Although Shalimar returns home on one occasion to observe her from a distance (241), for the most part he roams the world as a peripatetic *jihadi* terrorist. Curiously, Shalimar's telepathic thoughts to Boonyi are represented by her interpretation of what she hears, rather than through his own interior first-person voice. The effect is to give the reader the impression that they, too, are hearing his stream-of-consciousness thoughts as Boonyi hears them, which mostly constitute his homicidal intentions against her as revenge for her adultery. He tells her telepathically where he is, what he is doing and what he is thinking. "He speaks to me as you speak. He is full of fire and death," a distraught Boonyi tells her friend. The "reason" they are able to speak, she adds, is because it is "our bond that cannot be broken." Boonyi understands he will eventually kill her (262). In contrast to the telepathy between Saleem Sinai and the other children of midnight, which is portrayed as a positive phenomenon for potential nation-building, the "channel of communication" between Shalimar and Boonyi is depicted as negative and destructive. Their telepathic bond is described as an "anti-love" based on "love's dark opposites" (258). In a sense, their doomed "anti-love" refracts the destruction of their home of Kashmir.

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[24] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn. (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

Shalimar's telepathic link with Kashmira, on the other hand, involves a critical difference. Whereas Boonyi cannot transfer her thoughts to Shalimar – their link is a one-way channel – Kashmira can enter Shalimar's mind, and vice versa. When Kashmira first meets him in Los Angeles, as her father's chauffeur, but without knowing his real identity, she experiences a "hallucinatory" vision of Shalimar with his hands and clothes covered "red with blood" (23). On the day Shalimar murders Max on the doorstep of her apartment block, she hears Shalimar's voice over the entry-phone and recognises it as "the voice of death," the same "gurgling, incoherent" (40) sound she had recorded of her own nocturnal sleep-talking, "a language she did not speak," possibly Arabic (3). In other words, Shalimar previously telepathically conveyed his voice to Kashmira while she was sleeping. Once Shalimar is caught and imprisoned, she turns the tables by communicating telepathically with him while he waits for his trial, causing him to scream and complain about "a female demon who was occupying his head" (374). Kashmira executes her plan to be his "black Scheherazade" (374) by writing more than five hundred letters to her parents' murderer, in which she "stated her intent to invade his thoughts" (383). Just as Shalimar goads Boonyi through his telepathic communications before he kills her, Kashmira goads Shalimar through her telepathic provocations before she – possibly – kills him at the novel's ambiguous ending.

In short, the characters' telepathic powers in *Shalimar* are associated with revenge: Shalimar's revenge against Boonyi for leaving him for another man; and Kashmira's revenge against Shalimar for murdering both her parents. Notably, neither Boonyi nor Max are able to communicate telepathically to Shalimar, nor are they capable of killing him before he kills them. The corollary is that telepathy becomes the form of communication by which Shalimar and India *terrorise* their targets. The supernatural, therefore, is linked with terrorism in its broad sense, although in this context it is a private, individualistic mode of terrorism. This contrasts with Rushdie's wider examination of the historical causes and nature of political terrorism, as well as the moral culpability of both West and East in the rise of public terrorism of all kinds, which I shall discuss in detail below.

As I mentioned earlier, outside of the magical realist rubric *Shalimar* has literary value as one of the early fictional attempts to address the rise of Islamic terrorism after 9/11. Crucial to this is the plausibility of Shalimar's character arc in his transition from peaceful clown to vengeful murderer. For if Shalimar, or any fictional character, is to work effectively as a magical realist figure, their life must somehow be rooted in the extra-textual world. Pei-chen Liao points out that Rushdie's post-9/11 analysis of terrorism in the novel is conducted through a pre-9/11 storyline. The dramatic climax of the plot – Max's murder – occurs in the aftermath of the first terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, which the narrator notes "would be remembered as the first bombing" eight years later (377). "The confusion that Rushdie creates between the past and the present, and that between fiction and reality, provoke from the reader the sense of the uncanny," he says. The uncanny, in the Freudian sense of the return of the repressed, emanates from the novel for two reasons: in a public context through the "repetition of history"; and in a private context through the discovery that the perpetrators of terrorism may not be complete strangers but friends (Shalimar, Max).[25] The novel's dislocation of time in this respect reinforces the notion of terrorism as a constant menace, a threat aimed beyond the immediate target to the populace at large. Since Shalimar exists outside of chronological time, due to his supernatural powers, especially that of telepathy, then his constant returns – to Pachigam and Los Angeles in particular – contribute to that sense of the uncanny.

In analysing Shalimar as Rushdie's fictional case study, as it were, of Islamist terrorism, it is vital to distinguish between the character's personal violence and his public violence. The former involves his revenge killings of Boonyi and Max (as well as his attempt, at the end, of murdering Kashmira), while the latter pertains to his killings as a Kashmir liberation fighter and the assassinations he performs as a *jihadi* assassin. Shalimar's motivations for these separate categories are different and discrete. Some critics, however, have conflated the various rationales behind his violence, which has led to the misapprehension that Shalimar lacks an in-depth psychological profile. Michiko Kakutani, for

[25] Pei-chen Liao, 30-31, 41.

instance, says Shalimar's decision to join Islamist terrorists "because he has been jilted by his wife feels farcical in the extreme."[26] Maurice O'Connor concludes the narrative "completely avoids any engagement with Shalimar's transformation to mujahideen," failing to explain his "mental process" or "ideological" transformation.[27] The text, however, signals a bifurcation between Shalimar's personal and public violence through his telepathic power, which relates only to his personal revenge killings through his psychological terrorising of Boonyi and Kashmira, and not to the organised violence with which he becomes embroiled. As I will discuss in more detail shortly, while Rushdie employs magical realist tropes in the novel to denote the negative, destructive side of humanity from an individual perspective, he largely resorts to literary realism to portray the public violence associated with the Kashmir conflict and Islamist terrorism, including that which Shalimar is involved in.

Shalimar's motivation for the personal violence is relatively straightforward. As a fourteen-year-old, he reveals a propensity for retribution and self-centredness when, after his first sexual encounter with Boonyi (they were born on the same night in 1947, that symbolic year of Indian independence), he threatens that, if she ever leaves him: "I'll have my revenge, I'll kill you and if you have any children by another man I'll kill the children also" (61). Despite initiating their youthful affair themselves, the teenage lovers are affectively coerced into an arranged marriage by their fathers and village elders, who celebrate their union in a "multifaith ceremony" (Shalimar is Muslim, Boonyi Hindu), which is meant to reflect the village's socio-cultural harmony (112). Importantly, Boonyi is denied a decision for herself to marry, so when the philandering US ambassador Max Ophuls appears in Kashmir, she sees the ageing lothario as her ticket out to a more exciting world. Conversely, the smitten Shalimar, who represents cultural conservatism, upon hearing of her infidelity swears to carry out his earlier threat by cutting off her head and killing any offspring (236). From this point the novel takes on an element of a revenge narrative. While Shalimar's vendetta might seem extreme from a Western point of view, in which divorce is an acceptable commonplace, his

[26] Kakutani, "In Kashmir, Toxic Love Breeds Terrorism," E7.
[27] O'Connor, 217.

actions in terms of verisimilitude may be compared with an episode in Rushdie's *Shame*. In the author's third novel, the narrator, who otherwise comes across as a reasonable person, confesses he understands a Pakistani father's revenge killing of his daughter in London for allegedly "making love to a white boy." The narrator reveals that, having grown up "on a diet of honour and shame," he can grasp the idea that men will sacrifice "their dearest love" due to pride. "Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence," he says.[28] Within this context, Shalimar's murder of Boonyi and Max might be viewed as so-called 'honour' killings.

Shalimar's motivations for his public violence, on the other hand, are more complex. Decades of corruption, vote-rigging, imprisonment of Kashmiri political leaders and a continual erosion of local autonomy by Indian authorities led to the political uprising in Kashmir in the 1990s. India's response was "to institute a policy of ruthless mailed-fist repression," which exacerbated the vicious cycle of bloodshed. The instigators of the insurgency, the secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), were inspired by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, the Afghan *mujahideen* resistance against the Soviets, and the Sri Lankan Tamil Tiger guerrillas.[29] "Kashmiris too had believed that their protests would win Kashmir its freedom. The early nineties were a naïve, heady time," says Basharat Peer.[30] Shalimar's brother Anees Noman joins the JKLF (299). So Shalimar's drift into the insurgency movement reflects a path taken by many Kashmiri men. "In those days before the crazies got into the act the liberation front was reasonably popular," says the narrator (253).[31]

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[28] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (1983; reprint, London: Vintage, 1995), 115-116; hereafter cited by page in the text.
[29] Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 111.
[30] Basharat Peer, *Curfewed Night* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 132.
[31] Kashmir became the only territory fought over by India and Pakistan after independence in 1947. Since 1949, the Line of Control, a de facto border, has divided the territory into Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir (which includes the Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Ladakh) and the Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Prior to independence, the predominantly Muslim Kashmir was the largest of the approximately 500 princely states under British sovereignty. Immediately following the departure of the British, Kashmiris thought they had the choice of becoming a fully independent nation, or acceding to either India or Pakistan. However, an incursion by Pakistani tribesmen in 1947 compelled Kashmir's then Hindu maharaja, Hari Singh, to join India. India has increasingly eroded Kashmir's relative independence and turned it into a subjugated state. The early 1990s saw the emergence of a popularly backed armed insurgency, initially orchestrated by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which proposed a secular and sovereign Kashmir. Over time the insurgency

Shalimar spends more than a decade as part of Kashmir's liberation front before he progresses into the ranks of Islamist *jihadis*. This transition, too, is credible given the ascendency of the Pakistan-backed Islamist guerrilla group Hizbul Majahideen, which became dominant over the JKLF. However, the text complicates Shalimar's motivation for becoming a *jihadi*, suggesting he might not have done so for religious reasons. While training for "worldwide Islamist-jihadist activities" (264) under the iron mullah, Maulana Bulbul Fakh, Shalimar harbours a secret ambivalence about his teacher's ideological and religious zeal. Even though Shalimar goes through the pantomime of tearing off his clothes in front of the iron mullah and other recruits, claiming to have "cleanse[d] myself of everything except the struggle," the "trained performer" and "actor" realises afterwards that he had "almost believed his own performance" (267-268), indicating he has not fully subscribed to the *jihadist* cause. Years later, after being hardened as an assassin, Shalimar rejects the notion of Islamist martyrdom when he falls out with the iron mullah after the militant leader introduces suicide bombers. Shalimar thinks the "business of finding young boys and even young girls who were ready to blow themselves" is "demeaning" (318). These episodes suggest Shalimar's religious conviction may be ambivalent at best, and may not have been the catalyst for him becoming a *jihadi*. In reality, as Peer notes, some leaders of militant groups in Kashmir were not necessarily religious crusaders, but often used Islam as an inspirational tool to mobilise their troops, borrowing images from Islamic history and employing words like martyrdom and *jihad* as motivational terms.[32] This reading of Shalimar implies the underlying reason why he became a *jihadi* may have been more to happenstance rather than design, as a result of Islamist extremists taking over the JKLF liberation fighters.

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became dominated by the Islamist guerrilla group Hizbul Majahideen, which was supported by Pakistan. India retaliated by mobilising more than 550,000 armed personnel to Kashmir in the 1990s, leading to a violent and repressive counter-insurgency. From 1989 to 2002, between 40,000 and 80,000 people are estimated to have died in Jammu and Kashmir. References: Sumantra Bose, 2, 3, 4, 27, 30; Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 187; Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175-176.

[32] Peer, 168.

This interpretation of the title character reinforces the text's overall theme that individuals in a globalised world no longer have any influence over historical forces, especially ideology and culture. Shalimar is a victim of history rather than a shaper of it. His actions in the public sphere prove to be as inconsequential as that of his brother, who is eventually tortured and murdered by Indian soldiers. This represents a shift in Rushdie's treatment of historiographic metafiction compared to his earlier work, which offered the hope that individuals could alter the course of history. I am drawing on Linda Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction as fiction that critically reworks the forms and contents of the past by by treating history and fiction "as human constructs." Furthermore, historiographic metafiction questions the veracity of the historical record by foregrounding the potential for error in the documentation of history.[33] This metafictional approach to history has become an integral feature of much magical realist fiction in that writers often employ the narrative mode to insert a 'magical' discourse into a realistic setting, in order to challenge and question orthodox assumptions of the historical record.

Presenting alternative, fictionalised versions of history, and questioning the veracity of its basis, provides the spine of much of Rushdie's work. "History has become debatable," says Rushdie. "In the aftermath of Empire, in the age of super-power, under the 'footprint' of the partisan simplifications beamed down to us from satellites, we can no longer easily agree on *what is the case*, let alone what it might mean. Literature steps into this ring" (original emphasis).[34] *Shame* examines the effects of a military dictatorship in the narrator's post-independence "fictional country" that is "not quite" Pakistan but at the same time occupies "almost the same space" (29). *Midnight's Children* depicts an idealist's view of what could have been in post-independence India through the magical realist conceit of the thousand and one children of midnight who have the potential to influence the course of history, yet fail to do so because their group disintegrates amid infighting. *The Satanic Verses* questions the

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[33] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 5, 114.

[34] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 66-67.

veracity of holy scripture through the schizophrenic Gibreel Farishta's dreams that he is the Archangel Gibreel who appears to Mahound the Prophet and tricks him by telling different version of god's word on different days (123). The Archangel's deliberate 'mistakes' are duly recorded in writing and enter the holy scripture. Notions of history, the novel implies, are highly subjective and unreliable.

In *Joseph Anton*, Rushdie states how at the start of his writing career he decided his fiction would explore "the great point of history, which was to understand how individual lives, communities, nations and social classes were shaped by great forces, yet retained, at times, the ability to change the direction of those forces."[35] Rushdie's early belief in the power of individuals to influence history is best exemplified in Mahound, who metamorphosises from businessman to Prophet to become the founder of "one of the world's great religions" in *The Satanic Verses* (95). Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* is a more complex figure, in that he believes he is "handcuffed to history" and his personal destinies are "indissolubly chained to those of my country".[36] Yet Saleem is ultimately shown up to be megalomaniacal and powerless: his attempts to persuade the other children of midnight to shape India's post-independence future come to nothing; his unwilling participation as a soldier in the Pakistan-Indian war demonstrates he is a victim of major historical events; and his futile resistance to Indira Gandhi's state of emergency in the 1970s shows he has no control over political forces.

In *Shalimar*, Max Ophuls is, in a sense, a close relative of Saleem. The brilliant economist starts off believing, or at least acting as though, he can influence political events, as a member of the French Resistance fighting the Nazis, as a participant in the Bretton-Wood Conference to establish the post-war financial systems (173), conversing with historical leaders like Charles de Gaulle (170), and as a US ambassador to India. Even towards the end of his life Max remains an idealist, stubbornly trying "to believe that the global structures he had helped to build ... the multinational associations, the treaty organizations, the frameworks of co-operation and law whose purpose had been to deal with

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[35] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 55-56.

[36] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; reprint, London: Picador, 1982), 9; hereafter cited by page in the text.

a hot war turned cold, would still function in the future that lay beyond what he could foresee." But it is an idealism his pragmatic daughter realises is a "utopian fallacy ... the myth of the perfectibility of man" (20). In the end, Max has no more success at influencing historical forces than Saleem.

Shalimar, on the other hand, represents disillusionment, the son of an idealistic father who grew up witnessing the destruction of his homeland and its unique culture by foreign military and political forces. Shalimar is the ultimate cynic, who gives himself over to historical forces rather than trying to resist them. Conversely, Boonyi is the opportunist whose one attempt to break free from what she views as a constricting village life backfires disastrously, as she herself is crushed beneath the weight of history. Max abandons her in fear that her pregnancy will cost him his career (although it does anyway): Indira Ghandi has her government members privately criticise Max's affair in order to portray India as the protector of Kashmir "against marauders of all types" (206). Shalimar and Boonyi, as Damian Grant says, are "not so much handcuffed to history as pilloried by it, and play out in their doomed and demented relationship all the violence and hatred of the times."[37]

This fatalist attitude to history, a belief in the impotence of the individual, is reflective of Rushdie's evolving philosophy of the "new world" following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of "revolutionary Islam." In this post-millennial age, he argues, the Marxian idea that economics is primary has become redundant, whereas "ideology and culture were moving to the centre of the stage."[38] I propose that Rushdie's concept of ideology being ascendant as an historical force is played out in the pairing of Max as a mirror image of Shalimar: Max is the Western intellectual urbane cosmopolitan, whereas Shalimar is the Eastern uneducated provincial peasant; Max is the global citizen, whereas Shalimar is the village-born regionalist; Max is the perennial seducer of women, whereas Shalimar is the jealous cuckolded husband. The most important oppositional characteristic between the pair, in the context of this thesis, is that Max is bereft of any supernatural powers, whereas

[37] Damian Grant, *Salman Rushdie*, 2nd ed. (Tavistock: Northcote House, 1999), 158.
[38] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 110.

Shalimar is imbued with them. The implication of this series of binary oppositions between the two characters is that Shalimar represents the 'Other,' while Max personifies Western culture, which provides the intellectual framework of the novel.

Yet despite their mirror image, the two characters ultimately merge by transforming into terrorist figures. One of Rushdie's biggest achievements in *Shalimar* is to foreground the political nature of terrorism and the relative meaning of the term, as well as its ambiguity and its connection to the notion of freedom fighters. In this respect, Rushdie's deconstruction of terrorism reflects magical realism's capacity to break down binary oppositions and artificial barriers. "Terrorism, in the most widely accepted contemporary usage of the term, is fundamentally and inherently political," says Bruce Hoffman. "Terrorism is thus violence – or, equally important, the threat of violence – used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim." However, Hoffman concedes terrorism is "elusive" to define because its meaning has changed considerably over the last two centuries since first emerging as a positive concept during the French Revolution, when it denoted a system to enforce social stability and quell dissent. Yet by the late twentieth century terrorism had become a pejorative term.[39] Shalimar's character arc I have detailed above; Max's is more subtle. Like Shalimar with the Kashmiri liberation movement, Max starts off as a political freedom fighter resisting an occupying foreign force, as a member of the French Resistance. The term 'freedom fighter,' as Hoffman points out, emerged during the late 1940s and 1950s to signify the political legitimacy accorded to national liberation and self-determination movements around the globe, especially among anti-colonialist groups in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Many of these groups argued they should not be described as 'terrorists' but 'freedom fighters.'[40] Rushdie confirms in an interview he deliberately raises this connection in *Shalimar*, saying that Max's actions during the French Resistance would now be thought of as "heroic," whereas at other times an insurgency during an occupation might be called "terrorist." "I

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[39] Bruce Hoffman, "Defining Terrorism," in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, ed. Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer (Guildford: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 4, 13, 33.
[40] Hoffman, 11.

didn't want to make moral judgments," says Rushdie.[41] During the Second World War, Max throws a bomb into the home of "a Vichy stooge" and discovers that "terrorism was thrilling," but decides to discontinue this type of violent act because of "the moral hurdles" (162). The political imperative in deciding who is a terrorist and who is a freedom fighter is again highlighted in the novel when Pakistani prime minister Zulkifar Alu Bhutto visits "Pak-backed terrorists" who had hijacked an Indian Airlines planes in Lahore and calls them "freedom fighters" (246). Max, however, after self-destructing as an ambassador, eventually becomes the very thing he abhors, a terrorist. Max's final career is as the US counterterrorism chief who roams the Middle East, the Gulf states, Central America, Africa and Afghanistan. Rushdie uses the imagery of a ghost to denote Max's final transformation: he is a "senior spook" who must remain "hidden," a man who "could not be named" and who "slipped across the globe like a shadow" (353). The description is of a specter-like figure who keeps returning, to remind the reader of the historical forces that shape the geopolitical present. Max as the US counterterrorist chief constitutes a hauntology – Jacques Derrida's concept I introduced in the previous chapter – in that he represents repressed historical events that keep returning to haunt us. Max, in other words, ultimately becomes like Shalimar, a transnational figure with a shadowy presence. Max's complicity in helping spawn global terrorism is revealed when Shalimar's *jihadi* friend Talib is said in the 1980s to have been a liaison between the Afghan *mujahideen* and Max, who "was supporting terror activities while calling himself an ambassador for counterterrorism" (272). By conjoining the fate of Max and Shalimar as 'freedom fighters' turned 'terrorists,' therefore, the text implies the Western world is equally culpable of spawning violence as the religious or ideological terrorists. More importantly, it is Shalimar, the individual who has given up his life to the ideological forces of history, who finally wins out by murdering Max. Ideology, therefore, remains primary in the progression of history.

[41] Jack Livings, "Salman Rushdie: The Art of Fiction No. 186," *The Paris Review* 174 (2005): 111.

Boonyi stands in opposition to Shalimar through her ruthless pragmatism and willingness to leave her own family in order to get ahead materially. The irony with Boonyi is that she is the one character who strives to transcend her historical circumstances to improve her lot, but is foiled in the process, finally ending up completing a full circle as an outcast in her home village. In other words, Boonyi's individual narrative is the one that most particularly highlights the absurdity of history. My argument is that Rushdie employs the magical realist trope of the bodily grotesque to explore the link between the individual (Boonyi) and the nation (Kashmir). Boonyi is also arguably the most complex character in the novel, serving as a rebuttal to earlier criticism, once valid, that Rushdie had a record of "honourable failure" in "his anxiety to write woman into the narrative of history," as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says.[42] Although Rushdie had previously written women characters with relative degrees of complexity – such as Ayesha the prophetess and Allie Cone the mountaineer in *The Satanic Verses*, Aurora Zogoiby the artist and Indian nationalist heroine in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, and Vina Aspera the singer in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* – Boonyi marks his first attempt to write a complicated subaltern woman character. The subaltern woman, as Spivak highlights, is "doubly effaced" because of the dominance of the male in society due to the ideological construction of gender.[43] Rushdie resists portraying Boonyi as a passive victim of her downtrodden circumstances and instead depicts her as a conscious, calculating agent. Early in her marriage, the ambitious girl realises her betrothal and the village of Pachigam will become "a lifetime sentence" and so resolves to escape, reflecting a desire for self-determination (114-115). In her twenties she dances for Max, then aged fifty-five, regarding the ambassador as "a fool" and her avenue for freedom (133). So when a besotted Max offers to set her up in an apartment in New Delhi to become his paramour, she not only willingly accepts, but also exhibits "a naked pragmatism" by negotiating the terms of their agreement like "an international arms deal," insisting on a decent education and a nice place to live (192). However, she outwits Max by not taking

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[42] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 223.
[43] "Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 41.

contraceptive pills and falling pregnant. Subsequently, their relationship sours and the once beautiful and desirable dancer metamorphoses into a physically grotesque figure, gorging on food, opium and pills. Boonyi becomes so obese she turns into a “new type of cripple” who is “almost immobile through sheer gluttony” (209).

Boonyi’s changed physical state reflects the shift in the power imbalance. Whereas Boonyi, through her beauty, initially holds the upper hand over Max the ageing lothario, after she breaks their pact by falling pregnant Max callously cuts her off. The obese Boonyi is an example of the bodily grotesque, which is a recurring feature of magical realist fiction.[44] Many of the magically real bodies, as Wendy Faris says, “are literally inscribed with the social, political, cultural, and geographical coordinates.”[45] However, these fictional bodies frequently belong to women, which suggests a form of embodied knowledge that marks their traumatic experience and transgresses the conventional Western dichotomy of mind and body. In Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* (1984), for instance, the feathered wings of the Cockney trapeze artist Fevvers symbolise a flight from sexual and economic repression at the dawn of the Victorian suffragette movement. In D.M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel* (1981), Sigmund Freud’s Jewish patient Lisa Erdman complains of pain in her left breast and pelvic region, which he initially treats as hysteria, but her physical pain, it becomes apparent, is the embodiment of her prophetic power to foresee the death of herself and others amid the Babi Yar massacre of Jews and Ukrainians by the Nazis. These grotesque bodily representations act as a kind of “linguistic magic” by which “flesh is literally inscribed with or transformed by an idea” and in many instances “literally marked by history, as in the phenomenon of ‘felt history’,” says Faris.[46] Put another way, the bodily grotesque enables traumatic memories that cannot be accepted into consciousness to be displaced into an alternative register. “Both magic and grotesque realism,” says Jenni Adams, “enable acts of traumatic representation

[44] Jenni Adams, *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 82.
[45] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 188.
[46] Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 190.

that are otherwise impossible."[47] I propose that Boonyi's metamorphosis from idealised beauty to obese bodily grotesque embodies the political and geographical coordinates of Kashmir's transition from earthly paradise to corrupted colony. In Rushdie's fictional portrayal, Kashmir seeks freedom but is invaded and destroyed by foreign forces. Boonyi suffers a bodily invasion on two fronts: by Max, who represents the dominant Western powers; and by materialistic consumption, through junk food and addictive opiates. This interpretation is crystallised in Boonyi's attack on Max: "I am your handiwork made flesh. You took beauty and created hideousness, and out of this monstrosity your child will be born. Look at me. I am the meaning of your deeds" (205).[48] As Marianne Corrigan says, "Rushdie maps the militarization of Kashmir through the body of Boonyi, and her sexual relationship with Max."[49] However, Boonyi's descent into grotesqueness is not solely a national allegory of the fate of Kashmir, because her obesity is, to some extent, the result of her willing embrace of Western consumerism. Having rejected Kashmiri culture, which is symbolised by her gift for traditional dancing, Boonyi replaces her heritage with a physically and spiritually destructive lifestyle.

While Rushdie embraces magical realism to denote the destruction of Kashmir through the bodily grotesque, his resort to literary realism for sections denoting violence has led to criticism that he has become ambivalent to magical realism as a literary style appropriate for human rights advocacy. Passages that involve Shalimar fighting with the Kashmir insurgents and his *jihadi* journeys around the globe – into Arabic, French and English-speaking countries as well as a year-long stint killing Christians in the Philippines – are predominantly portrayed in a realist style. For instance, Shalimar's first 'hit,' of a French-speaking "godless" writer in North Africa, reads like a sparse Robert Ludlum thriller. Shalimar carries out the act on a crowded street and, instead of using a pistol with a silencer as he had been instructed, slaughters the writer with a knife. "He wanted to know what it would feel like when he placed the blade of his knife against the man's skin, when he pushed the sharp

[47] Adams, 103, 109.
[48] There is a parallel in the novel between Max's bodily invasion of Boonyi and Max's Strasbourg-based Ashkenazi Jewish parents, whose bodies were invaded by the German Nazis in fatal medical experiments (157).
[49] Corrigan, 41.

and glistening horizon of the knife against the frontier of the skin, violating the sovereignty of another human soul, moving in beyond taboo, towards the blood" (274). Rushdie here chooses to focus on the psychological degeneration of his protagonist in a realist mode. Similarly, Rushdie concentrates on the emotional trauma of Shalimar's mother, Firdaus, when the corpse of his freedom-fighter brother, Anees, is dumped at their parents' house after being tortured by Indian security forces. Indian soldiers smash down the front door and drag Firdaus outside by her hair. "She stood up and looked the incharge in the eye. 'Where are his hands?' she asked ... 'Give me back his hands'" (307).

Why does Rushdie predominantly utilise literary realism to portray violence rather than magical realism, as he had done previously? Does this indicate a change in authorial style? John Updike notes: "The novel's knowledgeable details of military and political action, and its harrowing depictions of atrocity and counteratrocity, are apt to be news to American readers, for whom, in six decades that headlined Eastern Europe, Berlin, Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, Kashmir has been off the front page. But to Rushdie it has been a grievous personal matter."[50] Updike's argument, in effect, is that Rushdie, who had emigrated from London to New York before composing the book, was writing with a polemical intent and an American audience in mind. To reinforce the political impact, he turned to a kind of fictional journalism in order to highlight atrocities associated with the Kashmir conflict. Updike's interpretation has merit. Rushdie clearly felt a personal impetus for writing the book: he claims to be "more than half Kashmiri" himself and dedicated the novel to "my Kashmiri grandparents." He also supports a fully independent Kashmir state.[51] In addition, Rushdie reveals in *Joseph Anton* the idea for *Shalimar* came to him while filming a television documentary about India, when Kashmiri performers of the *bhand pather*, or clown stories, of Kashmiri history and legend, stated on-camera they loved the Indian Army, but off-camera were "ferocious" in their criticisms of "the authoritarian Indian military."[52] This comment

[50] John Updike, "Paradises Lost: Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*,"*The New Yorker*, September 5, 2005, accessed March 13, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/09/05/paradises-lost.
[51] Salman Rushdie, "Kashmir, the Imperiled Paradise," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1999, A27.
[52] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 83.

implies Rushdie regarded it his duty to tell the 'truth' of the militarisation of Kashmir. Three years before the novel's publication, Rushdie demonstrated his desire to persuade the US government to focus on Kashmir in an article for *The Washington Post* in 2002. He criticised then US president George W. Bush's foreign policy in South Asia for ignoring the Kashmir conflict, fearing the US would turn a blind eye to Pakistani-backed terrorism in Kashmir because of Pakistan's support for the US-led war against terrorism in Iraq at that time.[53] Rushdie's self-positioning as a writer with an international voice, as an immigrant lobbying US leaders, is in keeping with his cosmopolitanism, in the dual senses described by Rebecca Walkowitz: promoting allegiance to a transnational community rather than a particular nation; and emphasising multiple attachments to more than one nation.[54]

The literary realism evident in *Shalimar* has proved problematic for some critics. Natasha Walter, in a review for *The Guardian*, says: "If you're prepared to take this novel as an impassioned lecture on the roots of violence and the awful fate of Kashmir, it can work powerfully. But lose sight of the lecture, and you are left with an increasingly absurd plot and a style that is more and more mannered."[55] While Walter clearly has no issue with the polemical aspects of the book, she nevertheless views them as jarring stylistically with the supernatural elements. Elizabeth Anker, more specifically, argues Rushdie gravitates to what she calls "mimetic realism" in order to highlight human rights abuses in Kashmir, and that this indicates the author's "ambivalence" towards magical realism in the text. Anker concludes that the novel's paramount concern is not "aesthetic experimentation and play," which she says characterises Rushdie's earlier work, but rather "to awakening social conscience, a project requiring persuasion and credibility." "It is this yearning for the truth effects of frank

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[53] Salman Rushdie, "Double Standard Make Enemies," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2002, A23.
[54] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 9.
[55] Natasha Walter, "The children of paradise," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2005, accessed January 10, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/sep/03/fiction.salmanrushdie.

political speech that engenders *Shalimar*'s conflicted posture toward magical realism," says Anker.[56]

However, I would argue the text does not exhibit a "conflicted posture" toward magical realism in relation to violence so much as a complex one. A more nuanced reading of the text is required rather than an inference that magical realism be reduced to an either / or proposition in relation to literary realism. One of the key attributes of magical realism, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, is that it destabilises the idea of a universal truth or reality, and instead posits a pluralistic view of multiple truths or realities, by presenting alternative and often conflicting modes of knowledge systems or cultural codes. Rushdie's purpose in the passages denoting violence is polemical, which is borne out by the repetitive phrasing he employs in relation to the "orgy of unprovoked violence" against Hindu pandits, the "pogrom" during the Muslim insurgency, which the "six hundred thousand Indian troops in Kashmir" fail to prevent. Rushdie repeats the phrase "why was that" ten times after each of a number of rhetorical questions detailing the aftermath of this "human cleansing" event (295-297). The technique both focuses the reader's attention on the extreme, politically-sanctioned violence and acts as a distancing effect so that we may reflect upon it. Indeed, Marco Roth praises Rushdie for his "strength" regarding "descriptions of violence and atrocity" because it enables readers "to understand the consequences of terror and its violent repression by the state."[57] At this point in the text, Rushdie's purpose is to present only one 'reality' in order to highlight the human rights abuses.

Anker is correct to observe that *Shalimar* lacks the "aesthetic experimentation and play" in Rushdie's early work, but, as I noted above, his overly elaborate style in *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses* would have been inappropriate given the sombre themes of state-sanctioned violence and international terrorism in *Shalimar*. Yet Rushdie does employ magical realism in part to portray the psychological effect of the perpetrators of the

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[56] Elizabeth S. Anker, "Narrating Human Rights and the Limits of Magic Realism in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*," in *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg and Alexandra Schultheis Moore (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 150, 158, 159.
[57] Marco Roth, "Give the people what they want," *The Times Literary Supplement* 5344, September 9, 2005, 19.

violence in Kashmir, in keeping with the narrative mode's "traumatic imagination," which I have referred to in previous chapters. Eugene Arva's phrase reflects magical realist fiction's capacity to "*re*-present the unpresentable," not of what actually happened but of "what was *experienced* as happening" (original emphasis) in regards to historical trauma.[58] Rushdie uses this technique in *Midnight's Children* to convey the horrors of Indira Gandhi's state of emergency in India in the mid-1970s, when up to a quarter of a million political prisoners were rounded up (434). In the novel, the dictatorial regime orders doctors to remove the reproductive organs of the magical children of midnight in order to take away their supernatural powers, an action that results in "the tormented cry of children who had lost their magic" (439). The "traumatic imagination" appears in many other magical realist texts, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), which re-presents the brutality of slavery through the ghost of the daughter of Sethe, a former slave, who returns to haunt her mother as a teenager. Re-presenting the unpresentable compels the reader to use their imagination in an active, experiential sense, which leads to a more engaged, subjective understanding of the historical trauma being conveyed.

Shalimar re-presents the unpresentable in the character of Indian Colonel Hammirdev Suryavans Kachhwaha, who is in charge of suppressing Kashmir insurgencies. The colonel has such "an exceptional memory" (96) that accumulates "the detritus of quotidian memories" (97) he cannot forget a thing. This magical realist trope involves a human rights or ethical component in that it suggests those responsible for perpetrating violence ought not to be able to forget their actions. Indeed, Colonel Kachhwaha eventually suffers from an "overload of unforgotten words and deeds" that leaves him "wide-eyed with horror." The consequence is an inversion of the natural order of physiology: he experiences a "jumbling of his senses," thinking his officers have "rigid vermillion voices" and that his soldiers smell like "jasmin blossoms" (121). The magical realist aspect of the colonel continues with his supernatural death, which is brought about after Shalimar's mother, Firdaus, casts a "snake curse" on

[58] Eugene L. Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2011), 5.

Kachhwaha, who dreams he is killed by a king cobra in his sleep (316-317). My point is that magical realism is only one of the many modes of conveyance that Rushdie utilises in the novel, and that he uses it for particular effect. To complement the literary realism of the violence, Rushdie employs magical realism's "traumatic imagination" to invoke the trauma that befalls the architect of much of the Kashmir violence.

Interestingly, Rushdie returns to a magical realist treatment of violence in his latest novel, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015).[59] In this futuristic fantasy, Rushdie reclaims the playful aesthetics of his earlier work and a preponderance of magical realist tropes. Indeed, the book is so laden with them – levitating illegal immigrants, wormholes that lead to alternate worlds, humans copulating with spirits – that Rushdie seems to consciously parody his own style from the 1980s. More pertinent to this argument is that Rushdie deploys magical realism to portray violence associated with religious extremism, as the jinn spirits wage war against the human real world during the period of the "strangenesses" in a failed attempt to establish a "global jinn sultanate." The novel is a thinly veiled critique of twenty-first century Islamist terror regimes like the Taliban in Afghanistan and Isis in Syria and Iraq. "Zumurrud [the dark jinn] embarked on a wild international spree of decapitations, crucifixions and stoning that created, in the very first days of the sultanate, a groundswell of hatred that would, in short order, fuel the counter-revolution," says the narrator (241).

The alternating between magical realism and literary realism that we find in *Shalimar* is present elsewhere in Rushdie's work. In *The Satanic Verses*, he uses the realist mode to narrate the founding of a major religion, juxtaposing the realist Jahilia sections with the magical realism inherent in the Thatcherite Britain chapters. As Christopher Warnes points out, Rushdie here emulates *The Master and Margarita*, in which Mikhail Bulgakov includes historical realism within the Master's novel in a rewriting of Christ's crucifixion, in contrast to the magical realism of the Soviet Moscow sections in the main narrative.[60] Yet Rushdie's

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[59] Salman Rushdie, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015).
[60] Warnes, 109.

switching between modes in the Jahilia and Britain sections is by no means a simplistic aesthetic demarcation, because the Jahilia passages are complicated on two levels: first, they are dreams; and, second, creations of the mind of the schizophrenic Gibreel. This reinforces my argument that the realist mode is more complex than mere representation or mimesis (as Anker seems to suggest), and is itself an artistic construction because it involves a dual process of registering both the external world and, simultaneously, the perception of the external world that distorts it. Realism involves a degree of self-consciousness on the part of the author about how to represent, at a textual level, the external world. In this respect, magical realism is an emanation of literary realism rather than a binary opposition to it. The 'magical' and the 'real' are neither antagonistic nor oppositional, but represent an infinite array of points that lie upon a continuum. The 'magical' and the 'real' have an "adjunctive, supplementary relationship" with one another.[61]

Similarly, the modal boundaries between magical realism and realism are blurred in the 2012 film adaptation of *Midnight's Children*, which involves a noticeably different aesthetic treatment of the two modes than occurs in the novel. This warrants highlighting because, even though film is to a large extent a director's medium, Rushdie co-wrote the screenplay (as well as 'acted' as the voiceover narrator). The film is shot mostly in a realist style, and even the plot points that are distinctly magical realist in the novel are blended with a cinematic realism. For instance, the story's central magical realist conceit – the magical children of midnight – is portrayed in the film as a hybrid between the real and the supernatural. When Saleem Sinai sees and talks to the other magical children, it generally occurs in his bedroom or another interior room, as if there are other, 'real' people surrounding him. Granted, there is a visual allusion that they 'appear' to him, but the depiction is as flesh-and-blood characters, rather than as telepathic bodiless identities. Moreover, in each of these scenes, there are only perhaps a couple of dozen of the midnight's children at most, rather than the full one thousand and one, which, in the age of

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[61] Tamás Bényei, "Rereading 'Magic Realism'," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 3.1 (1997): 157.

computer-generated images, seems parsimonious numerically. As a result, the film adaptation does not accentuate the central magical realist aspects of the novel, although this may have been a stylistic decision by the director in an attempt to add plausibility to the storyline. For the purposes of my argument, the film version of *Midnight's Children* illustrates the adjunctive relationship of the 'magical' and the 'real' rather than an oppositional one.

This aspect of Rushdie's writing is indicative of what Robert Eaglestone identifies as the paradoxical nature of his fiction, which is characterised by having contrasting and irresolvable positions that never reach a satisfactory synthesis or conclusion. "Rushdie's work is simply too lacking in unity, too paradoxical and continually shifting for any firm view which relies on a single position properly to embody it," says Eaglestone. The paradoxical aspect of the violence in *Shalimar* is that its realist depiction stands in opposition to the postmodern irony and play of much of the rest of the novel, the sincerity or earnestness of these passages contrasting with the epistemological questioning of the 'magical' parts. As Eaglestone suggests, Rushdie's fiction may be read within the context of Jean-François Lyotard's concept of paralogical thinking.[62] Paralogy, as Lyotard defines it, denotes a postmodern scientific method by which knowledge is acquired through inventing counter-examples, or paradoxes, in order to test a hypothesis or argument. In other words, the pursuit of knowledge involves "producing not the known, but the unknown," says Lyotard. "Consensus is a horizon that is never reached."[63] The paralogical nature of *Shalimar* is exemplified in the novel's open ending, when Kashmira waits at night in Max's house for the fugitive Shalimar with a bow and arrow, knowing he has broken in and is hunting her. Although the last few lines state "there was no possibility that she would miss" (397), there is always the chance her arrow might not kill him. The ending, therefore, implies four possible outcomes: Kashmira kills Shalimar; Shalimar kills Kashmira; they both kill each other; or neither kills the other and their mutual vengeance continues. The ending offers no affirmation, only a continuation of paradoxes.

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[62] Eaglestone, "Salman Rushdie: Paradox and Truth," 100, 101.

[63] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 54, 60, 61.

Rushdie's treatment of Kashmir in the novel is also paradoxical in that he mythologises Kashmir as an idyllic paradise, which is a divergence from historical reality. Kashmir as a key location in *Shalimar* functions as a liminal geographical space, an amorphous site confined by outer boundaries, in this case hemmed in between two warring nuclear powers, India and Pakistan. In this respect, the novel follows in a tradition of magical realist fiction in which a liminal geographical setting operates as a "binary constriction," providing "the vehicle for reading the site of the novel as a metonym for postcolonial space," as Stephen Slemon says.[64] The trope appears, for instance, as the Colombian outpost Macondo in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), the municipality of Bigknife in the Canadian rural west in Robert Kroetsche's *What The Crow Said* (1978), the northern Australian town of Desperance in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), and the remote coastal towns in the south and north islands of New Zealand in, respectively, Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984) and Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987). Kashmir, which was technically independent of Britain before 1947, becomes a contested site for India and Pakistan, as well as for transnational forces such as geopolitical hegemony and fundamentalist Islam. As its borders change shape, so too does the make-up of its society. In the once tolerant, harmonious region, Islamic extremists torture and behead women to enfore a strict religious dress code (277). The novel offers another marginal and liminal geographical space as a parallel to Kashmir. Max's childhood homeland of Strasbourg had been "defined and refined for many centuries by shifting frontiers, upheavals and dislocations, flights and returns, conquests and reconquests," from the ancient Romans to the French and Germans in the Second World War (138). The implication from Strasbourg's history is that Kashmir, too, will transform.

By emphasising Kashmir's liminal status as a contested site with porous borders, Rushdie also accentuates its cognate status as a site in transition. Kashmir, then, is mythologised as a land of in-betweenness, reflecting the third plane of magical realist fiction.

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[64] Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 415.

Shalimar represents Rushdie's first attempt to make Kashmir a focal point of one of his novels, although the territory appears a number of times in his earlier fiction, each time suggested as an earthly paradise corrupted by greed and violence. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, feels more Kashmiri than Indian while the territory is "an independent princely state" (33) but leaves anyway to further his career as a doctor. Tai the ferryman is posited as the spiritual link to Kashmir, a "spirit of the valley" who transports the English sahibs to the Shalimar Gardens and King's Spring (15). Tai also represents staunch independence, having as a personal motto "Kashmir for the Kashmiris." But his bravery comes to nothing as he walks into the battleground between opposing Indian and Pakistani forces in 1947 to protest at their incursions into his valley, and is "naturally" shot (37). In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), the notion of Kashmir as paradise is framed within the storyteller Rashid Khalifa's explanation to his son, Haroun, that "the Valley of K" is a place with "fields of gold and mountains of silver."[65] Rashid's idealism, however, is contrasted with brutal reality. When father and son arrive at the Valley of K they are surrounded by "heavily armed soldiers" (42). Rushdie continues with this juxtaposition of an earthly paradise tinged with seedy reality in the short story "The Prophet's Hair," which is set in the Kashmir city of Srinagar.[66] An ungodly moneylender's family is killed after he finds a strand of the Prophet Muhammad's hair and his daughter seeks out a thief to return the relic to the mosque from which it has been stolen.

Shalimar also portrays Kashmir as a "terrainal paradise."[67] In this respect, the novel follows a long tradition by Indians, British and people from other countries of holding up Kashmir to be an earthly paradise, an idealised view first propagated by the Mughal emperors.[68] Kashmir Valley's physical beauty, with its rich and fertile soil, surrounded by vertiginous mountains, once made the region a popular tourist destination, a temperate

[65] Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta Books, 1990), 25; hereafter cited by page in the text.
[66] Salman Rushdie, *East, West* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994); hereafter cited by page in the text.
[67] O'Connor, 212.
[68] Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 5.

Himalayan escape from the summer heat of the plains. In the novel, this idealised view is symbolised in the notion of Kashmiriyat, which is defined by Shalimar's father, Abdullah Noman, as "the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all their differences" (110). Pachigam is initially portrayed as a village in which Muslims and Hindus co-exist peacefully as neighbours, which is symbolised in the inter-faith marriage of the teenage Shalimar (Muslim) and Boonyi (Hindu). Hence Kashmir, in the text, becomes a paradise lost, perhaps never to be regained. In this regard, Rushdie invokes Kashmiriyat in the same way that Kashmiris do, "in the context of its perceived erosion."[69] However, Rushdie's invocation of Kashmiriyat forms an integral part of his mythologising of Kashmir, because in reality definitions of Kashmiriyat have "remained vague and adaptable" due to different political or ethnic groups co-opting the term for their own interests.[70] Kashmiriyat is, to some extent, a myth. "Writings from both India and Kashmir frequently assert the primordial amity between Hindus and Muslims that existed under its banner," says Ananya Jahanara Kabir . "Kashmir's perceived 'enchantment' is associated with this mythic harmony between groups that, particularly during Partition, elsewhere strained for each other's throats."[71] Sumantra Bose agrees that a "vast" distance existed between the "privileged Hindu elite" centred on Kashmir's pre-1947 ruling family and "their large majority of Muslim subjects." Bose adds that accounts of Jammu and Kashmir in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "paint a grim picture of a self-absorbed, hopelessly incompetent regime and a Muslim subject population living in medieval conditions of poverty and oppression."[72]

Rushdie's use of Kashmiriyat, then, diverges from historical reality in order to mythologise Kashmir has a socially harmonious society. The paradox lies in the novel's advocacy for an independent Kashmir state, with the implication that this would re-establish a social paradise, but the historical reality was quite the opposite. *Shalimar*, therefore, is similar

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[69] Kabir, 20.
[70] Mirdu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir* (London: Hurst & Co, 2004), 224.
[71] Kabir, 164.
[72] Sumantra Bose, 16.

to *The Calcutta Chromosome* in that both novels employ historiographic metafiction not to re-instate forgotten historical 'truth,' but to fictionalise history in order to posit an alternative idea. In Ghosh's novel, the real-life British scientist Ronald Ross only discovers the cause of malaria once he is pointed in the right direction by his Indian subaltern lab assistants. The idea is to privilege localised Indian scientific knowledge over colonialist science. In Rushdie's book, the pre-Partition Kashmir becomes a terrainal paradise to which all people ought to aspire, free from ideological, religious and political oppression. Rushdie's fictionalised 'Kashmir,' in other words, is not so much a paradise lost, but a paradise that is yet to be gained.

In conclusion, *Shalimar the Clown* illustrates how Rushdie has developed his own style of magical realism in late career in order to find a new literary form that matches his shift in focus from postcolonialism to globalisation and the interconnectedness of the contemporary world. Even a canonical writer like Rushdie, who helped establish magical realist fiction as an international phenomenon, may evolve stylistically and thematically such that his later work warrants a re-assessment of how he utilises the narrative mode. Rushdie inverts his earlier use of the supernatural by associating it with the negative, destructive tendencies of humanity, in contrast to his previous fiction that presents the supernatural as a positive power. Telepathy becomes a metaphor for globalisation, stretching space-time from the local to the remote, as well as becoming a power with which to terrorise one's victim. Rushdie returns to historiographic metafiction within a magical realist context in order to depict the powerlessness of the individual in the face of historical forces, especially ideology and culture. Moreover, Shalimar and Max ultimately merge as shadows of one another, transforming from freedom fighters to terrorists, exposing the culpability of both East and West in the rise of religious terrorism. In addition, I have shown how Rushdie's resort to literary realism to highlight human rights abuses in the Kashmiri conflict illustrates the porous generic borders between magical realism and realism, and the nature of the 'magical' and the 'real' as being points along a continuum rather than binary opposites. Rushdie's alternation between the different modes may be read as being indicative of the paradoxical

nature of his fiction, in which questions are raised without necessarily being answered. In the next chapter, I look at another writer, China's Mo Yan, who has also evolved his own style of magical realism throughout his career.

Chapter Five

Parody and purity: Mo Yan's resistance to Western magical realism in pursuit of his own Chinese style

"Re-examine my experiences afresh": inspiration rather than imitation

Although Mo Yan has been regarded as one of China's foremost contemporary novelists for the past three decades, his win of the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature provided a salient reminder that writers of magical realism from Asia are often left out of critical scholarship on magical realist narrative, with criticism still largely focused on North and South America, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. The Swedish Academy's decision to grant the award to the Chinese author means that nine writers of magical realism have now received the Nobel since 1949, signalling the narrative mode's enduring importance in world literature. Irrespective of the prize, Mo Yan ought to hold a central position in the global canon of magical realism because his utilisation of the narrative mode is distinctly Chinese and, as such, he develops the narrative mode in new directions. While Mo Yan was influenced by foreign authors early in his writing career, in particular Gabriel García Márquez, I will argue that he uses their explorations in magical realism as an inspiration rather than as examples to be imitated. Not only are the magical realist elements highly idiosyncratic to Mo Yan's literary style, they also change over time and overlap with traditional Chinese literary influences. As a result, it is particularly difficult to accurately describe the kind of magical realism in his works, and prompts the question whether magical realism adequately describes what is present in them. This may be partly why critics have given various magical realist labels to his fiction, such as "fantastical realism"[1] and "carnivalesque magical realism,"[2] or the Swedish Academy's cognate term, "hallucinatory realism."[3]

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[1] Sabina Knight, "The Realpolitik of Mo Yan's Fiction," in *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller*, ed. Angelica Duran and Yuhan Huan (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014), 96.
[2] Hongtao Liu, "Mo Yan's Fiction and the Chinese Nativist Literary Tradition," trans. Haiyan Lee, *World Literature Today* 83.4 (2009): 31.

Mo Yan's early novels exhibit elements of what we might identify as folkloric magical realism that emanate from local cultural beliefs, particularly from the Shandong province in north-east China, where the author was born and which serves as the location for most of his fiction. In this respect, his novels *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*, 红高粱, 1987) and *The Garlic Ballads* (*Tiantang suantai zhige*, 天堂蒜薹之歌, 1988) are reminiscent of the ontological strain of magical realism associated with Latin American fiction. In this chapter I shall argue that Mo Yan utilises the supernatural in order to re-imagine an alternative historiography that challenges the official version of Chinese history. Yet as his literary career progressed, the presence of magical realist characteristics became more spasmodic in his works. This was largely due to Mo Yan adopting an experimental realist style in historical novels like *Big Breasts & Wide Hips* (*Fengru feitun*, 丰乳肥臀, 1995) and *Sandalwood Death* (*Tanxiang xing*, 檀香刑, 2001). This pattern was interrupted, however, with the trenchantly satirical *The Republic of Wine* (*Jiu guo*, 酒国, 1992), which employs magical realism as metafiction in order to critique the rampant materialism of the post-Mao, market-oriented China. Mo Yan's novel is similar to Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromome* (1995) in that both books are constructed upon a complex mosaic of intertexts, and it is from the interplay of these intertexts that the magical elements are derived. I will demonstrate how Mo Yan develops in *The Republic of Wine* the traditional literary trope of cannibalism as a satirical vehicle, which in turn creates a grotesqueness that is typical of much magical realist fiction. What we find in Mo Yan, then, is a writer similar to Ghosh in that he utilises magical realism for some books but not for others, and amid a range of literary styles that are often difficult to categorise, especially those that are Western.

Mo Yan emerged as a writer in the 1980s with the "root-seeking" group of Chinese writers who aimed to probe "the roots of national character through local folk culture" and to

[3] Swedish Academy, Nobel Prize in Literature 2012, press release, October 11, 2012, accessed July 15, 2015, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2012/press.html.

recover a sense of national identity and cultural spirit by looking back to the past.[4] These writers produced "subversive historiographies" as a reaction against Maoism-Marxism and reimagined Chinese history in literature, says Howard Choy.[5] Authors like Mo Yan (born 1956) who grew up during Mao Zedong's reign began to question what their country's true history actually was, by injecting their own subjective take on China's past and writing parodies of the Chinese Communist Party's grand narrative of national history. Magical realism, with its Bakhtinian capacity for enabling multiple discourses and alternative points of view, was an attractive antidote to Mao's stultifying socialist realism.[6]

Mo Yan and other writers of his generation benefited from a relaxation of ideological rigidity and an opening up to the West under Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms following Mao's death in 1976. After three decades of foreign literature being effectively shut out of China, literary imports quickly flowed in. Mo Yan says he "welcomed the ideological emancipation and literary fervour."[7] China experienced a revival in Chinese translations of Western books. Among them was García Márquez's seminal magical realist work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which became "an inspirational model" for many Chinese writers who were keen to produce literature that could "move toward the world" without losing its Chinese character.[8] Magical realism, which in Chinese is known by its literal translation, *mohuan xianshizhuyi* (魔幻现实主义), was soon adapted by many Chinese authors.[9] Mo Yan acknowledges he was "greatly inspired" early in his career by both García Márquez and William Faulkner, especially their fictional locales of Macondo and Yoknapatawpha Country, respectively, which prompted him to create his own "literary domain," Northeast Gaomi

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[4] Howard Y.F. Choy, *Remapping the Past: Fictions of History in Deng's China, 1979-1997* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 12.
[5] Choy, 9.
[6] Socialist realism refers to the literary dogma that originated in the Stalinist Soviet Union and which was enforced by Mao. In effect, it was a communist propaganda tool confining fiction writers to employ literary realism in order to represent the struggle for socialism in a positive manner.
[7] Mo Yan, "Storytellers: Nobel Lecture, December 7, 2012," trans. Howard Goldblatt, *Chinese Literature Today* 3.1/2 (2013): 13.
[8] Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant "Other" in Modern Chinese Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 191.
[9] The Chinese term *mohuan xianshizhuyi* consists of *mohuan* (魔幻), meaning "magical", and *xianshizhuyi* (现实主义), meaning "realism."

Township, where most of his fiction is set.[10] On the other hand, Mo Yan claims he was "shocked and angry" when he first read García Márquez, because "I felt that I already possessed what Márquez had. If I had known it earlier, I would have written fiction that way. However, he really inspired me to re-examine my experiences afresh."[11] I take this remark to mean that Mo Yan recognised magical realist elements in his own work once he had objectively identified, through the Colombian's fiction, what magical realism was as a literary style. The epiphany Mo Yan describes is important because it supports my contention that while magical realist elements can be identified in Mo Yan's fiction, the underlying artistic expression that produced these elements may often have more to do with Mo Yan's individual style and his Chinese literary heritage than a conscious attempt to adapt a 'foreign' generic kind of magical realism.

Any description of Mo Yan's own style of magical realism is further complicated by the issue of translation. Of all the key authors in this thesis, Mo Yan is the only one who does not write in English. In fact, he is monolingual as he neither speaks nor reads any language other than Chinese (specifically, Mandarin). This has a dual significance: he absorbed foreign magical realist fiction through translations, and his own fiction is read by an international audience mostly through translations. Translation has been a paramount concern for Mo Yan, as he has long desired "a large readership," which, on a global scale, necessarily requires translations in multiple languages.[12] Consequently, his work has been published in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese, among other languages.[13] Despite this, Mo Yan's work has so far received more critical attention in China than the West.[14] Chinese fiction, unfortunately, still suffers from being pushed to the periphery of world literature. Critics have suggested this may be partly

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[10] Mo Yan, "Storytellers," 13.

[11] Laifong Leung, *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 150-151.

[12] Suman Guptak, "Li Rui, Mo Yan, Yan Lianke and Lin Bai: Four Contemporary Chinese Writers Interviewed," trans. Xiao Cheng, *Wasafiri* 23.3 (2008): 32.

[13] Shelley W. Chan, *A Subversive Voice in China: The Fictional World of Mo Yan* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011), 4.

[14] Angelica Duran and Yuhan Huan, "Introduction," in *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller*, ed. Angelica Duran and Yuhan Huan (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014), 6.

explained by an imbalance in translations, whereby many Western literary works are available in Chinese while "few excellent" Chinese works are translated into foreign languages,[15] or by the attitudes of some large publishers, which are dominated by Western corporations, perceiving Chinese fiction to be "little known" and therefore "unlikely to attract audiences."[16] Nevertheless, I would argue that Mo Yan's fiction, due to its extensive availability through multiple linguistic translations, ought to be positioned within the context of world literature, following David Damrosch's definition of world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading" rather than an "infinite, ungraspable canon of works." In other words, the fact that Mo Yan's fiction is published in a wide variety of different languages accords with Damrosch's observation that a work of world literature circulates out into a broader world beyond its "linguistic and cultural point of origin."[17]

Enhanced availability, however, is not necessarily correlated with cross-cultural understanding. Even though, as Mo Yan optimistically says, "translated language carries a trace of the original," translations can never fully convey the nuances and subtleties of the primary text.[18] As Emily Apter states: "Something is always lost in translation. Unless one knows the language of the original, the exact nature and substance of what is lost will always be impossible to ascertain."[19] This truism complicates critical analysis of Mo Yan's fiction for those who do not read Chinese, since elements in the original text may not be conveyed in the translated version. For example, the close and long-standing relationship between Mo Yan and his English-language translator, Howard Goldblatt, who began collaborating with the author in 1988, suggests Goldblatt's translations incorporate a significant degree of the translator's artistic licence. Mo Yan says Goldblatt's translations have "made my novels

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[15] Ning Wang, "Cosmopolitanism and the Internationalization of Chinese Literature," in *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller*, ed. Angelica Duran and Yuhan Huan (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014), 175.

[16] Julia Lovell, "Chinese Literature in the Global Canon: The Quest for Recognition," in *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang (Leiden, The Netherlands and Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2010), 203.

[17] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5-6.

[18] Guptak, 32.

[19] Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 210.

better," although I take this to be a self-deprecatory statement confirming Goldblatt's translations significantly modify his Chinese texts.[20] Goldblatt says it is his "duty" as translator to "faithfully reproduce … *my interpretation* of what the author meant – and not necessarily what he wrote" (my emphasis).[21] Goldblatt's comment emphasises the translator's role to be that of an interpreter. Walter Benjamin, in discussing the difference between the roles of the poet (which I take as author) and the translator, says: "The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original." Benjamin's argument is that while the poet (or author) is concerned with the "totality" of language, the translator is focused on "specific linguistic contextual aspects." As a result, the translator produces an "echo," or reverberation, of the original work.[22] When it comes to translations of Mo Yan's fiction, the scholar of magical realism must be mindful of both the echoes created by the translator and the original cultural elements that were not, or could not, be translated.

Linguistic and cultural differences also figure in the overlap between magical realist fiction and classical Chinese literature, which informs Mo Yan's work. One of the key themes of this thesis is to explore the difficulties in applying magical realism as a rubric with which to analyse non-Western fiction. Mo Yan's novels highlight how problematic this can be. Lena Rydholm offers a salutary warning against automatically applying Western theories of genre, style and fiction to Chinese literature, which "has its own distinctive features and qualities as a result not only of the language, literary conventions or aesthetic values, but also from its deep roots in China's cultural, philosophical, political and historical background that neither Western theories nor terminology can completely cover."[23] Nevertheless, Chinese scholars

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[20] Mo Yan, "My 3 American Books," trans. Sylvia Li-chun Lin, *World Literature Today* 74.3 (2000): 473. At the time of writing, Goldblatt had translated ten of Mo Yan's twelve novels into English.

[21] Howard Goldblatt, "A Mutually Rewarding yet Uneasy and Sometimes Fragile Relationship between Author and Translator," in *Mo Yan in Context: Nobel Laureate and Global Storyteller*, ed. Angelica Duran and Yuhan Huang (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014), 34.

[22] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (1955; London: Fontana Press, 1992), 77.

[23] Lena Rydholm, "Chinese Theories and Concepts of Fiction and the Issue of Transcultural Theories and Concepts of Fiction," in *True Lies Worldwide: Fictionality in Global Contexts*, ed. Anders Cullhead and Lena Rydholm (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 19.

have remarked on similarities between magical realism and classical Chinese fiction. David Der-wei Wang, for example, argues that while Mo Yan's fictional characters "are extremely difficult to box into any kind of generalization," their actions "not only express the special traits of magic realism and the influence of traditional Chinese legends of the strange, but also display a startling similarity between these two very different literary genres." Notice that Wang emphasises the "very" difference between magical realism and Chinese legends of the strange (called *chuanqi*), yet at the same time draws attention to their similarities: for example, characters undergoing metamorphosis and being reincarnated.[24] Ming Dong Gu asserts that magical realist elements – in the form of the supernatural, the grotesque and the fantastic – are present in five of the "six commonly acknowledged masterpieces" of classical Chinese fiction.[25] Elsewhere, he argues that classical Chinese literature, with its "strange and extraordinary things or events," and its "blurring of the real and the unreal," actually "*anticipated* the modern technique of magic realism" (my emphasis).[26] His choice of the word "anticipated" is critical, for Ming Dong Gu does not claim that magical realism existed within classical Chinese literature, but that classical Chinese literature was a kind of antecedent to magical realism. However, Ming Dong Gu concludes that classical Chinese fiction "differs fundamentally" from magical realism, due to the preponderance of underlying cultural factors that are not characteristic of the narrative mode. In particular, he says, classical Chinese fiction can be traced back to Taoist epistemology, which I shall discuss later. Instead, he argues that what exists in classical Chinese fiction might be more accurately described as "mythical realism" or "supernatural realism."[27]

In short, both David Der-wei Wang and Ming Dong Gu observe similarities between magical realism and classical Chinese literature while at the same time emphasising their

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[24] David der-wei Wang, "The Literary World of Mo Yan," trans. Michael Berry, *World Literature Today* 74.3 (2000): 492.
[25] Ming Dong Gu, "Toward a Transcultural Poetics of Fiction: The Fusion of Narrative Visions in Chinese and Western Fiction Studies," in *True Lies Worldwide: Fictionality in Global Contexts*, ed. Anders Cullhead and Lena Rydholm (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 216.
[26] Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction: A Non-Western Narrative System* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 83.
[27] Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction*, 188, 193, 194.

differences as generic kinds. My purpose here is to raise the likelihood that magical realism shares similarities with classical Chinese literature. Rather than equate magical realism with classical Chinese literature, it would be better to invoke Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances," which concerns phenomena that do not have any one thing in common but are related to one another in many different ways, and which I referred to in the Introduction. Wittgenstein describes "family resemblances" as "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail."[28] By applying Wittgenstein's theory, I would argue that the magical realist elements present in classical Chinese literature *resemble* those elements that exist in modern magical realist fiction. The elements are not necessarily the same, but they do belong to the same family. They overlap and criss-cross. The corollary is that Mo Yan draws on two streams of influence in relation to magical realist literary elements, one domestic and the other foreign. In addition, the comments by David Der-wei Wang and Ming Dong Gu support my argument in the Introduction that the genealogy of magical realist fiction ought to be based on polygenesis, arising from different cultures at different times.

Another feature that distinguishes Mo Yan from many other writers of magical realism is his use of the narrative mode in a communist, or, more accurately, post-communist, society. This is a key intervention in the field of world literature by this thesis, as relatively few writers of magical realism from communist states have been the focus of literary criticism in the West. Mikhail Bulgakov (of the former Soviet Union) and Vaclav Havel (of the former Czechoslovakia) are among that small group. Whereas the other key authors in this thesis write against the political domination and social injustices faced by their own people in a postcolonial context, Mo Yan often writes against the oppression of Chinese people by his country's home-grown authoritarian regime, the Chinese Communist Party. My contention is that magical realism enables Mo Yan to portray a fractured society during historical crises, of

[28] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Oxford, 1967), sections 66 & 67.

which China has experienced continuously over the past century, and to circumvent internal censorship.

Although the indirect language of metaphor, allegory or parable is a time-tried means of eluding censorship in China,[29] magical realism provides Mo Yan with a convenient mode of writing to address important social and political themes by challenging the nationalistic narrative promoted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) without incurring the wrath of the censors. Nevertheless, he has had to carefully time his interventions. For example, he could have written about China's socially destructive one-child policy at any time since it was introduced in 1979 to slow population growth. Yet he chose not to do so until the publication of *Frog* (*Wa*, 蛙, 2009) three decades later, once the regime had begun to relax the contentious policy in certain situations.[30] *Frog*'s central character, the obstetrician and zealous Party member Aunt Gugu, becomes wracked with guilt in her sixties about performing more than two thousand abortions as a result of enforcing the one-child policy. "I'll never again soil my hands with that atrocious act!" declares Gugu. Stylistically, the novel is written mostly in a realist narrative, portraying the death of pregnant women who were forced to undergo botched abortions in a documentary-like manner, thus focusing on the physical and emotional consequences. Yet the novel includes a single magical realist sequence in which Gugu is confronted by phantasmagoric imagery that encapsulates what she had dedicated her life to. After a dinner celebrating her retirement, she is attacked by "tens of thousands of frogs" who nearly strip her naked as she walks home, drenching her in what she believes is semen. The attacking frogs serve as a metaphor, as tadpoles, or baby frogs, are said to resemble the human foetus in the first trimester. In this scene they enact revenge on Gugu's conscience. Moreover, the Chinese word for frog, *wa* (蛙), sounds the

[29] Richard Curt Kraus, *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 127.

[30] China finally scrapped the one-child policy in October 2015, although couples are restricted to two children. In previous years, the one-child policy had been relaxed in rural areas and certain situations to allow two children. Patti Waldmeir, "China scraps one-child policy after more than three decades," *Financial Times*, October 29, 2015, accessed October 29, 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4f966d1a-7e2d-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e.html?ftcamp=crm/email/20151030/nbe/BusinessEducation/product#axzz3pwllSq9Z.

same as that for baby, *wa* (娃), although the Chinese characters are different. Of course, both Chinese words correspond onomatopoeically to the sound of a baby's cry.[31]

Frog illustrates how Mo Yan operates in a "gray zone," that amorphous area in which "many" writers and artists in China, says Jeffrey Wasserstrom, "bend or even flout the rules to evade the PRC's censorship mechanisms, but do not confront the government outright. Instead, they make careful judgment calls about how far they can push before the authorities will push back."[32] Challenging the Chinese censors is a "game."[33] Howard Goldblatt says Mo Yan "avoids direct, overt criticism of established institutions and policies while revealing social pathologies and what he characterizes as a devolution of attitudes and behaviors in the Party." What may grate with Western sensibilities is Goldblatt's admission that Mo Yan applies a pragmatic "self-censorship."[34] I take Goldblatt's comment to mean Mo Yan protects himself from charges of sedition or anything else that might land him in jail. Salman Rushdie, however, labelled Mo Yan a "patsy for the regime" because he had refused to sign a petition for the release of Liu Xiaobo, the literary critic and human rights activist who was imprisoned in 2009 and who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, and because Mo Yan had reportedly said, after winning his Nobel, that defamation and rumours "should be censored."[35] Mo Yan has been classified by Qinghua Zhang as an "official" writer, meaning his identity lies somewhere in between a dissident and a free writer.[36] The term reflects Mo Yan's insider status as a Party member and his position as an honorary vice-chairman of the government-run Chinese Writers' Association, to which most writers in China belong.[37] The description "official," however, implies that he writes on behalf of, or is implicated with, the state

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[31] Mo Yan, *Frog*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (2009; London: Hamish Hamilton, 2014), 248, 251-252, 259.
[32] Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94.
[33] Kraus, 108.
[34] Goldblatt, "Mutually Rewarding," 31.
[35] Alison Flood, "Mo Yan accepts Nobel prize, defends 'necessary' censorship," *The Guardian*, December 11, 2012, accessed July 12, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/dec/11/mo-yan-nobel-prize-censorship.
[36] Qinghua Zhang, "The Nobel Prize, Mo Yan, and Contemporary Literature in China," trans. Andrea Lingenfelter, *Chinese Literature Today* 3.1/2 (2013): 17.
[37] Goldblatt, "Mutually Rewarding," 31.

apparatus, in which case he would not share characteristics of neither a dissident nor free writer.

I would argue that Mo Yan's position is ambivalent, as he writes both as an insider *and* an outsider. His outsider status is derived from being the child of rural peasants, who were classed as "upper-middle peasant" during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This class was out of favour politically at that time, and so Mo Yan was denied an education beyond grade five and forced into manual labour as a teenager. He joined the People's Liberation Army in 1976 essentially to escape rural life, employed initially as a soldier and later as a teacher and member of the literary and cultural division.[38] "I may look like a writer, but deep down I'm still a peasant," he says.[39] Mo Yan's identification with a peasant consciousness informs the political nature of his fiction, for it subverts both the Chinese Communist Party's narrative of history as well as domestic literary conventions. Mo Yan maintains that, since the establishment of the PRC, "the workers have had a better life and a higher political status than peasants," and that the "peasants have been discriminated against in society." He questions, therefore, whether the peasants have actually been liberated, as the official narrative states.[40] In his fiction, Mo Yan re-imagines the past and the present from the point of view of those on the lowest stratum of society, reconstructing history from the lives who have been written out of it. His humanisation of peasants contrasts with the literature of the May Fourth movement in China in the early twentieth century, which largely imagined peasants "as faceless beings" and presented them as the alien "other." His fiction also undermines the "model" worker-peasant-soldier literature of the Maoist era, in which socialist heroes overthrow the ruling class.[41] Mo Yan's self-perception as a peasant outsider is reflected in his pen name, Mo Yan (莫言), which means "don't speak." The writer

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[38] Laifong Leung, 146-149. Shelley Chan says the Chinese Communist Party during Mo Yan's childhood was "meticulous" about class status. Upper-middle peasants were marginalised and politically alienated, "even though they were not much better off than the poor and lower-middle peasants." See Shelley Chan, 9.
[39] Mo Yan, "My 3 American Books," 476.
[40] Kenny K.K. Ng, "Critical Realism and Peasant Ideology: *The Garlic Ballads* by Mo Yan," *Chinese Culture* 39.1 (1998): 122-123. Original source Mo Yan, "Wode 'nongmin yishi' guan" (My Conception of the 'Peasant Consciousness'), trans. Kenny K.K. Ng, *Wenxue pinglunjia* 2 (1989): 39-43.
[41] Ng, "Critical Realism and Peasant Ideology," 110, 121-122.

born as Guan Moye (管谟业) describes his *nom de plume* as "an ironic expression of self-mockery" because he has a "natural desire" to talk[42] and reveal "the unvarnished truth."[43]

My contention is that Mo Yan deploys magical realist techniques involving the supernatural in many of his novels partly as a strategy to re-imagine an alternative historiography for China, thereby exposing the official history fabricated by the Party. The historical point of view in Mo Yan's work is frequently fictionalised from a peasant's perspective. In order to create a historical counter-narrative, however, Mo Yan required new forms expression between author and reader that would encapsulate China's profound historical upheavals. In magical realist fiction, the 'magic' acts as an adjunct or supplement to the rational world that is frequently "summoned by reason in moments of crisis."[44] This is evident in several of Mo Yan's novels that depict the ongoing social dislocation of China since Mao's reign. In *Big Breasts & Wide Hips* (1996), [45] the peasant Shangguan Jintong refuses to grow into a mature man, harbouring an obsession with women's breasts, surviving on milk until his teens (342) and not experiencing sex until the age of twenty in a bizarre act of necrophilia with the corpse of a woman he had spurned (424). Jintong's child-like existence, which is reminiscent of Oskar in Günter Grass's magical realist German novel *The Tin Drum* (1959), is resistant to the Party's official narrative of a country 'maturing' by virtue of Mao's industrialisation programmes and Deng Xiaoping's market reforms. Even when Jinton manages to turn his breast fixation into commercial success as a mid-fifties chief executive of a bra shop in 1991, he is doomed to fail: his new wife takes over the business and divorces him (522-526). His childish naivety is a handicap in a commoditised economy. China's post-communist era is characterised by "imbalance, disparity, conflict, and contradictions," which in turn has led to a "general disintegration of a real or imagined

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[42] Mo Yan, "Storytellers," 12.

[43] Mo Yan, *Shifu, You'll Do Anything for a Laugh*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001; 2011), xii.

[44] Tamás Bényei, "Rereading "Magic Realism"," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 3.1 (1997): 158.

[45] Mo Yan, *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2004); hereafter cited by page in the text.

national political, intellectual, and cultural discourse," says Xudong Zhang.[46] The corollary is that discursive practices in China are "caught in an ironic tension" that no longer achieve a national consensus, says Xiaobing Tang. [47] Mo Yan highlights this ironic tension of a lack of consensual discourse in the satirical *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (*Shengsi pilao*, 生死疲劳, 2006). Drawing on Buddhist ontology, the narrator, Ximen Nao, is executed for being a landlord and keeps being reincarnated, as a donkey, ox, pig, dog and monkey, only to witness successive injustices being perpetrated against his family.[48] Mo Yan blurs the distinction between humans and animals as Ximen Nao is forced to witness society on a level below that of the peasant. While the narrative is mostly set during Mao's reign, it continues until 1991, with the endless calamities befalling the narrator's family undermining the notion of teleological progress as proselytised by both communism and capitalism.

The Garlic Ballads (1988)[49] upends Maoist ideology by portraying peasants as the victims of government ineptitude and corruption rather than as victorious socialist heroes. Based on an actual event, the novel depicts a revolt by garlic farmers against corrupt local government officials.[50] The novel proved so controversial it was temporarily banned following the Tiananmen Square massacre of student and worker protestors in 1989.[51] Throughout the novel a frisky chestnut colt keeps reappearing as a symbol of liberation and freedom, in contrast to the peasants' effective servitude even under a state-controlled capitalist economy. In one magical realist scene, the colt tries to prevent Fang Jinju from hanging herself by licking her hand, as tears well up in both the colt and the pregnant woman (139). Meanwhile, Jinju's unborn yet conscious son shouts at his mother that he wants to stroke the colt's head,

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[46] Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 10, 5, 3.

[47] Xiaobing Tang, "The Function of New Theory: What Does it Mean to Talk about Postmodernism in China?" *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China*, ed. Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 294.

[48] Mo Yan, *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012).

[49] Mo Yan, *The Garlic Ballads*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012); hereafter cited by page in the text.

[50] In a personal interview on March 26, 2000, Mo Yan said the plot of *The Garlic Ballads* is based on a real revolt of garlic farmers in 1987 in his native Shandong. Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Modernity and Apocalypse in Chinese Novels from the End of the Twentieth Century," in *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*, ed. Charles Laughlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 119, footnote 29.

[51] Mo Yan, *The Garlic Ballads*, back cover.

representing a desire to be freed from the womb. But Jinju, worn down by a lifetime of oppression, and distraught that her garlic farmer lover is on the run from the police due to the revolt, kills herself and thus the child, too (140). The subtext of this phantasmagoric incident is that peasants, even unborn ones, remain subjugated and are prevented by the new social order from attaining freedom.

Although *Sandalwood Death* (2001) is mainly written in an experimental realist style, it includes supernatural elements that represent indigenous Chinese beliefs and customs that stand in resistance to the foreign powers such as Germany that dominated the Qing Dynasty, China's last imperial regime, at the time of the Boxer Rebellion around 1900.[52] The supernatural elements include: a tiger's whisker that enables a person to see someone else's true form as an animal (another transgression of the human-animal divide) (4); a fox spirit that instructs a woman how to ensnare the love of a magistrate (127); a ghost (50-51); and an executioner with "small demonic hands" that are "red as hot cinders" (26-27). What I wish to focus on, however, is Mo Yan's revelation in an author's note that he "jettisoned" from an early draft any passage which might have a "resemblance to magical realism [that] was too obvious to miss." The result, he maintains, is "a purer Chinese style" (406) in the final version. Exactly how the text is 'purer' he does not say. Yet it seems he excised "borrowings from Western literary trends" (407) and increased the importance of the Maoqiang opera, a local folk opera style unique to the Shandong Peninsula, which acts as a narrative device by commenting on the novel's action. Mo Yan's desire to publicly distance himself from magical realism is a topic I shall return to with *The Republic off Wine*.

This interplay between magical realist elements and a "purer" Chinese literary style is especially evident in his debut novel, *Red Sorghum*. Mo Yan deploys the supernatural and other magical realist elements within the narrator's re-imagining of his family's history. Although the novel is nominally a historical romance and family saga spanning three generations, the narrative's reinterpretation of historical events, in particular the Japanese

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[52] Mo Yan, *Sandalwood Death*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (2001; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013); hereafter cited by page in the text.

War of Resistance (1937-1945), offers an alternative historiography from the perspective of morally ambiguous anti-heroes: the narrator's grandfather (Yu Zhan'ao) and grandmother (Dai Fenglian). The passionate, libertarian and individualistic lives of his grandparents cut across the Party's nationalistic narrative and the Maoist doctrine of revolutionary heroes. Grandfather is a murderer (he kills the lover of his mother and the first husband of the narrator's grandmother), he is a bandit, he is equally contemptuous of both Mao's communists and the Chinese nationalists, and he runs off with grandmother's maid. Grandmother, meanwhile, takes over the winery of her leper husband immediately after he is killed without compunction, and later initiates an affair with a rival bandit to spite philandering grandfather.

At face value, *Red Sorghum* is imbued with folkloric supernatural elements which, as in *Sandalwood Death*, represent indigenous Chinese beliefs that resist external forces, in this case the Japanese. Village elder Old Deng survives being bayoneted eighteen times by Japanese troops after a fox licks his wounds while unconscious in a sorghum field.[53] Passion, grandfather's lover, is twice possessed by a weasel's evil spirit and exorcised both times by a Taoist monk (319, 356); the weasel spirit is the harbinger of a Japanese soldier who later instigates a pack-rape of Passion with his troops (324). The narrator himself believes in the supernatural, thinking "marriages are made in heaven" and that his grandparents were "fated to be together" (46), thereby suggesting his grandparents were pre-ordained to collaborate on initiating a local insurrection against the Japanese. However, it is the narrator's re-imagining of his family's past in which the magical realist elements largely exist, which makes the novel such an interesting study for the narrative mode. *Red Sorghum* is a product of the "root-seeking" Chinese literary movement of the 1980s in that the book strives to recover a sense of Chinese national and cultural identity by reaching back to the past. This contemporary school of fiction was an iteration of the "native soil" writers that Lu Xun identified in 1920's Chinese fiction: authors writing about their home regions from which they

[53] Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (1987; London: Penguin, 1994), 310; hereafter cited by page in the text.

had been uprooted, the separation causing their imagination to play just as important a role as their lived experience. Consequently, these writers developed an "imaginary nostalgia," to borrow David Der-wei Wang's term.[54] Their nostalgia is posited artificially because they were not alive during the era they write about. In *Red Sorghum*, the narrator's re-imagining of his grandparents' lives during one of the most tumultuous periods in modern Chinese history is akin to Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which denotes the remembrance of "personal, collective, and cultural trauma" through stories, images and behaviours by the generation that comes *after* the generation that witnessed the trauma. "These experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation," says Hirsch (original emphasis).[55]

It is tempting to label the narrator's imaginative historical reconstructions in line with the Swedish Academy's comment that Mo Yan "with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history and the contemporary."[56] The Nobel custodians' term is remarkably close to "hallucinatory magical realism," a kind of the narrative mode that is characterised, as Wendy Faris says, by "fragmentary invocations and creates difficulties in ascertaining which events have happened, which are imagined, and which are dreamed."[57] Hallucinatory magical realism appears, for instance, in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), with Azaro the *abiku* child's visions of grotesque phantasms that symbolise corruption in post-independence Nigeria, and in D.M. Thomas' *The White Hotel* (1981), in which Sigmund Freud's patient, Lisa Erdman, suffers from telepathic visions that foretell future Holocaust atrocities committed against Jews in the Ukraine. In *Red Sorghum*, however, the narrator's historical re-imaginings are not so much hallucinations as partially informed emotional recollections of

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[54] David Der-wei Wang, "Imaginary Nostalgia: Shen Congwen, Song Zelai, Mo Yan, and Li Yongping," in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and David Wang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 109, 112.

[55] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

[56] Swedish Academy (no pagination).

[57] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 100.

other peoples' lives; in other words, postmemories. Critically, the narrator mines the past in order to make sense of his present.

Red Sorghum spans from 1923 to 1976, encompassing the warlord era, the Japanese invasion, the communists' defeat of the nationalists in the civil war, and the Cultural Revolution. The narrator returns to his home town of Northeast Gaomi Township ostensibly to research a family chronicle, but his real motivation is to recover a sense of an honourable life among rural peasants, having become disdainful of his "hypocritical" life in the city (365) and believing that humanity is caught in a "regression" (4) due to an "increase in prosperity and comfort" (334). Like many narrators in magical realist fiction, the narrator in *Red Sorghum* confesses that he is unreliable. "Someone said that the little goatherd was me, but I don't know," he says (4). He scours the official county records for historical information on the Japanese enslavement of Chinese people to build the Jiao-Ping highway (14), but ends up relying on oral history, mostly from his father (37) and a "confused" ninety-two-year-old woman who survived the village massacre in 1939 (13). Since the narrator was only two on the single occasion he met his grandfather, he has no direct account from the novel's protagonist (78). Faced with incomplete or unreliable historical records, the narrator is forced to imagine what happened. He not only has the ability to envisage past events, but also to verbalise how the population of victims, such as his grandparents, thought and felt by inhabiting their consciousness. The narrator constantly switches between the first person and the third person; the latter enables him to inhabit the consciousness of other characters. This frequent switching between the narrative voices – a favourite technique of Mo Yan's throughout his work – decentres the authorial centre or any claim of omniscience. The novel's 'magic,' then, mostly lies in the narrator's imaginative re-creation of the past, in contrast to the "boring and petty" realism of the narrator's present.[58]

One of the novel's key features is the constant intercutting between past and present as the narrative switches between the narrator's point of view and that of his forebears. In this respect, the stylistic influence of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and

[58] Wang, "Imaginary Nostalgia," 125.

Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), in regards to the use of time, stream-of-consciousness, and telling a story from multiple points of view, is apparent. Indeed, Mo Yan has attested to learning from Faulkner's manipulation of time to connect "past history and the present world."[59] Although the disruption of time and place is a key characteristic of magical realist fiction, what Mo Yan achieves artistically in *Red Sorghum* is distinctly his own. He devises a method of spatialising and dissecting history into what David Der-wei Wang calls "historical space," by creating a three-dimensional discourse on space, time and history. In this historical space, located within Northeast Gaomi Township, there are "virtually unlimited possibilities for strange and fantastic narrative mutations."[60]

This fracturing of time, however, is entirely absent from the film version, which catapulted Mo Yan to international fame after it won the prestigious Golden Bear Award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1988. Director Zhang Yimou's Chinese-language film *Red Sorghum* (1987) takes a different approach to history and style than Mo Yan's book. The film is based on the first two chapters of the novel and does not reference events in the book's last three chapters. Consequently, the film focuses on the dramatic episodes of the novel concerning the early romance of the narrator's grandparents, grandmother taking over the wine-making enterprise, and grandfather's ambush of the Japanese troops, which provides the film's climactic conclusion. In a sense, Zhang Yimou's selection of the first two chapters need not be an issue given that the novel is the compilation of five novellas Mo Yan had previously written. But as Wilborn Hampton notes, the film provides only a "broad outline of the stories" in the novel.[61] The movie script is a drastically simplified version of the book and selects only a narrow part of the novel's narrative. The film leaves out major episodes like grandfather becoming a bandit, his fights with the communist and nationalist troops, and his murder of grandmother's first husband.

[59] M. Thomas Inge, "Mo Yan and William Faulkner: Influence and Confluence," *The Faulkner Journal* 6.1 (1990): 19-20.
[60] Wang, "The Literary World of Mo Yan," 488.
[61] Wilborn Hampton, "Anarchy and Plain Bad Luck," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1993, BR28.

Most important for this discussion, however, is that the film is shot for the most part in a realist style, and the film script progresses in a linear fashion, with none of the jump-cuts between different times that is such a distinctive feature of the book. Vincent Canby, in his review for *The New York Times*, describes the film as an "exotic fable," but then concludes that "the point of view is still that of socialist realist cinema" and that the film's style is "decidedly old-fashioned."[62] In other words, the various avant-garde stylistic devices that set the novel apart from Maoist-era socialist realist fiction are abandoned in the film. The magical realist aspects of the book – the folklore, animal spirits, spirit possessions and exorcisms, supernatural events, and Grandma's spirit flying through the sky as she dies – are absent from the movie. The conclusion, therefore, is that unlike the *Whale Rider* movie being a successful film adaptation of the magical realist elements of Witi Ihimaera's novella *The Whale Rider* (1987) (see Chapter Two), Zhang Yimou's film version of *Red Sorghum* does not translate the magical realist elements of Mo Yan's book. This is not to say that magical realism has any inherent limitations on being adapted from book to screen, only that in this case the director, perhaps to make the film more easily digestible for audiences, chose to make a linear, realistic film version and deviate substantially from the novel's structure and style.[63]

Trickster strategy: making cannibalism palatable in the satirical *The Republic of Wine*

Mo Yan takes experimentation with metafictional structure that he began in *Red Sorghum* to a different level in *The Republic of Wine*. Both books are structured as work-in-progress novels in that a narrator or character is engaged in the act of writing. While in his debut novel, the narrator is a fictional character writing a family history, in *The Republic of Wine* the structure is much more complex. The writers include a fictional Mo Yan, an actual Mo Yan, and a protagonist who sends letters and short stories to the fictional Mo Yan. I shall argue

[62] Vincent Canby, "Social Realist Fable of 1930's China," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1988, 74.

[63] One assumes Mo Yan was comfortable with the film version of *Red Sorghum* because director Zhang Yimou later made a screen adaptation of the novel *Shifu yuelaiyue youmo* (*Shifu, you'll do anything for a laugh*, 1999) titled *Happy Yimes* (*Xingfu shiguang*, 2000).

that the intertextual complexity of *The Republic of Wine* reflects Mo Yan's strategy to undermine political and social discourse, as well as to question at an existential level epistemological discourse and the basis of ideation. The novel's other key feature is its humorous satire. Although Mo Yan is not often considered a satirist,[64] *The Republic of Wine* is a satire on multiple levels, interweaving multiple narratives that poke fun at the materialistic greed and corruption in post-communist China, the "grossly elaborate" official banquets that are emblematic of corruption,[65] and the Chinese tradition of eating and drinking in large social groups. The book also satirises a range of literary styles, both domestic and foreign, and in particular magical realism itself, even though the narrative mode is a central component of the novel's structure.

Why would Mo Yan's literary style have changed so abruptly – from historical romance to trenchant satire, from the supernatural to metafictional magical realism – within five years? The reason, I suggest, is the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing on 4 June 1989. The communist regime's brutal crackdown on protesting students and workers, who were agitating for improved democracy in China and an end to "rampant corruption and abuses of power,"[66] had profound ramifications. Sentiment among the general populace and intellectuals alike turned into "repressed rage" and "subdued antagonism toward the state."[67] Mo Yan recalls that, as a postgraduate literature student in Beijing, he did not feel like attending classes when "the student movement erupted."[68] It is likely that he wrote *The Republic of Wine* "as a response to the government crackdown against the demonstrators," as Shelley Chan suggests.[69] Mo Yan signposts a thematic link by setting the narrative in the same year as the Tiananmen demonstration, 1989.[70] In an essay in the original 1992 Taiwan edition, the author reveals he started writing the novel three months after the Tiananmen

[64] Shelley Chan, 181.
[65] Kinkley, 112.
[66] Yue Gang, *The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 225.
[67] Xudong Zhang, 38.
[68] Mo Yan, *Change*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (London: Seagull Books, 2010), 83-84.
[69] Shelley Chan, 197.
[70] Ding Gou'er is 48 (1) and was born in 1941 (11), implying the novel is set in 1989.

demonstration. Also in that edition, the last three words of Ding Gou'er's epitaph signals Mo Yan's serious intent: "Brothers, do not judge your own blood brother in times of confusion and corruption" (*hunluan he fubai* 混亂與腐敗). Tellingly, Mo Yan softened the last three words in the mainland Chinese edition of 1993 to "romance and affection" (*langman duoqing* 浪漫多情).[71] In the mainland edition he also deleted the acerbic final chapter, with its Joycean-like stream-of-consciousness that refers to Mao's Great Leap Forward and historical cannibalism in China.[72]

These minor acts of self-censorship and the fact that he had the novel originally published in Taiwan show that Mo Yan was initially wary of what he might be able to get away with.[73] My argument is that he adopted a style of extreme, rambunctious satire in order to circumnavigate the regime's political sensitivities about Tiananmen. Moreover, Mo Yan keeps the novel's satirical sights aimed firmly at local officials – such as the mine director, Party secretary and deputy head of propaganda – rather than senior political figures. The novel's setting, Liquorville, the capital of Liquorland, is deliberately fantastical rather than real.[74] With these self-imposed parameters Mo Yan stays inside "the confines of the safe zone" in his attacks on the PRC. "He can be caustic about the corrosive effects of government corruption on communities, albeit taking aim at local officials only—a far safer target than national ones," says Jeffrey Wasserstrom.[75] Mo Yan even satirises himself on this survival strategy. In *The Republic of Wine*, the fictional author Mo Yan admonishes the aspiring writer Li Yidou for criticising "those in power" in his short stories. "That's a no-no," advises the fictional Mo Yan. "Society is shaped like a pagoda, getting progressively smaller

[71] Yenna Wu, "Pitfalls of the Postcolonialist Rubric in the Study of Modern Chinese Fiction Featuring Cannibalism: From Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' to Mo Yan's *Boozeland*," *Tamkang Review* 30.3 (2000): 51-87.
[72] Kinkley, 112.
[73] Translator Howard Goldblatt says: "*The Republic of Win*e was considered extremely subversive, and could be published in China only after a Taiwanese edition appeared in 1992." See Mo Yan, *The Republic of Win*e, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2012), v.
[74] The Chinese title, *Jiu guo* (酒国), is also fantastical, as it literally means country or nation (*guo*) of wine or liquor (*jiu*). Howard Goldblatt's English translation, *The Republic of Wine*, may play on the concept of a 'republic' in the People's Republic of China, but this is a nuance introduced by his interpretation. The title has also been translated into English as *Wineland* and *Boozeland*, which are more literal translations than Goldblatt's.
[75] Wasserstrom, 95-96.

toward the top; that makes it easier to link the characters in your story with real-life people." Instead, the fictional Mo Yan suggests Li Yidou modify his short story "Donkey Avenue" by giving the main characters "a less illustrious background" and their father a "diminished official position" (135).

The novel's self-conscious artifice is a central feature, including its parody of numerous literary styles, in particular magical realism. The budding writer Li Yidou is also a doctoral student at Brewer's College in Liquorland, which in itself is part of the satire as his bombastic pronouncements represent a widespread disillusionment of intellectuals in contemporary China. Following the Cultural Revolution and market reforms, intellectuals today are displaced from the privileged position they held at the centre of feudal power in China for centuries.[76] Li Yidou proclaims that he uses "literature to awaken the populace" and expose corrupt officials, comparing himself to the May Fourth intellectual and pioneer of modern Chinese literature Lu Xun (55). Yet Li Yidou is neither an intellectual nor a good writer. He combines his two interests – literature and liquor – in his academic research, giving his PhD thesis the title: "Latin American 'Magic Realist' Novels and the Distilling of Liquor" (282). Thus, the text pokes fun at literary scholars who frequently link Mo Yan with García Márquez. Moreover, the hypothesis of Li Yidou's research is: "How are a distiller's emotions manifested in the physics and chemistry of the distilling process, and how do they affect the overall taste of a liquor?" (282-283). This can be read as Mo Yan parodying himself, referring to grandfather urinating in grandmother's rice wine in *Red Sorghum*. While grandfather acts out of spite, his misdeed has the unintended 'magical' effect of endowing the wine with a distinctive flavour that makes it highly popular among customers and turns grandmother into a wealthy winemaker. Li Yidou's thesis creates the impression Mo Yan is trying to distance himself and the novel from the literary concept of magical realism, similar to his author's note at the end of *Sandalwood Death*. Yet the author's apparent protestations might actually constitute pretend parrying, a sort of jocular jousting, involving the playful

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[76] Xia Li, "Li Yidou's Credo: Intellectuals in the Post-Mao Literary and Cultural Landscape," *Interlitteraria* 1 (2009): 54-55.

denial of a narrative technique that he is self-consciously adapting and deploying. It is all part of a trickster mentality to writing. Li Yidou confesses to being an unreliable narrator, in the tradition of unreliable narrators in magical realist fiction, such as Saleem Sinai in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* ("To tell the truth, I lied"),[77] Herbert Badgery in Peter Carey's *Illywhacker* ("I am a terrible liar and I have always been a liar"),[78] and even the narrator in *Red Sorghum*. In a letter to the fictional Mo Yan, Li Yidou admits to having "too rich an imagination" (209), which subsequently throws into doubt the veracity of his allegations about cannibalism in Liquorland. Li Yidou's unreliability serves to question the authenticity of all discourse.

Indeed, *The Republic of Wine* is symptomatic of the rise of avant-garde fiction in China that was characterised by self-reflexivity and intertextuality in the 1990s. This kind of metafictional writing "revealed a deep distrust of existing interpretive systems in both political and cultural terms," says Kenny K.K. Ng. Mo Yan, he adds, engages with metafictional styles in order to address "the heightened control of political discourses, the tightened censorship of literary activities, and the lack of freedom of expression."[79] I would argue *The Republic of Wine* goes further than indirectly criticising political discourse and censorship in China, in that the book also questions the basis of ideation, personal identity and communication in general. The novel, as Shelley Chan says, "lay[s] bare a world deprived of all truth, value, reason, and meaning, a world in which people are senseless, helpless, grotesque, and absurd."[80]

Metafiction, to borrow Patricia Waugh's definition, is writing that "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." Rather than 'represent' the world, the writer of metafiction seeks to represent the discourses of the world.[81] *The Republic of Wine* is a critique on multiple discourses: the creation of fiction; the nature of investigation and

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[77] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; reprint, London: Picador, 1982), 443.
[78] Peter Carey, *Illywhacker* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 11.
[79] Kenny K. K. Ng, "Metafiction, Cannibalism, and Political Allegory: *Wineland* by Mo Yan," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 1.2 (1998): 121, 124.
[80] Shelley Chan, 180.
[81] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1984), 2, 4.

intellectual inquiry; political narratives; the suppression of truth; and the relativity of pluralistic 'realities.' At face value, the novel is a pastiche of a detective novel. Ding Gou'er, a hapless special investigator, is despatched to Liquorland to determine the veracity of allegations that the region's officials are eating children as gastronomic delicacies. As the main narrative progresses, however, it becomes apparent that Ding Gou'er's detective story is merely the framework for a much more intricately designed metafictional text that incorporates pastiches of a variety of other literary styles and genres. The novel is based on an epistolary structure and a metanarrative of three distinct narrative threads, each of which are separate from, but at the same time are related to, the others as part of a unified whole. The narrative threads are: first, the fictional author Mo Yan's novel about Ding Gou'er's special investigation in Liquorland, which might be called the *orthodox fiction narrative*; second, Li Yidou's ten letters to the fictional Mo Yan and, in response, Mo Yan's nine letters to Li Yidou, which is the *nonfiction narrative*; and third, Li Yidou's nine short stories that he sends to the fictional Mo Yan for feedback, which is the *fictitious fiction narrative*.[82] The three narrative threads each comment on one another in such a way that the meaning of any individual narrative thread is unclear if read in isolation from the rest. This creates a dialectical friction that increasingly blurs the distinction between what is fiction and nonfiction, what is real and unreal, and which drives the overall narrative "to the brink of collapse" until all three narrative threads eventually converge in the final chapter. [83] The brilliantly inventive unstable nature of the book's narrative reflects the social dissolution of post-communist China, the rampant materialism and individualism brought on by the embracing of capitalist markets and the consequent erosion of traditional Confucian values of community and spirituality. On another level, the metanarrative is constructed around nine chapters, which is encapsulated in the book's Chinese title: *Jiu guo* (酒国), which literally means "country of wine," is a play on words, as *jiu* (九) means the number "nine" as well as "wine." The tenth and final chapter switches to the

[82] I have modified Xudong Zhang's terminology for the first narrative, which he calls the "properly fictional," but borrowed his labels for the second and third narratives. See Xudong Zhang, 242-243.
[83] Xudong Zhang, 240.

first person of the character Mo Yan, as the fictional Mo Yan merges with the actual Mo Yan. The last six pages consist of a rambling, incoherent, stream-of-consciousness passage – as a pastiche of the famous Molly Bloom chapter in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) – emanating from the mind of 'Mo Yan.'

One of the challenges in deciphering Mo Yan's work is exploring the intertextual networks present in all of his fiction, but this is especially true of *The Republic of Wine*. Given that Mo Yan habitually exploits cross-cultural intertexts, the critic must engage in a process that Maiping Chen calls "co-contextualization," that is, examining a text in the context of its original language as well as the context of its translation into another language. For the critic who does not read Chinese, however, this process is doubly difficult, for the worst outcome is "mis-contextualization," by which "the reader will not understand the context of the translation at all" due to the linguistic barrier. At a pragmatic best, the non-Chinese critic may strive for "re-contextualization," which is an approximate understanding of a translated text in terms of its original context and cultural background. "When Mo Yan is read intertextually in the context of modern Chinese literary history and social history, then we can see that Mo Yan has a deeper and more unique insight into Chinese history," says Maiping Chen.[84]

The intertextual networks of *The Republic of Wine* reach both inwards and outwards. The inward-facing intertexts generate much of the novel's magical realist elements, and are mostly associated with Li Yidou's series of interconnected short stories. The quality of Li Yidou's stories "can properly be described as creatively bad writing" in that each story parodies major styles and topical concerns of contemporary Chinese literature. "These short stories constitute a semisystematic parody of the major paradigms of modern Chinese literary history," says Xudong Zhang. "But in a more immediate sense, these stories seem to mock the breathless chase of the international literary trends throughout the Chinese Reform era in the name of 'innovation' and 'modernization.'"[85] The stories are described by either Li Yidou or the fictional Mo Yan as "grim realism" (55), "demonic realism" (110) and "neo-realist"

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[84] Maiping Chen, "The Intertextual Reading of Chinese Literature: With Mo Yan's Works as Examples," *Chinese Literature Today* 5.1 (2015): 34-36.
[85] Xudong Zhang, 242-243.

(210). The story most like magical realism is “Child Prodigy,” of the so-called ‘demonic realist’ genre, which features a demon boy riddled with a skin disease that erupts in scales (a magical realist touch of physical deformity). The demon boy tries unsuccessfully to free the babies at the Culinary Academy before they are eaten (95-110).

Li Yidou’s stories also refer back to Chinese literary traditions. Kenny K.K. Ng suggests that Li Yidou’s “fairy tales and romantic stories resemble the two ancient Chinese narrative genres,” the *zhiguai a*nd the *chuanqi*.[86] The *zhiguai* (志怪), or “weird account,” is a pithy narrative of some strange event, creature or person, while the *chuanqi* (传奇), or “strange story,” is a short story with developed plots and characterisation. Chinese literary classics such as Pu Songling’s *Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi*, 聊斋志异), which was first printed posthumously in 1766, bring together these two traditional storytelling traditions.[87] Both the *zhiguai a*nd the *chuanqi* were revived during China’s cultural and intellectual renaissance in the 1980s after being suppressed during the Maoist era, which imposed socialist realism as the dominant literary aesthetic.[88] I have already mentioned David Der-wei Wang’s remark about similarities between the *chuanqi* and magical realism. These similarities are especially evident in Li Yidou’s stories in regards to the gallery of grotesque characters, such as the demon boy, Li Yidou’s mother-in-law who slaughters babies for eating, and Yu Yichi the dwarf tavern proprietor. The grotesque is not only a common characteristic of magical realist fiction,[89] it also conveys an anarchic style of storytelling that amplifies and distorts reality “to make it more credible.” Moreover, this sort of “hyperbolic distortion,” as Jeanne Delbaere-Garant says, “creates a sense of strangeness through the confusion or interpenetration of different realms like animate / inanimate or

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[86] Ng, “Metafiction, Cannibalism, and Political Allegory,” 124.
[87] Pu Songling, *Strange Tales From A Chinese Studio*, trans. and ed. John Minford (London: Penguin, 2006), xii-xiii.
[88] Jianguo Chen, “The Logic of Phantasm: Haunting and Spectrality in Contemporary Chinese Literary Imagination,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 14.1 (Spring 2002): 234.
[89] Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), 146.

human / animal."[90] This type of distortion is evident, for instance, in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, with the publican Madame Koto and her monstrous-looking customers who symbolise the political corruption of post-independence Nigeria. The grotesque is also fundamental to satire, as Northrop Frye reminds us: "Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience."[91]

In *The Republic of Wine*, Mo Yan accentuates the grotesque most prominently in the trope of cannibalism. Ironically, for a subject intrinsically abhorrent, anthropophagy underpins the book's black humour and, by virtue of it being prompted by gluttony rather than famine, becomes the satirical tool by which Mo Yan represents "human absurdities."[92] The grotesqueness of adults eating babies for pleasure parallels the grotesqueness of the social and political upheavals Chinese people have had to endure in recent history, including the cult of Mao, the Cultural Revolution, forced abortions as part of the one-child policy, and the Tiananmen Square massacre. The trope is an example of what David Der-wei Wang describes as "the familiarization of the uncanny." Wang argues the series of calamities inflicted upon the Chinese population since the mid-twentieth century makes the conventional literary technique of defamiliarisation – that is, the "aesthetic and conceptual distancing of a familiar subject in order to restore its perceptual newness" – inappropriate for contemporary Chinese fiction. "Insofar as it aims to 'make strange' things that otherwise seem familiar, defamiliarization would have to mean, in the Chinese context, not an outrage or a revolution to subvert the tedium of the familiar but either a refamiliarization of the trivial or a creative deformation of the unbearable," says Wang. It is the latter category, I propose, into which *The Republic of Wine* falls. The familiarisation of the uncanny refers to the aesthetic practice of those contemporary Chinese writers like Mo Yan who highlight the

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[90] Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English," in *Magic Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkindon Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 256.
[91] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; reprint, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 224.
[92] Shelley Chan, 185.

normalcy of the grotesque elements of society, implying they ought to be considered abnormal. "Precisely because reality is already too bizarre and grotesque, the writers' greatest challenge lies in how to make it more plausible rather than more strange," says Wang.[93] In *The Republic of Wine*, the consumption of babies is presented not only as plausible, but even laudable: residents have grown "tired" of eating beef, lamb, pork, chicken, dog, donkey and the more exotic meats of other animals and are looking for new delicacies (100). Cannibalism spawns an entire industry, in which parents purposely breed children to be sold for eating, abattoirs are set up to kill the children, and the state runs a Culinary Academy to enhance the entire process, from production to plate.

Cannibalism is intextricably tied to the novel's satirisation of literary forms and its intertextual networks. Although common to many countries and cultures around the world and a topic in various literatures throughout the ages, cannibalism has a long tradition as a trope in Chinese literature. It appears in classical Chinese fiction such as Wu Cheng'en's Ming Dynasty novel, *Journey to the West* (*Xi youji*, 西游记, 1592), in which demons seek to eat human flesh to prolong their life, especially the hearts or livers of children.[94] Yet the key Chinese intertext for *The Republic of Wine* in relation to cannibalism is Lu Xun's canonical short story "Diary of a Madman" ("Kuangren riji," 狂人日记, 1918).[95] In an attempt at "re-contextualization," I want to now explore how Mo Yan builds on Lu Xun's pre-communist story in order to apply similar themes and insights to post-communist China. Lu Xun's paranoid "madman" narrator believes people in his village have been practising cannibalism for four thousand years, in particular during times of famine (31, 41). So convinced is he that cannibalism is a normal behavioural trait among Chinese people since "ancient times," he believes the practice is written "*between* the lines" (original emphasis) in history books (32). To reinforce his argument, the madman refers to a story in the early philosophical text, *Guan*

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[93] David Der-wei Wang, "Afterword: Chinese Fiction for the Nineties," in *Running Wild: New Chinese Writers*, ed. David Der-wei Wang and Jeanne Tai (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 243-245.
[94] Yang Xiaobin, *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-garde Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 22.
[95] Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, trans. William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990); hereafter cited by page in the text.

Zi, which attests that the cook Yi Ya boiled his son and served him to Duke Huan of Qi (685-643 BC) because the meat of a child was one of the few delicacies his ruler had not tasted (38).

"Diary of a Madman" is generally considered to be a figurative tale containing the delusional fantasies of a madman, and is usually read as being symbolic of Chinese rulers in the late and post-imperial period consuming their subjects and peers in order to survive. The madman, says Key Ray Chong, accuses "the traditional Confucian culture of being a man-eating (*ch'ih-jen*) society."[96] Fredric Jameson likewise advocates a "figural" reading of the story, arguing that all levels of this "exceedingly hierarchical society," from peasants to the bureaucratic elites, "must devour one another ruthlessly to stay alive." Yet Jameson also suggests the madman's belief in societal cannibalism involves "an unveiling or deconcealment of the nightmarish reality of things, a stripping away of our conventional illusions or rationalizations about daily life and existence." What Jameson is referring to is the revelation of a "terrifying objective real world" that lies beneath "the appearances of our own world." Jameson compares this literary effect in Lu Xun's short story to some processes of Western modernism, especially existentialism, "in which narrative is employed as a powerful instrument for the experimental exploration of reality and illusion."[97] I would argue that the literary effect that Jameson identifies in "Diary of a Madman" is similar to Wang's concept of the familiarisation of the uncanny; it is a "creative deformation of the unbearable" that highlights the normalcy of people devouring their competitors for self-preservation. The deconcealment of a nightmarish reality is experienced by both Lu Xun's madman and Ding Gou'er. Both characters think they may be losing their minds as a result of their conviction that cannibalism is occurring in their respective societies. Indeed, Yenna Wu's observation about "Diary of a Madman," that its attraction "lies in the tension in the complex interplay between the literal and the figural, between normalcy and madness, and between blindness

[96] Key Ray Chong, *Cannibalism in China*, (Wakefield, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1990), 142; hereafter cited by page in the text.
[97] Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 70-71.

and insight," equally holds true for *The Republic of Wine*.[98] In other words, both texts function within that in-between state which is characteristic of magical realist fiction.

In addition to a figurative reading of Lu Xun's short story, an opposite, or literal, reading is also possible, prompted by the ending, which presages an imminent, near-universal cannibalism with the narrator's plea: "Save the children" (410). The dissident novelist and journalist Zheng Yi reads "Diary of a Madman" through such a literal interpretation, for he believes it points to actual cannibalism throughout Chinese history, including modern times.[99] Zheng Yi makes the comment in light of his exposure of an outbreak of mass cannibalism in the Guangxi Autonomous Region in southern China in 1968, at the height of the Cultural Revolution.[100] Key Ray Chong defines this type of behaviour as "learned cannibalism," which is institutionalised and culturally sanctioned, and driven by a diverse range of circumstances such as hate, punishment, love, loyalty, religion, a belief in the medical benefits of human flesh, or simply desire for human meat as a delicacy, as in *The Republic of Wine*. The other type, "survival cannibalism," is borne out of "an act of desperation" and is "normally a prohibited" behaviour that occurs only in a crisis situation, as a result of natural disasters like famine, drought or flood, or of man-made disasters like war.[101] Interestingly, an episode of indirect survival cannibalism occurs in *Red Sorghum* when village dogs roam the sorghum fields, eating the remains of their former masters who had been massacred by Japanese troops. The feral dogs attack the survivors, so the narrator's father and grandfather resort to shooting the dogs in self-defence, eating the animals' corpses for "necessary nutrition." Years later, the narrator reflects that "eating a winter's supply of fatty dog meat was, for Father, the same as eating a winter's supply of

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[98] Yenna Wu, 63.
[99] Zheng Yi, *Scarlet Memorial: Tales of Cannibalism in Modern China*, trans. T.P. Sym (1993; Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 149; hereafter cited by page in the text.
[100] Zheng Yi estimates that during an eleven-day period 3,681 people were either beaten or persecuted to death throughout Guangxi, and that many of them, although exact numbers are unknown, were eaten by fellow residents (14). In Wuxuan County alone, he concludes at least one hundred people were victims of cannibalism (114), and up to 20,000 people in the county had engaged in eating the flesh of other people (116). The frenzied outbreak occurred after the Party called for a crackdown on "class enemies" (10). Horrors included cutting out a person's organs and frying them in oil while the victim was still alive (64).
[101] Chong, 1, 2.

human flesh ... indirectly, he had *cannibalized* his own people" (my emphasis) (271).[102] Yet this episode is presented in a positive light because of the need for survival and continuing the fight against the Japanese. Key Ray Chong says learned cannibalism was "often practiced" in ancient China "for culinary appreciation" to satiate the "jaded upper-class palate."[103] The existence of learned cannibalism in China's ancient and recent history suggests "Diary of a Madman" and *The Republic of Wine* warrant both a figurative and a literal reading. While I am not suggesting either Lu Xun's or Mo Yan's texts portray actual incidents of cannibalism, the underlying historical presence of anthropophagy imbues their fictional works with the kind of familiar grotesqueness that Wang identifies.

Mo Yan was not alone in utilising cannibalism as a trope at the time he wrote his novel, which demonstrates its metaphorical power in Chinese literature throughout the ages. Another leading contemporary writer, Yu Hua, similarly reached back into domestic literary tradition by fashioning his short story "Classical Love" ("*Gudian aiqing*," 古典爱情, 1988) on a traditional *chuangi* or strange story.[104] Set during a famine and economic hardship at an indeterminate time, the would-be scholar Willow witnesses two incidents of cannibalism: first, a man sells his wife and young daughter to two butchers, who immediately take an axe to the females and sell their flesh to a throng of waiting customers (37); second, a waiter in a tavern cuts off the leg of a live woman with an axe, then serves her flesh to a hungry merchant (44). Willow recognises the woman in the tavern as a beautiful maiden he had previously met, which may or may not be her ghost. Yu Hua's story, which has magical realist elements, focuses on the mistreatment of women and capacity of people to literally devour each other when survival is precarious. *The Republic of Wine* differs, however, in that the cannibalism occurs during an era of material comfort and plentiful food, suggesting the Party is consuming China's own citizens and particularly the nation's youth.

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[102] Mo Yan also includes brief references to cannibalism in the novels *Thirteen Steps* (*Shisan bu*, 十三步, 1989) and *The Herbivorous Clan* (*Shi cao jiazu*, 食草家族, 1993), neither of which had been translated into English at the time of writing. See Shelley Chan, 188.

[103] Chong, viii-ix.

[104] Yu Hua, *The Past and the Punishments*, trans. Andrew F. Jones (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996); hereafter cited by page in the text.

Mo Yan's novel is an overt satirical homage to "Diary of a Madman." Li Yidou claims to have adopted "Lu Xun's style of writing" and that his own short story "Meat Boy" is "a latter-day 'Madman's Diary'" (55). Despite the claim, "Meat Boy," in which a father sells his young boy to the Special Purchasing Section of the Culinary Academy to be eaten, is also a parody of another short story by Lu Xun, called "Medicine" (1919).[105] In "Medicine," a father purchases a *mentou* (steamed bread roll) soaked in the blood of an executed criminal to feed to his son, who is ill with tuberculosis (he dies anyway), indicating once again that people have become inured to cannibalising others in order to survive.[106] Yet Mo Yan takes elements of "Diary of a Madman" and develops them further in *The Republic of Wine*. The metafictional structure of Lu Xun's short story – the narrator discovers the madman's diaries – is transformed into a complex mosaic of letters, short stories and a novel in Mo Yan's book. The madman recovers from his insanity and is employed in an official post (29), implying normalcy inevitably involves collaboration in a cannibalistic society, whereas Ding Gou'er fails to break free of his descent into the corrupt world of Liquorland and dies in a literal and figurative cesspit, suggesting the overwhelming and destructive nature of endemic corruption in post-Mao China. A re-contextualisation of *The Republic of Wine*, however, involves more intertextual references than Lu Xun's short stories: the novel also refers to cannibalism with Yi Ya and the Duke Huan of Qi (78); Liu Bei (161-223), a warlord during the Han Dynasty whose army resorted to cannibalism during battle; and Liu Kui, a cannibalistic character in the sixteenth-century classical Chinese novel *Water Margin* (*Shui hu zhuan*, 水浒传).

In addition to the Chinese intertexts, the key foreign intertext is Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift's essay *A Modest Proposal* (1729), which is referred to in Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman" but not directly in Mo Yan's novel.[107] Even though Mo Yan claims he has not read

[105] Zhang Xudong, "'Demonic Realism' and the 'Socialist Market Economy': Language Game, Natural History, and Social Allegory in Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*," in *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Xudong Zhang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 243.
[106] Lu Xun, *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*.
[107] Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal* (1729; reprint, London: for Weaver Bickerton, 1730); hereafter cited by page in the text.

Swift,[108] the resemblances are striking, not least because the two texts share a caustic humour for satirical purposes and present seemingly credible arguments for eating babies. Northrop Frye's comment about Swift's tract could as easily apply to Mo Yan's novel. "The argument of Swift's *Modest Proposal* has a brain-softening plausibility about it: one is almost led to feel that the narrator is not only reasonable but even humane; yet the 'almost' can never drop out of any sane man's reaction, and as long as it remains there the modest proposal will be both fantastic and immoral," says Frye.[109] Swift proposes that Britain rid itself of the children of poor people and Catholics by selling their young babies to be consumed as meat, in a critique of the English colonisation of Ireland and the poor state of the colony's economy. The emphasis on babies as a culinary delicacy runs across both texts. Swift maintains that one-year-old babies are delicious and nourishing, and can be cooked in a variety of ways, either stewed, roasted, baked or boiled (10). In Mo Yan's text, Ding Gou'er is served an "incredibly fragrant little boy" on a platter (52), and the child dishes are devised by Liquorland's chefs, who are described as "extraordinarily talented, uncanny masters" (77). Cannibalism arises as a gourmet's titillation: Swift maintains it provides pleasure for the rich (23); in Liquorland the rationale is one of "aesthetic appreciation" (220). There is also an economic imperative. Swift devises a tiered payment scheme and suggests women keep breeding babies for human consumption (12). In Li Yidou's short story "Meat Boy," the Special Purchasing Section of the Culinary Academy buys babies in bulk numbers (72) and compels parents to guarantee that they have bred their child specifically as "a special product" to sell to the academy (73). The above re-contextualisation of *The Republic of Wine*, then, illustrates how the novel follows in two different literary traditions that deploy cannibalism as a trope to critique political and social issues, one Chinese and the other Western. Thus Mo Yan's novel ought to be positioned within a world literature context, rather than be regarded as just a pre-eminent example of contemporary Chinese fiction.

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[108] Kinkley, 119, footnote 31. Kinkley cites a personal interview with Mo Yan on March 23, 2000.
[109] Frye, 224.

Much of the magical realist elements in the novel are inherent in the heightened ambiguity about whether or not the alleged cannibalism in Liquorland actually occurs. Special investigator Ding Gou'er is unable to prove conclusively if Party officials are eating babies. His confusion is amplified by the hallucination-like episodes he experiences in Liquorland, which are induced by the excessive imbibing of alcohol. In a magical realist touch, drunkenness in the novel exists amid the in-betweenness of consciousness (sobriety) and unconsciousness (dead drunk). Drunkenness represents a loss of control in a bacchanalian sense, as well as the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, in that characters temporarily let slip their identities to reveal hidden truths and repressed selves. For example, Ding Gou'er becomes so intoxicated at his first banquet in Liquorland that his consciousness is "stripped from his body" (43) and flies with wings around the dining hall (45). When he is presented with the "famous dish" of a boy (75), he panics and shoots the boy's head. His host, Liquorland's Deputy Head of Propaganda, Diamond Jin, provides a rational explanation that the "boy" consists of lotus root and melon for the arm, ham sausage for the leg, processed suckling sow for the torso, silver melon for the head, and strings of hirsute vegetables for the hair (82). Ding Gou'er's confusion is compounded when he eats an arm and is overwhelmed by the exquisite taste (83). Consequently, the special investigator is led further and further into an "epistemological puzzle" in which he is increasingly doubtful about what constitutes reality, satirising the Maoist concept of a universal socialist realism.[110] These kinds of sequences create the "surrealistic and hallucinatory metaphors and much magic realism" of the novel, as Jeffrey Kinkley points out.[111] Later, the special investigator begins an affair with a woman known only as the "lady trucker," who turns out to be Diamond Jin's wife. She pleads with Ding Gou'er to take her away from Liqourland, claiming her husband and other officials "eat infants" (195), and that Diamond Jin had eaten "every one of the aborted foetuses" from the five pregnancies he had forced her to terminate (197). Although it seems their liaison is an entrapment, designed so that Diamond Jin can photograph Ding Gou'er in a compromising

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[110] Yenna Wu, 73.
[111] Kinkley, 112.

position, the lady trucker's claims nevertheless add to the plausibility of cannibalism and the investigator's confusion.

It is tempting to describe Ding Gou'er's inability to solve his investigation as reflecting a hesitation typically experienced by the reader when confronted with two seemingly contradictory elements – the magical and the real – in a magical realist text. "The reader may hesitate (at one point or another) between two contradictory understandings of events – and hence experiences some unsettling doubts," says Wendy Faris. The hesitation occurs before the reader determines if there is an "irreducible element" of magic in the text; that is, something which cannot be explained according to the laws of the universe as understood.[112] But is the term hesitation appropriate for Chinese fiction? I think not.

Ming Dong Gu argues that classical Chinese fiction reflects the Chinese philosophical system as expressed in Taoism. Taoist metaphysics conceives of the universe as "growing out of nothing," an idea encapsulated in the phrase *wu zhong sheng you* (蕪中生有), which is translated as "being in nonbeing," or "the real in the unreal." Crucially, Taoist ontology perceives everything in the universe as being connected to everything else, hence subject and object are not cognitively separated. By contrast, Western philosophy does usually separate subject and object. Ming Dong Gu maintains that classical Chinese fiction, as a result of being traced back to Taoist ontology, reflects the binding of *wu* (nonbeing) with its "opposite," *you* (being). Put another way, classical Chinese texts can hold what is not true as also being true, to the extent that this tendency to portray the unity of paradoxes "completely defies the law of probability." While Ming Dong Gu concedes that Western fiction can also hold the nontrue as being true, he argues that the Chinese tradition "surpasses its Western counterpart in intensity." He adds that within Chinese fiction "the fantastic elements cannot be adequately explained in terms of a hesitation on the part of the reader," nor "resolved as the results of imagination or illusion" because they "are part and parcel of the plot

[112] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 167, 171.

development."[113] Similarly, Andrew Plaks argues that Chinese narratives reintegrate perceived dualities into a "conceptual unity." The "Chinese solution" is to conceive a universe in which sensory and intellectual opposites are "contained," and in which "poles of duality are seen as complementary," says Plaks. Polarities are not seen as opposites but as points along "a series of axes, or continua."[114]

The Republic of Wine reflects Chinese narratives in that the novel reintegrates perceived dualities into a conceptual unity, such as the fictional and the real, drunkenness and sobriety, corruption and purity. Ding Gou'er remains indecisive about whether cannibalism is occurring in Liquorland. "Who could guarantee it wasn't a hoax?" he thinks at one point (115). Yet his indecision ought to be read more in context of a Chinese narrative's tendency to unify dualities rather than constitute hesitation. Ambivalence, or even ambiguity, may be more apt, for what underpins Ding Gou'er's reluctance to make up his mind is his belated recognition that he himself is being increasingly dragged into the corrupt world which he was sent to investigate. If he accepts the corruption of the external world, he has to face up to the corruption within himself. In the Taoist tradition of holding what is true to be untrue, Ding Gou'er is both ethical and corrupt. *The Republic of Wine*, therefore, illustrates how the concept of hesitation that underpins the poetics of magical realism does not adequately capture the cultural dynamics of the text.

An inherent tension exists between the satirical portrayal of the allegations of cannibalism and the 'evidence' produced, principally through Li Yidou's letters and short stories. I propose that Mo Yan introduces this tension in order to encourage the reader to explore the deeper undercurrents of the book. Two of Li Yidou's stories, in particular, give credence to the cannibalistic behaviour: "Meat Boy," which I discussed earlier; and "Cooking Lesson." In the latter, Li Yidou's mother-in-law demonstrates to students at the Culinary Academy how to efficiently "slaughter" a baby boy without ruining the meat. The scene starts as satire but ends as grotesque horror. The mother-in-law tells her students that, "owing to

[113] Ming Dong Gu, *Chinese Theories of Fiction*, 83, 187, 182, 191-194, 214-215.
[114] Andrew H. Plaks, "Conceptual Models in Chinese Narrative Theory." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 4.1 (1977): 34-35.

the rapid development following the four modernizations and the constant upping of people's living standards, eating is no longer simply something to fill one's stomach, but an aesthetic appreciation" (220). Immediately, she shows the class how to anaesthetise the "little animal" (220), suspend him from a rack and cut an artery in a foot (225). In his story, Li Yidou describes the demonstration in such precise detail it is reminiscent of the torturous execution scenes in *The Sandalwood Death*. Why are such gruesome details included in *The Republic of Wine*? Importantly, the mother-in-law says of the babies: "They are not human. They are little animals in human form" (220). Mo Yan once again blurs the distinction between humans and animals, suggesting humans are no better than animals, and reaffirming the theme of *Red Sorghum* that the human spirit degenerates in inverse proportion to rising material prosperity. In *The Republic of Wine*, the mother-in-law's clinical slaughter of an infant indicates Mo Yan wants the reader to understand that such a nightmarish scenario is not only possible under an authoritarian regime, it is also representative of what has actually occurred in China's history.

I propose that the cannibalism trope in Mo Yan's novel is an example of the "traumatic imagination" inherent in much magical realist fiction. Eugene Arva's concept, which I introduced in Chapter Two, highlights how magical realism frequently incorporates "an empathy-driven consciousness that enables authors and readers to act out and / or work through trauma by means of magical realist images." Historical events that are too extreme to be portrayed through realism – such as massacres, genocide, or natural disasters – are instead depicted as experiences rather than as they might have actually occurred.[115] Trauma, as Cathy Caruth defines it, is "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena."[116] The historical trauma that Mo Yan wishes to address is not episodes of actual cannibalism like in Guangxi, but the ongoing social

[115] Eugene L. Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2011), 5.
[116] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 91.

upheavals throughout the Maoist era and state-controlled capitalism. Cannibalism is the magical realist image for the "traumatic imagination." Yet the satirical version of cannibalism in the novel is so extreme, so distorted, so grotesque that it becomes humorous and palatable to the reader. In short, it is digestible. A parallel may be seen in the epilogue of Canadian writer Yann Martel's magical realist novel, *Life of Pi* (2001).[117] The two government officials interviewing the teenage Pi, who drifted for two hundred and twenty seven days in the Pacific Ocean on a lifeboat, decide not to believe his 'alternative' story of survival by cannibalism (of a crew member), because the truth is too difficult to bear. Instead, they choose to believe Pi's tale of "traumatic imagination," of being saved by a (metaphoric) Bengal tiger named Richard Parker, who becomes the "awful, fierce thing that kept me [Pi] alive" (285). The historical Richard Parker was one of four sailors shipwrecked in the South Atlantic in 1884, and the only one to be eaten by the other crew.[118] Pi, who starts out as a religious vegetarian, gives his alter-ego the name of the sailor because he realises that unless he grows into a predator himself, he will become a victim.

So what is Mo Yan attempting to say in *The Republic of Wine*? And why does he employ a magical realist treatment of cannibalism to say it? German writer Patrick Süskind's canonical magical realist novel, *Perfume* (1985), provides a clue.[119] Although the central character, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, does not eat humans directly, the eighteenth-century French perfumer ingests them in an olfactory sense by murdering virgin "girls just approaching womanhood" (143) and distilling their essences into perfumes. Grenouille's perfumes endow him with superhuman power over others. Eventually, he is attacked in a cemetery by thirty people who cut him into pieces and eat him, performing their frenzied act "out of Love" (186). *Perfume* is often read as a metaphor for Hitler's dictatorial rise in Nazi Germany and his power over an enthralled populace. But I want to highlight that Grenouille's monstrous essence remains living within the people who cannibalised him, as Howard

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[117] Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (2001; reprint, London: Canongate, 2012); hereafter cited by page in the text.
[118] Chong, 18.
[119] Patrick Süskind, *Perfume*, trans. John E. Woods (1985; London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986); hereafter cited by page in the text.

Goldblatt notes.[120] Similarly, in *The Republic of Wine* the perpetrator becomes one with the victim, the crime of cannibalism involves the whole of society, not just those who directly participate in it. The longer Ding Gou'er stays in Liquorland, the more he becomes corrupted by its environment. He is an anti-hero who subverts the Maoist literary requirement for a socialist hero of action. He not only fails in his investigation, but is physically absorbed into Liquorland's cesspit, sinking into an open-air "privy" along with his "sacred panoply of ideals, justice, respect, honor, and love" (330).

This notion of collective responsibility for cannibalism in a metaphoric sense has a more profound resonance in the Chinese language than in English. The Chinese word for "to eat," *chi* (吃), has wider connotations than its English counterpart because eating in Chinese also relates to "various economic, political, social, and cultural codes." Moreover, the Chinese word *rou* (肉) means both "flesh" and "meat," and so applies to both human flesh (*renrou*, 人肉) and different kinds of animal meat, such as pork (*zhurou*, 猪肉) and beef (*niurou*, 牛肉). "When *rou* is combined with *chi* in the verb-object structure of *chirou*, it literally locates human consumption of *rou* and the human body itself in the order of *carnivora*," says Yue Gang (original emphasis).[121]

Mo Yan plays with this linguistic ambiguity or crossover between human flesh and animal meat in two particular passages in *The Republic of Wine*, in order to reinforce the novel's overall theme of cannibalism and collective social culpability. The first passage occurs during Ding Gou'er's inaugural banquet at Liquorland, when the special investigator has become so drunk that he has an out-of-body-experience and observes himself as a separate identity or being. The English translation reads:

> He saw the shell of his *body*, slouched in a chair like a *hunk of dead meat*, his neck pressing against the chair back, like an overturned gourd. From his vantage point on the ceiling, he wept over the *half-dead body* he had left behind (my emphasis) (84).

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[120] Howard Goldblatt, "'The Saturnicon' Forbidden Food of Mo Yan," *World Literature Today* 74.3 (2000): 478.
[121] Yue Gang, 11, 28.

The English translation clearly spells out a demarcation between the human "body" and the "meat" one might associate with a dead animal. The simile "like a hunk of dead meat" brings to mind the carcass of a dead cow hanging from a butcher's peg. The translated phrase "shell of his body" in the original reads "*ziji de qu qiao*" (自己的軀殼).[122] The word *qu* (軀) means "human body," so at this point there is no ambiguity about Ding Gou'er's physicality. The *qu* is qualified by *qiao* (殼), meaning "shell," which introduces the nuance of Ding Gou'er staring at the carapace or outer layer of his corpus. The translated phrase "hunk of dead meat" matches the Chinese text: *dui rou* (堆肉) literally means "pile" (or "heap") of "meat." But in the second reference, to Ding Gou'er's "half-dead body," the original text differs from the English translation, which fails to convey the subtlety of meaning or ambiguity. The Chinese text refers to a half-dead *routi* (肉體). The two Chinese characters combined mean "physical body," but the combination word consists of two separate Chinese characters: *rou* (肉), meaning "flesh" or "meat," and *ti* (體), meaning "body." Mo Yan's use of the word *routi*, therefore, introduces the idea that Ding Gou'er's human body is also flesh or meat that may be eaten. This concept is reinforced when he sees his inebriated *routi* as half "*si*" (死), meaning "dead." That is, the special investigator's meaty body is already half-way to the abattoir.

In the second passage, Ding Gou'er has just had sex with the lady trucker and, already confusing the demarcation between humans and animals, feels like he is "an animal in the wild." At the post-coital moment, the English translation reads: "Opaque steam rose from the lady trucker's *body*, like a freshly *steamed fish*" (my emphasis) (195). The Chinese text refers to the lady trucker's "*shen*" (身), which not only means "body," but also "life" as well as "morality" or "conduct." It is clear that the original text explicitly refers to a human body, yet there is the additional overtone of a living body, perhaps partly because she is a woman capable of giving birth, and the Confucian idea that the inhabitant of this body has moral obligations. Of course, the lady trucker implores Ding Gou'er to arrest her allegedly

[122] Mo Yan, *Jiu guo* (酒国) (*The Republic of Wine*) (Taipai: Hongfan shudian, 1992), 102.

criminal husband. Nevertheless, Ding Gou'er's response is to view her like a freshly cooked piece of meat to be eaten, or a "*zheng yu*" (蒸魚), literally "steamed fish." Ding Gou'er's mental or spiritual degeneration into cannibalism is reinforced moments later. "Gazing back at the lady trucker, he saw her as a target of *flesh* belonging to Diamond Jin" (my emphasis) (195). The Chinese text here uses "*rou*" (肉), meaning "flesh" or "meat," making it unambiguously clear that Ding Gou'er has crossed the mental threshold into viewing his lover as a consumable delicacy.[123] Even allowing for Mo Yan's satirical humour at this juncture, in which he employs the cliche of lovers 'eating' their paramours, it is nevertheless clear that Ding Gou'er has himself psychically entered the world of cannibalism.

The special investigator's transformation reflects the figure of the cannibal, who is "neither inhuman nor fully human." The cannibal cannot entirely be a monster because he or she "occupies a *liminal* site that belongs to neither the inside nor the outside: it constantly threatens the binary opposition on which the stability of the self hinges" (my emphasis).[124] The cannibal's liminal place, which lies between being inhuman and fully human, parallels the liminal space occupied by magical realist fiction, which exists at the interpenetration of the real and the unreal. It is precisely the liminality of cannibalism in *The Republic of Wine* that reveals to the reader the interconnection between corrupt officialdom and a compliant and complicit citizenry. In other words, the monster is not necessarily an external figure, but lives within all of us.

Not only does *The Republic of Wine* break down binaries of the external and internal, of the ethical and corrupted, it also dissolves the notion of an autonomous self, of an individual identity both separate from, and assimilated within, the rest of humanity. The novel employs metafiction to question the limits of realism and the basis of ideation, by exploiting the postmodern notion of a text as a network of other texts in such a way that the boundaries between the real and the unreal are dissolved, and the concept of an objective, universal truth is subverted. The novel elevates the 'magical' element of textual reality to the same

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[123] Mo Yan, *Jiu guo* (酒国) (*The Republic of Wine*) (Taipai: Hongfan shudian, 1992), 232.
[124] Yue Gang, 25.

level as extratextual reality, thereby throwing doubt on the epistemological status of both, and suggesting that 'reality' is plural, subjective and unstable.

In the tenth and final chapter, the character Mo Yan intrudes into the action of the main narrative by becoming a participant. The real-life Mo Yan went on to use this technique again in *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (2006), in which 'Mo Yan' appears as a character in the narrative. The final chapter of *The Republic of Wine* begins in the third person, written by the actual Mo Yan, who claims that the character Mo Yan "disgusts me" (332). The actual Mo Yan says the two of them have "many similarities" but "many contradictions" as well. "I'm a hermit crab, and Mo Yan is the shell I'm occupying," says the actual Mo Yan (331). This passage is reminiscent of the short story "Borges and I" (1960) by Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, whom some critics regard as a pioneer of magical realist fiction. The writer of Borges' story says the "other" Borges is "the one things happen to," implying that is the famous writer. But the last line confuses who is which Borges, and whether they are indeed separate identities: "I do not know which of us has written this page."[125] Similarly, what initially appears to be separate identities of the two Mo Yans in *The Republic of Wine*'s last chapter unify when the writer says that the character and he "merge into one" (332). Thereafter, the narrative switches from the third person to the first person as the merged Mo Yan disembarks from a train at Liquorland.

The merged actual-fictional character Mo Yan ostensibly travels to Liquorland to devise a better ending than Ding Gou'er falling into the open-air privy (334), thereby highlighting not only the artifice of the construction of fiction, but also the highly intertextual nature of this novel. By allowing the 'author' to actively intrude into the text, Mo Yan elevates fictional reality to the same level as extratextual reality. Jon Thiem identifies the transportation of an author (or sometimes reader) "into the world of a text" as a process that he terms "textualisation." Textualisation, he adds, is "the paradigmatic topos of magical realism" because it demonstrates "the interpenetration of irreconcilable worlds" – that is, the

[125] Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. James E. Irby, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 1970), 282-283.

actual world and the textual world. As a result, readers are prompted to question the ontological basis of both the fictional and extratextual worlds.[126] The fictional Mo Yan's intervention in the main narrative encourages the reader to question the complicity of society as a whole in regard to corruption as 'Mo Yan' ultimately realises that he has become as embroiled in the corrupt world of Liquorland as Ding Gou'er. Mo Yan meets Li Yidou, who had invited the author to his hometown, as well as Diamond Jin and other characters of Liquorland. But rather than discover a new ending, Mo Yan falls into the same trap as Ding Gou'er by becoming hopelessly drunk at the officials' banquet. Indeed, Mo Yan becomes the ending as, in his stream-of-consciousness rant in the final pages, he has an epiphany that Li Yidou is a "con man" and "evil-doer" (355), and a vision that he reunites with his "shadow" and "true brother" Ding Gou'er (355-356). Mo Yan's narrative journey, therefore, exposes the representation of discourse, but in such as way as to demonstrate the limitations of realism. For Mo Yan has no more success that Ding Gou'er in establishing the truth about cannibalism in Liquorland. Mo Yan fails in his bid to devise a better ending, hence absolute truth is shown to be a fiction.

In conclusion, Mo Yan is a writer who presents a quandary for the scholar of magical realism. On the one hand, there are identifiable magical realist elements throughout much of his work. One can trace a development in his deployment of magical realist techniques, from those of the ontological kind involving supernatural occurrences in *Red Sorghum* and *The Garlic Ballads*, to a different kind of magical realism that incorporates metafictional techniques, especially intertextuality, in *The Republic of Wine*. On the other hand, Mo Yan repeatedly publicly resists attempts to label his works magical realist, or himself as a writer of magical realism. Indeed, there is a degree of truth in his assertion that what might be perceived as magical realist elements in his fiction are more likely his own adaptations of traditional Chinese literary techniques and rural peasant stories or folklore. Moreover,

[126] Jon Thiem, "The Textualization of the Reader in Magical Realist Fiction," *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 235, 240, 244. Thiem says a second type of textualisation occurs "when the world of a text literally intrudes into the extratextual or reader's world" (236).

Chinese literary scholars attest to the similarities between magical realist fiction and classical Chinese literature, even though they are different generic kinds. From a literary critical point of view, therefore, one can only analyse Mo Yan's fiction through the rubric of magical realism if it is done so in conjunction with caveats. Mo Yan's fiction demonstrates, perhaps more than the work of any other key writer in this thesis, the amorphous nature of magical realism in that it so often shares similarities with other elements, especially cultural and from individual artistic expression, which may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to tell apart.

Conclusion: Walking in perpetually new "footsteps"

> Woman and man are words other people use, not me. I am not sure what I am. Some days I'm neither, or I'm nothing. On other days I feel I'm both.[1]

The epigraph belongs to Dimple, a prostitute and opium addict, then in her mid-twenties, in Indian writer Jeet Thayil's novel *Narcopolis* (2012). Dimple's description in terms of gender reveals the sense of an in-between state, either both male *and* female, or neither. Dimple's self-perception reflects the quintessential in-betweenness of magical realism, a style of writing that interpenetrates multiple modes of existence. In addition, Dimple's social status – the most marginal of the marginalised, the poorest of the poor – illustrates how magical realist fiction is frequently a form of social realism. As a young boy aged eight or nine, Dimple was given away by his mother to a man who claimed to be a "priest," who subsequently sold the child to a Bombay brothel where his genitals were removed. Thereafter Dimple experiences gender and class ostracism in the extreme. Dimple forms part of the cast of characters of drug addicts, criminals, prostitutes and misfits in Bombay in the 1970s, where opium provides a narcotic against the vicissitudes and pain of life. For the people of *Narcopolis*, life is neither real nor unreal, it lies somewhere in-between. Time is obliterated, events occur as if in a dream, smothered within an opium haze of delirium. But even dreams cannot be contained. "Dreams leak from head to head; they travel between those who face in the same direction, that is to say lovers, and those who share the bonds of intoxication and death," says the narrator (187). Thayil's narrative forms a different kind of "hallucinatory" magical realism, a narco-nightmare of perpetually endless disappointments.

Thayil's beguiling novel would be an obvious inclusion for an extension of this thesis. My investigation into the six key authors covered in the previous five chapters barely scratches the surface of how authors from Asia and Australasia have utilised and developed

[1] Jeet Thayil, *Narcopolis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 11; hereafter cited by page in the text.

magical realist fiction for different purposes and in different ways. Thayil shares with these other writers a preoccupation with deploying the narrative mode as a political strategy to give voice to the voiceless, to make visible the invisible people who exist on the fringes of society. My original intention for this study was to include an additional chapter that provided a brief overview of other writers in Asia and Australia who deploy magical realist techniques, such as Thayil and Japan's Haruki Murakami, among others. However, it quickly became apparent this was a fanciful wish due to the restriction on word length and the necessity to give adequate space to discuss each of the key writers. Nevertheless, there are cogent reasons for extending the research initiated in this study. For instance, it would be beneficial to scholarship on magical realism to further explore the fiction of Indigenous Australian authors Kim Scott and Sam Watson, whom I mentioned briefly in Chapter One. Their different adaptations of the narrative mode, which are distinguished by decidedly Indigenous Australian perspectives, could be contrasted with magical realist orientations by white-'settler' Australian authors such as Peter Carey (*Illywhacker*, 1985) and Richard Flanagan (*Gould's Book of Fish*, 2001). While Carey and Flanagan also address the dispossession of land of Indigenous Australians, they do so without appropriating Indigenous culture and tend to utilise a metafictional strain of magical realism for their satirical historical novels. Moreover, Mo Yan serves as a reminder that there is much to explore regarding magical realism among contemporary Chinese authors, as well as writers from communist or former communist countries.

It is not only writers of magical realism from Asia and Australasia who warrant further inquiry, but also some of the larger themes I have raised. One is the prospect of developing a genealogy of magical realism based on polygenesis. I have proposed that magical realism should be conceived as a narrative technique that appears in a multitude of literatures from different countries, different cultures and at different times in history. In Chapters One and Five, I touched on comments by several scholars that there are similarities between contemporary magical realist fiction and Indigenous Australian Dreamtime narrative as well as classical Chinese literature (although this is not to claim they are generically the same). In

the Introduction, I highlighted similar comments by scholars linking magical realism with ancient Roman literature and European fiction before the mid-twentieth century. In order to further explore these suggestions, it might be best done as a multi-disciplinary exercise involving scholars of magical realist fiction, Indigenous Australian literature, Chinese literature, classics and anthropology, among other areas, testing the hypothesis against close readings of selected texts.

Ecocriticism is another field that deserves further inquiry in relation to magical realism, given the growing importance of ecological discourse based on the deteriorating state of the global environment. I demonstrated in Chapter Two how ecocriticism may be used to interpret Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984) and Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987). The latter, in particular, exhibits a biocentric view of the world that illuminates the holistic view of magical realist narratives, which typically incorporate multiple perspectives and transgress barriers like human and animal, inner being and external environment. Jennifer Wenzel's concept of "petro-magic-realism," for example, could well be adapted for Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006). Wenzel coined the term to identify a political ecology in Nigerian fiction, focusing on writers Ben Okri, Amos Tutuola and Karen King-Aribisala. "Petro-magic-realism offers a way of understanding the relationships between the fantastic and material elements of these stories, linking formal, intertextual, sociological, and economic questions about literature to questions of political ecology," says Wenzel. She explores how "petro-magic-realism" combines elements of the Yoruba narrative tradition, such as "the transmogrifying creatures and liminal space of the forest," with the violence of oil exploration and extraction, associated state violence and the resultant environmental destruction.[2] One could build on Wenzel's theory to discuss what might be called "commodity magical realism," which would cover any natural resource sold as a commodity, such as oil, gas, timber, rubber, fish, tea or, in *Carpentaria*, iron ore. The subtext of Wright's novel is that the only way to fight for the natural world is to fight the people destroying it, as Will Phantom does by sabotaging

[2] Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-Magic-Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature," *Postcolonial Studies* 9.4 (2006): 450, 456.

the global mining company's iron ore pipeline to a coastal port. The book foregrounds the inter-relationship between global capital, compliant local politicians and environmental degradation. The land's ancestral spirits listen to "the dull, monotonous clanging made by heavy machinery churning and gouging the land."[3] The word gouging has a dual meaning here: both to dig and to extort money. Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013), by contrast, is more nihilistic in tone. The futuristic novel is set at a time of environmental apocalypse, with extreme drought as well as torrential rains, the causes of which are never entirely clear. Australia's first Indigenous president, Warren Finch, compromises himself, his constituents and the land by relying on political funding supplied by the very people who are "exploiting natural resources."[4]

Commodity magical realism has a long tradition, although it is not often remarked upon by critics. Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), for example, features the Macondo banana company which is owned and run by "gringo" Americans. The ecological implications become manifest after the American engineers, agronomists and hydrologists alter nature's habits as set by "Divine Providence," changing the pattern of the rains, accelerating the cycle of harvests, and moving the river.[5] In Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), the central character, the Mandingue Negro slave Macandal, is crippled after his arm gets mangled in machinery at a sugar cane plantation in Haiti. Macandal subsequently escapes from the plantation to commence his work as a revolutionary activist fighting the French colonists. Miguel Angel Asturias' *Men of Maize* (1949) is set among fields of maize and sugar cane tended by Guatemalan Indian farmers who battle the *Mestizos*, the descendents of the Spanish colonists. The novel's multiple stories depict, as Ato Quayson says, "the ravages of capitalism" and the "new modes of exploitation" that damage human relations.[6] Asturias explores what happens to

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[3] Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2006), 150.
[4] Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (Artarmon, NSW: Giramondo, 2013), 224.
[5] Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (1967; London: Pan Books, 1978), 186, 188.
[6] Ato Quayson, "Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative and History," in *The Novel Vol 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 753.

native peoples when they lose their links to the land, community and ancestral customs. Maize, says the character Benito Ramos, "should be planted ... to give the family its grub, and not for business."[7]

Film offers another area for further research, in terms of a detailed study on how magical realist fiction is translated from one generic form (the novel) into another (film). In this thesis I have touched on three film adaptations of magical realist books – *The Whale Rider, Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Red Sorghum* (1987) – demonstrating how the narrative mode may be successfully translated but to varying degrees. The comparatively simpler format of a screenplay, compared to a fictional text with tens of thousands of words, typically results in a narrative that is more streamlined and which may lose nuances and subtexts that are foregrounded in the book, such as postcolonial elements in *The Whale Rider* as well as the fracturing of time and the compression of history in *Red Sorghum*. Other film adaptations of magical realist books that might be appropriate include the celluloid versions of Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (1985), Peter Carey's *Bliss* (1981) and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989). Topics to be addressed might range from how the poetics of magical realism change (if at all) from one medium to the other, to whether film directors and screenwriters actually consciously acknowledge magical realism as a narrative mode that requires translation to film, and, if so, what they understand magical realism to be.

The genesis of this thesis was to respond to a gap in scholarship of magical realism, in that individual critical studies had previously largely focused on fiction from Latin America, North America, the Caribbean, Europe, West Africa, South Africa and India (mostly concentrated on Salman Rushdie). My argument is that this geographical bias has resulted in an understanding of the narrative mode that is too narrow, too limited by the cultural and philosophical frameworks of these regions. My aim has been to broaden the scope of magical realism, to modify and expand our collective conception of the narrative mode, by examining contemporary fiction from Asia and Australasia, two important regions of the global literary map that have been neglected by critics. I hope to have shown how the key

[7] Miguel Angel Asturias, *Men Of Maize*, trans. Gerald Martin (London, New York: Verso, 1988), xi, 253.

writers and texts in this study challenge not only how we read magical realism, but also our expectations of it. Alexis Wright fuses Indigenous Australian Dreamtime mythology and Law, as well as updated interpretations of non-Indigenous myths. Keri Hulme and Witi Ihimaera incorporate Maori mythology and a strong sense of the South Pacific into their works. Mo Yan draws on two magical realist traditions – one 'foreign' and the other 'domestic' – to develop a style of magical realism that is distinctively his own and, at the same time, distinctly Chinese. Amitav Ghosh reimagines the British colonial archive of late nineteenth-century India to re-insert localised Indian scientific knowledge in the country's history. While Salman Rushdie progresses his own magical realist style from a decidedly postcolonial focus early in his career to one concerned with globalisation and the inter-connectedness of the contemporary world in his later work. All of these writers share a political impetus with most other authors of magical realist fiction from other territories, utilising the narrative mode for its capacity to present alternative perceptions of reality that challenge the orthodox view of 'reality' as laid down by, usually, authoritarian regimes, and for its polyvocal nature that shifts the marginalised of society into the centre. However, these key writers also bring new and different approaches to magical realist fiction.

This thesis has examined magical realism at the intersection of postcolonial literature and world literature, regarding the narrative mode as a style of writing that circulates widely and freely around the world. I have explored how several of the key texts complicate the notion of postcoloniality through the authors' deployment of magical realism as a postcolonial strategy. Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, for example, depicts ongoing colonisation of Australia's first inhabitants in an officially postcolonial country. In turn, Wright's book prompts a re-examination of Stephen Slemon's influential theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse, which is based on a binary analysis of two oppositional systems. Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* invokes the Gothic and Irishness to interpret the colonisation of the Maori in New Zealand within a broader context of colonisation. Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* suggests a cross-fertilisation of localised Indian scientific knowledge with British colonial science, in a fictionalised re-imagining of the 'discovery' of the

cause of malaria. Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* questions the paradigms of domination and resistance that have resulted from the experience of colonialism and anti-colonial movements in recent history through its depiction of the destruction of Kashmir by neighbouring India and Pakistan, two former colonies of the British empire.

At a theoretical level, I have argued that magical realism has porous borders, constantly changing boundaries that make it inherently unstable as a generic kind. Each new work changes the nature of the narrative mode. What is required, therefore, is a flexible and minimalist definition of magical realism that allows it to be applied across a wide variety of texts from around the world. I have built on Jacques Derrida's concept that every work of fiction participates in a genre, or genres, without ever belonging to any particular genre. In this respect, a work may participate in magical realism without belonging to it. In addition, I have drawn on Derrida's notion that every genre has a single, common trait. This common trait forms the basis for my definition of magical realism, as literature that represents the magical or supernatural in a quotidian manner and which is embedded within literary realism. Rather than formulating a list of supposedly common characteristics among magical realist texts, as many critics do, I have instead proposed a family resemblances model. In other words, magical realist texts may share some similarities, but not all, and the only one thing they have in common is the solitary trait.

Magical realism plays a vital role in literary criticism because it allows comparative analysis between separate literatures that enable us to recognise continuities and similarities within different literary cultures that the established genre systems, which are essentially derived from Western literature, might not capture. Put another way, magical realism identifies the underlying dynamics of certain literatures that orthodox genres do not. There are three main similarities, or deep connections, that become apparent through a close reading of the key texts in this thesis, and which occur in particular groups of texts but not all of them: first, the use of mythopoeia by indigenous writers in white-'settler' countries in Australasia; second, a complex structure of intertextuality from which the 'magical' or supernatural elements are derived; and third, the presence of elements in pre-modern

literature (Chinese and Indigenous Australian) that are similar to magical realist elements in contemporary fiction. On the other hand, I have also shown how Western philosophical ideas quite often do not adequately capture non-Western ontologies. As a result, magical realism as a rubric is sometimes insufficient as a tool for literary analysis to explain the cultural sources or individual artistic expression inherent within a particular text; this is particularly evident in fiction from distinctly non-Western cultural contexts, like that of Alexis Wright and Mo Yan.

In his Nobel lecture, Mo Yan recalled how early in his career he had to “escape” the “influence” of the canonical magical realist writer Gabriel García Márquez, after he had “followed” in his “footsteps” for two years. Whereas the Colombian was a “blazing furnace,” “I was a block of ice. If I got too close ... I would dissolve into a cloud of steam.”[8] Mo Yan’s candid acknowledgement attests to the dynamic evolutionism inherent in magical realism that has enabled it to endure as a literary style for so long, and which is likely to ensure its future. What starts as inspiration soon turns into self-expression. In adapting and co-opting established magical realist techniques writers eventually create their own, new literary styles. By this process of continual exogamy authors keep reinventing the nature of magical realist fiction so that the narrative mode in each new work is recognisable yet unfamiliar.

[8] Mo Yan, “Storytellers: Nobel Lecture, December 7, 2012,” trans. Howard Goldblatt, *Chinese Literature Today*, 3.1/2 (2013): 13.

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