

MA (Literary Studies)

Mini-Thesis

Title:

**García Márquez, Magic Realism and Language as Material
Practice**

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I examine the political implications of the shifts in definition of the term, "magic realism". Magic realism as it was originally employed in the Latin-American context signified a concept different to what it is currently held to suggest in metropolitan literary discourse. Magic realism in the first world has come to be regarded as a third world reflection of its own cultural dominant, postmodernism, without an acknowledgement of the alternative material realities which inform it. I investigate these ideas through an analysis of the work of two novelists, namely, the Colombian, Gabriel García Márquez, and the American, John Barth. In a well-known essay titled "The Literature of Replenishment", Barth names García Márquez as the foremost postmodern writer. This is deceptive, I argue, since although in the essay Barth presents postmodernist fiction as a political advance on the earlier styles of realism and modernism, his own fictional practice contradicts his claim. While in the essay Barth presents postmodernism as politically significant by virtue of its "democratic impulse", his novel, Chimera, seeks to avoid the political through a flawed understanding of textuality. García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude stands in stark contrast with Chimera since it underscores the political consideration central to discourse through stressing the text's material, historical context. This distinction between the two novels is brought to light particularly through the incremental differences in their use of the techniques of "narrative circularity" and repetition. I argue, furthermore, that García Márquez's emphasis on language as a material practice is, at least in part, owing to the specifics of the style of magic realism. While postmodernist fiction, one of the cultural effects of an advanced capitalism, may slide ineluctably into notions of pure textuality, magic realism, constituted as it is at the interface of pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production, compels an acknowledgement of the material world.

John Barth: Some Notes Toward Defining the Postmodern

In a pair of essays titled "The Literature of Exhaustion"¹ and "The Literature of Replenishment",² John Barth examines what he considers to be the enervation of realist and modernist fictional modes, on the one hand, with the potential renewal represented by postmodernism on the other. Interestingly, in both these essays he refers to the fictional practice of Latin American writers, namely, the Argentinean, Jorge Luis Borges, and the Colombian, Gabriel García Márquez, respectively, to exemplify the new direction he considers literature ought to take.

In the first essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion", Barth suggests the contemporary inadequacy of realism and modernism as a result of "the used-upness of [their] forms or exhaustion of [their] possibilities".³ For Barth, these forms towards the close of the twentieth-century no longer seem to have any currency. To illustrate his opinion, he suggests, for example, that: "Beethoven's Sixth Symphony or the Chartres Cathedral if executed today would be merely embarrassing".⁴ Barth laments the fact that many of his contemporaries persist in employing these outmoded possibilities but paradoxically lauds the Latin American, Jorge Luis Borges, for using what could be construed as the same technique. Like the writers Barth criticises, Borges in some of his work employs these outmoded forms. Unlike these writers, however, Borges represents the earlier fictional modes with startlingly different effect. In one aesthetic strategy, for example, represented by the story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", Borges posits a contemporary author who "retrospectively" writes

Cervantes's seventeenth-century novel. What distinguishes this endeavour from a serious composition of Beethoven's Sixth in the late twentieth-century, is the ironic or parodic intention of the artist. What makes Menard's (Borges's) Quixote contemporary or current, is its textual effect different from that of its seventeenth-century precursor. While Cervantes's Quixote is mainly about the adventures of the knight errant of La Mancha, Borges's comment is on the "genre and history" and hermeneutic operation of the text itself. For Barth, Borges's "artistic victory... is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work".⁵

From Barth's account of the specific nature of Borges's "artistic victory", one gets the impression that for him (Barth) the direction literature ought to take is one which leads to increasing textual self consciousness. Barth maintains, in fact, that the novelistic genre itself has its origin in textual self-reflexiveness with one text imitating another - "If this sort of thing sounds unpleasantly decadent, nevertheless it's about where the genre began, with Quixote imitating Amadis of Gaul, Cervantes pretending to be the Cid Hamete Benengeli (and Alonso Quijano pretending to be Don Quixote), or Fielding parodying Richardson".⁶ Imitation in all of its forms, including mimesis, repetition and so on is a significant consideration also in Barth's fiction as a number of critical opinions indicate.⁷

While in the earlier essay Barth's focus falls on the importance of self-reflexiveness, in "The Literature of Replenishment" which explicitly attempts to define

postmodernism, Barth foregrounds a different consideration in response to criticism of postmodernism's trivialising narcissism.

In the later essay Barth suggests that while Borges in some ways embodies the transition between the modernist moment and what replaces it, another Latin American Gabriel Garcíá Márquez represents the apogee of postmodernism: "As Cervantes stands as an exemplar of premodernism and a great precursor of much to come, and Jorge Luis Borges as an example of dernier cri modernism and at the same time as a bridge between the end of the nineteenth-century and the end of the twentieth, so Gabriel Garcíá Márquez is in that enviable succession: an exemplary postmodernist and a master of the storyteller's art".⁸

While the essay which foregrounds Borges emphasises textuality, the essay which singles out Garcíá Márquez defensively shifts the focus from textuality to a concern with postmodernism's democratic impulse. The essay as a whole represents Barth's response to the question: "What is postmodern fiction?" Barth addresses this question neither through avowal nor disavowal but rather through a series of inclusions with illustrates postmodernism's avaricious incorporation of both what is like and unlike itself. Barth does not reject postmodern self-reflexiveness in this essay but attempts to mitigate postmodernism's representation through emphasising also its political significance.

Barth takes issue, for example, with the impression created by the cultural analysts Ihab Hassan,⁹ Robert Alter and others, that "postmodernist fiction merely emphasises

the “performing” self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness of modernism, in a spirit of cultural subversiveness and anarchy”. What this implies, furthermore, is that postmodern fiction “is more and more about itself and its processes, less and less about objective reality and life in the world”.¹⁰

Barth suggests:

If the modernists, carrying the torch of romanticism taught us that linearity, rationality, consciousness, cause and effect, naive illusionism, transparent language, innocent anecdote, and middle-class moral conventions are not the whole story, then from the perspective of these closing decades of our century we may appreciate that the contraries of these things are not the whole story either. Disjunction, simultaneity, irrationalism, anti-illusionism, self-reflexiveness, medium-as-message, political olympianism, and a moral pluralism approaching moral entropy - these are not the whole story either.¹¹

What Barth proposes more forcefully in this essay as contrasted with the “Literature of Exhaustion”, is postmodernism’s democratising effect through its relativisation of the belle lettres / popular culture opposition. Barth claims that in its transcension (not antithesis) of the options represented by realism and modernism, postmodernism simultaneously deconstructs the high- and low-brow culture opposition. Thus, while modernism embodies an “aristocratic cultural spirit”, postmodernism has a more popular appeal:

A worthy program for postmodernist fiction, I believe, is the synthesis or transcension of these antitheses, which may be summed up as premodernist and modernist modes of writing. My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his [sic]

twentieth-century modernist parents or his [sic] nineteenth-century premodernist grandparents... Without lapsing into moral or artistic simplism, shoddy craftsmanship, Madison Avenue venality, or either false or real naiveté, he [sic] nevertheless aspires to a fiction more democratic in its appeal than [the] late modernist marvels.¹²

This tension apparent in the juxtaposition of the two essays of a conception of the postmodern vasillating between notions of apolitical self-reflexive play and a politically significant democratisation of literature extends, as we shall see, also to the juxtaposition of the latter essay with Barth's fiction, in particular Chimera.

John Barth, Gabriel Garcíá Márquez and Postmodern Democratisation

If Barth maintains a degree of uncertainty in "The Literature of Replenishment" regarding a definition of postmodernism, an uncertainty which perhaps paradoxically is its distinguishing mark, he is unequivocal as to whom he regards as the arch-postmodern writer. John Barth unambiguously names Gabriel Garcíá Márquez as "an exemplary postmodernist" and hails One Hundred Years of Solitude, Márquez's most popular success to date, as the most impressive novel "as has been written so far in the second half of our century and one of the splendid specimens of that splendid genre from any century".¹³

One Hundred years of Solitude is singled out by Barth since, for him, it is a work of postmodern fiction which dispels the assumption that self-reflexivity is the chief effect of the postmodern novel. One Hundred years of Solitude is lauded by Barth precisely

for features other than the text's self-consciousness. García Márquez's novel represents for him "the synthesis of straightforwardness and artifice, realism and magic and myth, political passion and non-political artistry, characterisation and caricature [and] humor and terror".¹⁴ For Barth, García Márquez's example suggests the politically more significant effect of the postmodern than a narcissistic textuality. Barth asserts that in postmodernism's transcension ("A worthy program for postmodernist fiction... is the synthesis or transcension of [the] antitheses... [of] premodernist and modernist modes of writing.") of the literary precursors of realism and modernism, postmodernism simultaneously democratises reading practice. He suggests that while the postmodern writer cannot hope to "move the devotees of James Michener and Irving Wallace [or the] mass-media illiterates, he [sic] should hope to reach and delight, at least part of the time, beyond the circle of what Mann used to call the Early Christians: professional devotees of high art".¹⁵ Despite Barth's claim for postmodernism's importance in its challenge to the high-and-low-culture opposition, this concern with the political is contradicted in his own fictional texts.

Operating upon the assumption that the claims Barth makes for postmodern fiction theoretically would be illustrated in practice in his novels, one discovers, in fact, that claims of a democratisation of literature in postmodern fiction cannot be sustained. Despite the implicit allegiance Barth suggests between his work and that of García Márquez, there remains between them a very important distinction. Although Barth claims in "The Literature of Replenishment", as indicated in the prior section, that postmodernism is not only "disjunction, simultaneity, irrationalism, anti-illusionism, self-reflexiveness, medium-as-message, political olympianism, and a moral pluralism

approaching moral entropy,"¹⁶ his own fiction suggests the need for a retrospective reassessment of these claims. Barth's suggestion of the political radicality of postmodern fiction, by subtle sleight of hand, is jettisoned in his novels, for example, Chimera. Similarly, postmodernism in many interpretations can be seen to replace the critique of bourgeois humanism with a new set of politically as deceptive universals. In this environment, García Márquez's work, through being classified as postmodern, takes on the aspect of the dominant interpretations of postmodernity. More practically illustrated, since they both are represented as being encompassed by the term "postmodernism", García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude and Barth's Chimera should, therefore, operate upon similar assumptions. Clearly, as we shall see, they do not.

As was noted above, Barth mentions as one of the most significant features of postmodernity its deconstruction of the opposition of high-and low-brow culture. In this regard, Chimera and One Hundred Years of Solitude would appear to be similar. Structurally, Chimera is accessible to a reading audience wider than "the professional devotees of high art" because of its ingenious postmodern adaptation of some of the more elitist features of modernism. One does not need a "priestly industry of explicators, annotators [and] allusion-chasers... to mediate between the text and the reader",¹⁷ since Chimera unlike Eliot's The Wasteland, for example, self-consciously exposes its intertextual sources. The novel, Chimera, consists in three parts "Dunyazadiad", "Perseid" and "Bellerophoniad", each of which alludes to a literary precursor - the Thousand Nights and a Night and the myths of Perseus and Bellerophon respectively. Unlike the modernist text which indirectly indicates its

intertextual allusions, Chimera exposes its sources and rehearses the essentials, precluding the necessity for a prior erudite knowledge. Chimera, for example, word-for-word cites the relevant entry of Robert Graves, the foremost annotator of the Greek myths, in the “Bellerophoniad” section of the novel. At the level of style also the text is eminently accessible, substituting the dry alienating linguistic realms of the nouveau roman à la Robbe-Grillet with an inviting, exciting, “slangy, sexy” idiom.¹⁸ Cheap trick or not, this strategic “readability” gains the text accolades from representatives of popular culture like Playboy¹⁹ and access both to magazines like Esquire and Harper’s²⁰ and postgraduate English literature postmodernism courses.

If, as Barth suggests in “The Literature of Replenishment” and as his novel seems to bear out, a distinctive feature of the postmodern is its democratisation of literature, then quite correctly One Hundred Years of Solitude seems to be a champion of postmodernity. Paradoxically, One Hundred Years of Solitude is a Latin-American best-seller even before publication and falls under significant first world literary scrutiny only three years later when translated into English. The novel’s first publishers in Buenos Aires agreed to publish a first edition of ten thousand copies, but two weeks after showing the printers’ proofs to their specialists, they doubled the number.²¹ Subsequently, the novel caused as much of a stir abroad as it did on the Latin-American continent. In an interview given in 1983 García Márquez notes that at his wife’s latest count the novel had already been translated into thirty-seven different languages, among them Greek, Arabic and Farsi. The impact of the novel internationally, for example, can be gauged by the fact that the first Russian edition sold one million copies.²² To an extent the international success of One Hundred

Years of Solitude contributed to the success of what has come to be known as the Latin-American "Boom"²³ in general. Although Doris Sommer and George Yudice²⁴ approach the Latin American Boom with a degree of scepticism based on what they see as an international transformation of attitude, rather than a transformation of quality and style of Latin-American writing, the local success of García Márquez suggests a genuine popularity. Sommer and Yudice observe regarding the Boom that: "many of the books published were formerly ignored works that represented a backlog for publishers to exploit ^{once} interest in Latin-America had been established".²⁵ García Márquez's domestic popularity and the vast extent and heterogeneity of his audience suggest that this scepticism cannot apply to his work.

The sheer number of copies sold quite clearly suggests the novel's appeal to a circle significantly wider than literary academics. This is borne out, for example, by its importance to the political prisoners of a detention camp near Valparaiso, Chile. When García Márquez announced that he would not publish another novel until Pinochet was deposed, the prisoners decided to make him a present of a copy of One Hundred Years of Solitude set to traditional verse illustrated with woodcuts, the technique of Chilean popular engravers.²⁶ An assessment by the Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas Llosa, however, quite aptly summarises the extent of the popular appeal of One Hundred Years of Solitude:

The critics recognised the book as a masterpiece of the art of fiction and the public endorsed this opinion, systematically exhausting new editions which, at one point, appeared at the astounding rate of one a

week. Overnight, García Márquez became almost as famous as a great player or an eminent singer of Bolero's.²⁷

If there is an affinity between Chimera and One Hundred Years of Solitude based on their democratisation of elitist modernist forms, the similarity, however, would seem to end there. Chimera's attempt to democratically widen its audience through its commitment to a flawed but dominant understanding of postmodern textuality, paradoxically, quite undemocratically constitutes a significant proportion of humanity, namely women, as being somewhat less than human - all this moreover under a disingenuously apolitical guise. One Hundred Years of Solitude, by contrast, as a result of its magic realist commitment to a pre-industrial oral-traditional worldview (to be examined in more detail later) where the real exists, albeit in a form other than Enlightenment rationalism, employs the idea of textuality or the constitutive nature of language not to escape real political concerns but to illustrate in the narrative itself the interdependence of the text with the material political world. What distinguishes the challenge presented by oral-traditional, pre-industrial worldviews to Enlightenment rationalism from the challenge of certain trends in postmodernism is the fact that in oral cultures reality is problematised through the acknowledgement that not all phenomena can be known and understood but is not denied as it is in some postmodern tendencies.²⁸ The influence of oral forms upon García Márquez's work seems to preclude an exclusively textual approach.

In terms of a close reading of the texts themselves this distinction between the two writers is most clearly illustrated by the difference between each novel's use of particular forms of repetition made possible through narrative circularity.

Repetition and Narrative Circularity in Chimera: Strategies of Evasion

In a study of one form of repetition, namely, mimesis, Robert Con Davis suggests that for Barth mimesis still loosely means what it does in the Platonic and Aristotelian senses - imitation. The form of imitation, however, is narrower since it is used in Barth's texts "in the specific sense of self-imitation, of fiction imitating itself, of fiction radically self-referential"²⁹ Like One Hundred Years of Solitude and its fascination with the circular and repetitive history of the Buendía family, Chimera displays a similar obsession with repetition or imitation. The dominant motif for repetition in the text is the spiral which is variously represented throughout the novel in the form of designs on rings, the shape or architecturally astonishing rooms and so on.

Chimera, in a sense, is a critic's nightmare since, as was shown above, while it is easy and enjoyable to read, there seems to be no point of entry for critical investigation. One seems to be precluded from criticising any of the issues it addresses since it pastiches all potential positions one could adopt. The most obvious consideration, of course, is the relation of the text to feminist politics. It seems one cannot criticise the representation of woman in the text because of the textual awareness that in whatever image it moulds woman, that representation cannot yield essences, only ideologically

mediated representations. One cannot, therefore, but feel somewhat foolish in attempting to make a feminist reading stick to a text which so clearly relativises the discourse of feminist politics, reducing it to no more or less than one of the novel's discursive repertoires. The text's use of repetition achieved through circularity seems to be one of its defences in this regard, but a defence which ultimately is pervious.

In Chimera, indeed, Derrida's "There is no outside of the text" achieves its literal culmination. In each of the three sections one searches in vain for the extra-linguistic origin of the text: "Dunyazadiad" is a textual allusion to the Arabian Nights; but the Arabian Nights, in the context of the novel, does not represent an exterior fantastic or realistic realm, instead it itself seems to be constituted from a prior text. Spinning on the wheel of endless circularity, the Arabian Nights tells the story of Scheherezade, but Scheherezade in turn receives her directive from the Barthian genie himself reading it off from the text of the Arabian Nights. Similarly, in the second novella, Perseus tells Medusa how he told Calyxa the story of his life from the marble murals, sculpted from Calyxa's drawings, taken from the Hooded Girl's sketches referring to the myth of Perseus, the account of which itself is drawn from the texts of the ancient Greek bards. And in the third novella, Bellerophon, turned into the text of his life, tells Melanippe how he told Philonoë / his children / his students the story of his life, based upon Raglan's heroic cycle based upon an analysis of the myths drawn from the texts of the Greek bards and so on.

Based on the complexity, in fact the confusion of the trajectories of the novellas, what one finds is that the text is concerned with something apart from the idea that

knowledge is never unmediated by the dynamic of language. *Chimera* seems also to celebrate the mere fact of citation itself. Relying on the “Perseid” section, for example, although the general conclusions apply as forcefully to the other two novellas, what we find is that there is no discourse addressed simply and directly from one “reasonable man” to another. Instead, the narrative is constituted from a repertoire of cited utterances, the specifics of which are mentioned above - it is a story of Perseus’s telling Medusa how he told Calyxa etc. Ironically, even the starry “conclusion” of the story does not put a brake on the endlessly differing and deferring movement of iteration, since by their estimation, the mythological characters “nightly rehearse [their story] as long as men and women read the stars”.³⁰

The Medusa-figure and citation: An Attempt at Transparent Representation

The figure of the spiral which appears again and again in the novellas also bears testimony to the obsession with citation. The spiral, the shape which quite uniquely figures both sameness and difference in the repetition of the same circular form in spatially different positions, symbolises the effect of citation, marking an utterance both the same as the one cited and different. Barth’s privileging of citation is most forcefully indicated in the characterisation of the figure of the Medusa in the novella, “Perseid”. Narrative circularity thus makes possible the text’s repetitions, one form of which is the citation of the Medusa-myth.

The figure of the Medusa has haunted the Western imagination since it was first evoked and at different periods of its history has been variously regarded and

variously employed. In a transformation typical of the Romantics in the nineteenth-century, the Medusa, the symbol of abject terror, is presented anew as the quintessence of beauty. As one analyst of the Romantic period expresses it, "This glassy-eyed, severed female head this horrible, fascinating medusa was to be the object of the dark loves of the Romantics... throughout the whole of the century".³¹

This transformation of the Medusa-figure in the imagination of one cultural movement is, however, reversed in the early part of the following century. Freudian psychoanalysis, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, incorporates the myth of the Medusa in the theory of the development of the human psyche. The Medusa now comes to represent the horror of female castration, the sight of which is essential to the little boy's successful negotiation of the Oedipus Complex. Freud's representation of the Medusa-myth in this way throws the figure of the Medusa quite squarely within the arena of twentieth-century feminist politics.

Hélène Cixous takes up the challenge presented by Freud's inscription of the Medusa, and recasts her in a way which radically inverts the terms in which the myth is read since Cixous's Medusa is not horrible but beautiful and laughing. Cixous argues that the Medusa as symbol of castration is a convenient appropriation of a patriarchy that needs to constitute woman as other and as lacking to maintain its dominance.³² Cixous's Medusa's laughter is parodic since it undermines the fear that the Gorgon-head traditionally is supposed to inspire. While for Freud the reaction at the sight of the Medusa's head which makes the spectator "stiff with terror, turns him to stone"³³ is justified, Cixous mocks that it is fear precisely which is the basis of male sexuality,

playing on the “stiffness” of fear and the “stiffness” of the man aroused - “it’s the jitters that give them a hard-on!”³⁴ (Barth in Chimera we shall see toys with both these ideas but with startlingly different effect).

In the discourse of film theory on the other hand, in particular, in the essay by Theresa de Lauretis, “Desire in Narrative”,³⁵ the concern is with the sight of the Medusa as subjective not objective genitive, that is with how the Medusa (woman) sees rather than how she is seen. In order to make woman the subject of her own history, De Lauretis suggests, one needs to address a different question to the myth of the Medusa, namely, “What did Medusa feel seeing herself reflected in Perseus’s shield just before being slain?”³⁶

Barth in Chimera responds, so to speak, to De Lauretis’s question in a very different manner. The version of the Medusa that appears in Barth’s hero-narrative is one which very elusively resists classification in terms of the polarity described above. Clearly in the twentieth-century the Medusa becomes more than a mere “classical allusion” but constitutes instead the site of a political struggle. Through representing the Medusa in his contemporary myth, Barth enters the debate, but quite cleverly constitutes the Medusa in such a way that she can neither be claimed by the Freudians as essential archetypal symbol of horror in the psychic development of the male child nor appropriated as symbol in the feminist political confrontation.

Barth manages to avoid a commitment in the representation of the Medusa through presenting her in the text wearing a hood. An indication of the significance of the

hood is suggested by the fact that it is mentioned almost on every occasion that Medusa is referred to and the fact that the text inventively employs half-a-dozen or so periphrases to allude to it, for example “cowled” and “coifed”. If in reductive terms the struggle is for a representation of the Medusa either as Freud’s symbol of horror or Cixous’s symbol of beauty, then through the technique noted above, we see that Barth paints an uncertain picture of her as perhaps beautiful, perhaps horrible, perhaps even, inspired by the Romantic spirit, beautiful since she is horrible.

The fact that Barth’s Medusa is hooded makes it physically impossible to know whether she represents castrating horror or feminine beauty as defined by women. The hood thus operates much like a pair of quotation marks which allows the text to cite the myth but not enter into the politics of representation. The hood seems almost to bracket Barth’s representation of the Medusa from all political consideration, with attention being self-reflexively re-focused only onto the fact of the text’s citation of the myth. Thus, it is not so much a question of whether the Medusa is horrible or whether she is beautiful, but more that Chimera’s citation, foregrounding its own citationality, allows the possibility of both these alternatives and others, and in so doing jettisons them all as fairly insignificant.

Even at the concluding “moment of truth” when Medusa unveils, the text manages to avoid any decisiveness. Perseus says to Medusa:

Now listen and believe me, if there’s any truth in words: it wasn’t you who discovered your beauty to me, but I who finally unveiled it to myself. And what I saw, exactly, when I opened my eyes, were two

things in instantaneous succession, reflected in yours: the first was a reasonably healthy, no-longer-heroic mortal with more than half his life behind him, less potent and less proud than he was at twenty but still vigorous after all, don't interrupt me, and grown too wise to wish his time turned back. The second, one second after, was the stars in your own eyes, reflected from mine and rereflected to infinity - stars of a quite miraculous, yes blinding love, which transfigured everything in view.³⁷

Forced to a conclusion thus, Barth, nevertheless, succeeds in not imposing a final reading. The text neither acknowledges nor refutes the Medusa's horror or beauty but "reflects" citation to infinity.

In this way, thus, the text presents a view of language which distorts the positive conception identified in the work of the later Wittgenstein,³⁸ for example, of the constitutive nature of language, a language which is the effect of a social training and practice. To the extent that Chimera foregrounds the fact that language is more than simply a neutral reflection of reality but a social practice constitutive of our understanding of the world, the novel steps in the right direction. To the extent that Chimera suggests that language does not simply mirror the world but that discourse is informed by other factors, among them language itself, its assessment is positive. When Chimera thus, for example, through the idea of intertextuality suggests the dependence in part of a specific discourse on prior discourses, it makes a useful contribution. So, for example, the story of Scheherezade is not an objective representation of the real Scheherezade, but is dependent on a series of linguistic and generic conventions.

Chimera is potentially politically dangerous, however, to the extent that it elevates textuality to a new moral Truth. The Truth of textuality in the terms of the novel is “moral” in the sense that textuality itself, paradoxically, is presented as being value-free. What emerges as a critique of language which emphasises its ideological nature thus is transformed into its diametrical opposite. In the manner described above the text tries to escape its own ideological position through deflecting attention onto a quite sterile notion of textuality - every discourse is an iteration of a prior discourse. In this way thus the text substitutes a notion of postmodern “universality” for the bourgeois humanist “universality” of middle-class Western values. It is this subtle shift in the terms of thinking about language which is objectionable to critics on the left who challenge postmodernity.³⁹ It is the shift in certain currents of postmodernism from political critique to apolitical textuality which tends to diminish the significance of the work of García Márquez, classified as postmodern, for some theorists on the left. García Márquez in his novel One Hundred Years of Solitude, we shall see, employs a similar narrative technique to Barth in Chimera but with a very significant difference which accounts for its different ideological effect.

Chimera: The Return of the Repressed

In Chimera, however, although the text attempts to escape the political it, of course, cannot succeed. As was mentioned above, the text attempts to escape the politics of the representation of the Medusa through hiding her behind a hood. This does not, however, preclude our knowing the rest of the Medusa refracted through the

Barthian eye. The “New Medusa” presented by the text seems to be much less of a threat to man’s vision. While the Medusa of old petrified those who dared glance at her, “Nowadays Medusa turns stone to flesh...”⁴⁰ The “stone” referred to here, of course, is Perseus’s somewhat unresponsive reproductive organ which is animated, in an interesting inversion of the old petrification trope, by the New Medusa. Thus, while in Cixous’s parody of the Freudian version of Medusa’s-head it is fear which inspires erection, Barth’s New Medusa relies upon something else.

Since Medusa’s head is rendered invisible by the hood, the New Medusa must rely upon her body to arouse the man - “an ample soft young body, wide-hipped and small-breasted”.⁴¹ Indeed, the New Medusa seems to be exactly the right combination of nineteenth-century innocent and twentieth-century experienced adoration of the male hero - “she was sweet, sweet, my lifesaver. I was grateful, she was impetuous and shy at once”.⁴² In reply to De Lauretis’s question “what did Medusa feel seeing herself reflected in Perseus’s shield just before being slain?” - the New Medusa, it seems, would reply that her only desire upon seeing her reflection in Perseus’s shield would be to beg “to have her head cut off”⁴³ since she does not constitute the male fantasy of female beauty. Barth produces an image of the Medusa which, a little less wide-hipped and a little larger-breasted, would probably go down quite well in Playboy. It seems that Barth has scant need for the postmodern features of his text, designed to foreground the fact of the linguistic constitution of sexual difference among other differences since he falls back on a very conventional realist (very biologically determined) representation of woman. García Márquez, we shall

see, despite the implicit allegiance between their work suggested by Barth, does not attempt to shirk political questions.

The distinction between the novelistic practises of Barth and García Márquez is very aptly represented by the distinction the cultural analyst, Edward Said, makes in The World, the Text, and the Critic between what he terms the “textual” and the “worldly” writer.⁴⁴ He suggests that although postmodernism or, as it is alternatively referred to, “theory” originates as an “insurrectionary” intervention, by the late seventies it “retreat[s] into the labyrinth of ‘textuality’”. “Textuality” is the term Said employs to refer to the writer’s “principle of non-interference”, that “mode of appropriating... subject matter [so as] not to appropriate anything that is worldly, circumstantial, or socially contaminated”. This clearly is Barth’s position in Chimera where in denying the material, he simultaneously desires to avoid the political. García Márquez, as I shall try to show, like the writers Said names - Hopkins, Wilde and Conrad - corresponds to what he terms the “worldly” writer, that is the writer whose craft deliberately conceives the text as “always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society”.

Narrative Circularity and History in One Hundred Years of Solitude

Like Chimera, One Hundred Years of Solitude depends quite heavily on structures of narrative circularity and therefore displays the similar feature of repetition or imitation which is the logical outcome of circular structure.⁴⁵ Despite the likeness of the two texts, they are signally unlike with respect to the ideological effect of their

respective narrative structures. While Chimera attempts to achieve a value-free textuality, One Hundred Years of Solitude, by contrast, employs notions of textuality themselves to emphasise the political nature of specific linguistic constitutions of historical and social reality. The ultimately conservative splitting of the material world from the pure and unfettered signifier thus cannot be effected as in Chimera, but instead in One Hundred Years of Solitude the imbrication of the material world and real interests in language is underscored. The introductory paragraph of One Hundred Years of Solitude is an interesting point of access to some of the features which make One Hundred Years of Solitude distinctive.

In "The Literature of Replenishment" John Barth juxtaposes the first sentences of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, Joyce's Finnegan's Wake and García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude as examples of realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively. What these introductory lines signify in Barth's analysis is the simple referentiality of realism, its antithesis in modernism and the transcendence of the dialectic represented by postmodernism. If we look to Barth's fiction as an illustration of how, specifically, postmodern fiction achieves a transcendence of the dialectic, one finds that despite Barth's claims to the contrary, it seems to reside in pure textuality. As has been shown in relation to Chimera, the text desires to iterate, as one example among others, the myth of Medusa without entering into the politics of the representation of the Medusa through structures which indicate only the mere fact of citation. The materiality of the signifier, thus, is used not to emphasise the subjective constitution of the representation of women in the text, its emphasis falls instead on the fact of representation itself.

One assumes that in naming García Márquez as an exemplary postmodern, Barth implies that this Latin-American writer achieves, as he [Barth] does in Chimera, the successful postmodern transcendence of the thesis and antithesis of realism and modernism. In what way is the first line of One Hundred Years of Solitude the exemplary introduction to the quintessential postmodern text?

Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.

The importance Barth attributes to this sentence seems to be vindicated by the fact that its elements are iterated in the text seven times. Despite its apparent simplicity, this sentence represents in condensed form the complexity of the text as a whole. As one critic of Latin-American writing, Gerald Martin, expresses the conundrum - "And why is that first sentence a labyrinth of tenses, time, people and places, a rotating mirror of events, experiences and memories reflecting endlessly back and forth until we tire of circular imag(in)ing and move on to the next lines?"⁴⁶ The line creates assumptions in the reader regarding the art of narrative which the text subsequently destroys to foreground the subjectivity of the conventions often regarded as objective and universal. This is balanced, however, by the fact that the line also creates assumptions which the text significantly entrenches.

In its juggling of time frames, the first line foregrounds questions of narrativity in more than one way. The introductory phrase "Many years later" anticipates a future time, the future where the Colonel is to be shot. This is contrasted with a past time in which he was taken to see ice. Past and future are connected by the thus foregrounded omniscient narrator telling the story in the present.

What the text seems to play with are the reader's anticipations regarding narrative and narrative structure. With regard to narrative structure, the first line suggests that the story ends with the execution of the Colonel before the firing squad. This assumption created in the reader by the text is emphasised in the course of the novel by the repetition of the reference to the firing squad running through the text. What one discovers, however is that what has been billed as the end of the story of the Colonel's life, in fact, is only the beginning of his legendary fame. In a ridiculous anti-climax, the Colonel's estranged brother arrives shotgun in hand and with remarkable ease stops the execution, the execution which for the reader is almost a foregone conclusion. More contrary to expectation is the fact that the captain of the squad entrusted with executing the Colonel regards the brother's act as one of divine intervention, joins the opposing side and goes to a battle which it emerges does not have to be fought. To the extent, therefore, that One Hundred Years of Solitude seems to foreground medium more than message in its challenge to conventions of beginning and ending, it would satisfy Barth's criteria for postmodern fiction.

Similarly, what one assumes to be the beginning of the story is also undercut. As reader one almost automatically assumes that what follows the introductory sentence

is an account of the details of the incident where the Colonel was taken to see ice. This assumption also is undermined by the fact that the “beginning” is shifted even further back in time to when Macondo was first founded. The reader is informed of the discovery of ice only thirteen pages further in the text.

What distinguishes One Hundred Years of Solitude from Chimera in their attention to medium rather than message is that while Chimera makes medium an end in itself, One Hundred Years of Solitude foregrounds medium in order to emphasise the ideological underpinnings of language itself. The privileging of the narrative structure itself in One Hundred Years of Solitude, through the subversion of assumed beginnings and endings, operates to emphasise the ideological nature of narrative. One Hundred Years of Solitude resists the Chimeran impulse to toy with narrative structure through entirely sending up beginnings and endings making attention to narrative structure a new Truth and an end in itself. Indeed, if one reads One Hundred Years of Solitude as a number of critics do read it as an historical account of neo-colonialism,⁴⁷ then the text seems to draw “objective” historical narrative itself into the battleground of ideology.

Thus the concepts of beginning and end are undermined since they are not found where anticipated. As significant is the realisation that the beginning of the novel is contained in the end and the end in the beginning. The trajectory of the text thus is not teleological but circular. What the circular structure of the novel seems to challenge is the narrativisation of history where the ideological nature of beginning and end is suppressed and the smooth emergence of a singular meaning in between is

presented as obvious. The structure of One Hundred Years of Solitude and Chimera, thus, are similar since narrative circularity is part of the conscious artistry of both these texts.

At the beginning of the novel the Colonel as a young boy is taken to see ice - "the greatest invention of our time". The ice referred to at the beginning of the novel is reflected at the end where one of the last descendants of the Buendía family reads "as if... looking into a speaking mirror" the history of the family prophetically known to and inscribed by the gypsy Melquiades at the beginning. Aureliano reads of the ultimate destruction of Macondo referred to in Melquiades's encyclicals as "the city of mirrors (or mirages)". The connection between the ending and beginning, encompassing in circularity a text which seemed teleologically to be moving forward, is made apparent by the intimate connection between ice and mirrors in the text. When José Arcadio Buendía takes his son to see ice for the first time, he envisages transforming Macondo into a city of ice which will make it a cool haven in the tropical inferno. The grandfather's ambition is, in a sense, materialised by the grandson, Aureliano Triste, when with the arrival of First World technology, he sets up "on the edge of town the ice factory that José Arcadio Buendía had dreamed of in his inventive delirium".⁴⁸ Paradoxically, the ice-factory which is simply one effect of the illusion of progress fostered by the arrival of multinational capitalism, in fact, spells Macondo's ultimate destruction. In this way ice, "the greatest invention of our time" foreshadows the "city of mirrors (or mirages)" which Macondo will become and inscribes in circularity what appeared to be the unilinear progress of history.

While narrative circularity in Chimera is directed at notions of pure textuality, circularity in One Hundred Years of Solitude is used to foreground the ideological manipulation at work in metropolitan criticism of third world economic stagnation and political irrationality. In this regard, the text seems to generate various discourses. In the first place, the discourse of neo-colonial multi-national capitalist penetration is contrasted with the discourse of colonialism of the Spanish conquistadores. Secondly, assumptions of technological and consequently economic advance attendant upon first world penetration is contrasted with the discourse of the frustrating effects of capitalist expansion.

Colonisation seems to represent only a minor concern of the text in relation to neo-colonialism.⁴⁹ This is quite evident given the text's lack of "anxiety of influence" regarding the language of its composition - Spanish. Unlike contemporaneous writing in English, for García Márquez Spanish is naturalised to the extent that it is not regarded as an oppressor's language nor as a language unsuited to the Latin-American landscape. Spanish seems to be regarded as the authentic language of the zones formerly dominated by Spain unlike the tensions prevalent in the use of English by the African writers Achebe or Ngugi, for example. Bringing the comparison closer to home, García Márquez is not self-conscious about the use of Spanish as his fellow Caribbean writer Derek Walcott is regarding his use of English - "parroting our master's / style and voice, we make his language ours".⁵⁰ The difference of historical time scale of Spanish and English colonisation accounts in part for the difference in attitude. While independence was won in British dominions by and large in the

twentieth-century, the corrosion of Spanish spheres of influence led to the loss of its colonies already by the early nineteenth-century.

Spanish colonisation thus enters the text only as a ghostly remembrance of a glory past. The pomp and ceremony of aristocratic Spain is ridiculously resuscitated in the character of Fernanada, one of the Buendía daughters-in-law, whose insistence on anachronistic formalities epitomises the division in Colombia between the more traditionalist highlands from where she comes and the colourful cultural confusion of García Márquez's own Costa or the Caribbean coastal region. The historical distance between a Macondo at the turn of the century from the ravages of colonisation is also symbolically represented by José Arcadio the elder's discovery of an old Spanish suit of armour which in its degeneration and decay suggests the destruction of Spanish power. The discovery is described as a "suit of fifteenth-century armour which had all of its pieces soldered together with rust and inside of which there was the hollow resonance of an enormous stone-filled gourd".⁵¹ This sense of degeneration, decay and alienation is emphasised again with José Arcadio's subsequent serendipitous discovery of a beached Spanish galleon. The static petrification of Spanish colonisation is emphasised by the ghostly "otherworldliness" of the galleon: "The whole structure seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion".⁵²

More significant, however, is the text's intersection of the stasis of colonialism with the purposive progress of scientific rationalism represented by Anglo-American neo-colonialism. While Spanish colonisation is presented in the text only as a distant (though not necessarily nostalgic) memory, Anglo-Saxon activity in Latin-America is

presented as having direct influence. The text foreshadows the new Anglo-Saxon “colonisation” through representing its ascendancy in the colonial economic and political arena. That glorious agent of English victory over the Armada, Sir Francis Drake, makes an appearance on more than one occasion in the text and, in a sense, can be regarded as the true progenitor of the race of the Buendías. In an interesting reversal of the Black Legend, the self-righteous Elizabethan myth of the unscrupulousness and bloodthirsty ferocity of Spanish colonisation crystallising in the image of hunting dogs bearing down upon “poor Indians”, the text refers to the Englishman Drake as the pirate whose attack inspires such terror in Ursula’s great-great-grandmother that she sits on a lighted stove.⁵³ As a result of her persistent fear “of the English and their ferocious attack dogs”⁵⁴ she finds it impossible to sleep. The family subsequently relocates to an isolated Indian village where several generations later José Arcadio marries his cousin Ursula giving rise to the incest fear in the circular and repetitive history of the Buendías.

It is interesting to note furthermore, that whenever references are made in the text to colonial days, quite surprisingly, English rather than Spanish historical figures are referred to. One of José Arcadio’s ancestors, for example, happens to be taxidermist to Sir Francis Drake, stuffing the crocodiles killed on his, needless to say, exceedingly destructive cannon hunting expeditions for presentation to Queen Elizabeth. Also, the itinerant “troubadour”, Francisco the Man, whose compositions, called “vallenatos”, are one of the few sources of information in a dominantly oral culture where the technological advance of the telegram, telephone and newspaper had not yet made its mark, is given the accordion to whose accompaniment he sings his songs by Sir Walter

Raleigh. (The figure of Francisco the Man could also quite conceivably be read as a subtle authorial intrusion bearing in mind García Márquez's comment that "One Hundred Years of Solitude is nothing more than an attempt to write a 450 page vallenato".⁵⁵ Francisco the Man could thus be seen to be García Márquez himself).

The text in this way presents the Anglo-Saxon world as impinging more directly on the Latin-American realities it describes than the Spanish world. The Anglo-Saxon world seems to represent a contrast of progressive dynamism to the degeneration of Spanish influence, frozen in time. The apparent advance represented by the Anglo-Saxon world is suggested in the text in a number of ways. The excitement generated by the Gypsies who visit Macondo from time to time, bringing with them the wonders of the metropolis is a clear indication of the progress apparently represented by the Western powers. This spirit of progress is, however, most forcefully displayed in José Arcadio the elder whose adventurous initiative displays mixed results. It is revealing that in one of his pursuits for the literal road to civilisation José Arcadio's conviction is that it lies to the North. In relation to the position of Colombia this trail would eventually lead to the USA which, ironically, is also the national origin of the company which leads to Macondo's destruction. It is largely due to José Arcadio's ideas and planning that the early Macondo seems to verge almost on a simple utopia. It is the same spirit of enterprise, however, which often proves José Arcadio's undoing and the ultimate undoing of Macondo itself. For example, upon being introduced by Melquiades to the magnifying glass, he attempts to construct a complex mechanism which uses the property of the magnifying glass to concentrate the heat of the rays of the sun in a weapon of war. As with the greater number of his

other schemes, he succeeds only in disadvantaging himself or his family. The outcome of the magnifying glass experiment results in José Arcadio's sustaining burns which take a long time to heal.

The most significant example of inroads made into Macondo in the name of technological and scientific progress, however, is represented by the arrival of the railway. When Aureliano Triste, grandson to José Arcadio the elder, weighs up the idea of the introduction of the railway to Macondo, his sketches, closely resembling his grandfather's plans for "solar warfare", confirms Ursula's "impression that time was going in a circle".⁵⁶ The grandson's enthusiasm thus imitates the grandfather's. The devastation which follows in the wake of this apparently harmless innovation is suggested in the text at the outset. The locomotive from which Aureliano Triste waves is referred to as:

The innocent yellow train that was to bring so many ambiguities and certainties, so many pleasant and unpleasant moments, so many changes, calamities and feelings of nostalgia to Macondo.⁵⁷

The impression of ominous foreboding attached to the arrival of the railway in Macondo is subsequently confirmed as disastrous, given the activities of the banana company whose expansion into Macondo the railway permits. It is thus not gratuitous that the train is the same colour as that of ripe bananas - yellow. The historical allusion in the text's reference to the banana company is obvious. The banana company refers to the notorious United Fruit Company, "a conglomerate

formed in 1899 through the merger of a number of US companies".⁵⁸ Although bananas never were the major export of Colombia, a position held by coffee, García Márquez's concerns, not limited to the exclusively national, are expressed through the reference to the major Central American export, bananas. A sense of the extent of the United Fruit Company's dominion in South America can be gained from the introductory lines of the Chilean writer, Pablo Neruda's, poem called The United Fruit Company:

When the trumpets had sounded and all
 was in readiness on the face of the earth,
 Jehovah divided his universe:
 Anaconda, Ford Motors,
 Coca-Cola Inc., and similar entities:
 the most succulent item of all,
 The United Fruit Company Incorporated
 reserved for itself: the heartland and
 coasts of my country,
 the delectable waist of America.
 They rechristened their properties:
 the "Banana Republics" - ⁵⁹

The arrival of the banana company in Macondo brings with it an influx of outsiders and a previously unknown division within the town; a division symbolised by a barbed wire fence which exists between the "gringo" company administrators' homes and those of the local population. A number of changes occur in Macondo which gives the impression of modernisation. The effect of the activity of García Márquez's

banana company or the historical United Fruit Company is aptly summarised by Stephen Minta:

The cycle is a familiar one; foreign investment... creates boom conditions, leading to increases in local wages, and offers a seductive impression of progress and modernisation.⁶⁰

Progress, of course, is only an illusion in single-product export oriented economies controlled by multi-national companies. The effect of major repatriation of profits by the multi-nationals back to the metropolis, is to ensnare the third world in a cycle of underdevelopment, poetically reflected in the cycles of the texts. The effect of underdevelopment clearly is a concern of the text. When one of the Buendía great-great-grandchildren is hurried from Macondo to hide her pregnancy, this is what she does not see:

She did not see the white houses of the gringos or their gardens, dried out by dust and heat, or the women in shorts and blue-striped shirts playing cards on the terraces. She did not see the oxcarts on the dusty roads loaded down with bunches of bananas. She did not see the girls diving into the transparent rivers like tarpons, leaving the passengers on the train with the bitterness of their splendid breasts, or the miserable huts of the workers all huddled together where Mauricio Babilonia's yellow butterflies fluttered about, and in the doorways of which there were green and squalid children sitting on their pots, and pregnant women who shouted insults at the train.⁶¹

The particular form which progress takes in the context of the social and historical formation of Latin-America is suggested by the text to yield only retrogression and frustration. The constraints in which Latin-America is caught are poetically represented in the circular and repetitive history of the Buendía family, predicted in Melquiades's aptly names "encyclicals". Although chronologically the Buendía family would appear to be moving through historical time, in fact, the same articulation of tensions is iterated again and again. For the reader, possibly the most tricky repetition is the almost fatefully determined iteration of names and characteristics. On an occasion even where a new-born child is not named by the family he deterministically, nevertheless, still is anointed in the tradition of the family. When Meme is left at the convent to give birth to her illegitimate child, the nuns, on their own initiative baptise him with the name "Aureliano", given Meme's refusal to speak. One is presented with a vertiginous swirl of Arcadios and Aureliano's whose traits are fatefully repeated - the Aureliano's are "withdrawn, but with lucid minds", while the José Arcadio are "impulsive and enterprising".

The longevity of the matriarch, Ursula, grants her a bird's-eye view of the fateful repetition which she laments when, for example, the Buendía descendants display the same, ultimately tragic, enthusiasm as José Arcadio the elder for Macondo's connection with the modern world.

The fear of incest also looms as a constantly returning ominous cloud. The anxieties involved in the initial marriage of the cousins, Ursula and José Arcadio, are revisited

in Amaranta's potentially scandalous relationship with her nephew and are finally actualised in the monstrous fruit of the union of nephew and aunt at the end.

The circle in which Latin-American history is locked is, however, perhaps most succinctly represented by the Colonel's obsession with little metalwork fishes. The vicious circle of the Colonel's initial sale of little fishes for gold coins from which he manufactures more little fishes and so on, is substituted by the more tightly constrained circle of making little fishes to be melted down to make more little fishes ad infinitum. The Colonel's little fishes can also be seen to represent an allegorical critique of Colombian politics. The fishes, which at first were a symbol of Liberal political subversion, ironically later become a relic of the legend of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, treasured by the opposition Conservatives. The history of the fortune of the little fishes parallels the history of the fortune of the Liberals. In the same way that the metalwork fishes are transformed from symbols of subversion to coveted mementoes, the Liberals undergo a similar conversion. The initial clear-cut distinction between the Liberals and Conservatives is slowly eroded in the course of the war (the Civil War of 1899-1902), with the political principles of each party being bent, discarded and exchanged so that the difference ultimately is only nominal. In this way the text seems to provide a critique of the politics of Colombia, where the Liberal/Conservative distinction serves only to define the power games of a self-serving elite. It is this revelation which eventually leads the Colonel to remark: "The only difference today between Liberals and Conservatives is that the Liberals go to mass at five o'clock and the Conservatives at eight".⁶²

Circularity and repetition in One Hundred Years of Solitude thus operate as a political critique of Latin-America in the text. At the outset the gypsy Melquiades has access to the circularity of the history of the Buendías but so too does another character who dabbles in the occult, Pilar Ternera. Pilar Ternera's knowledge quite powerfully epitomises the history of the Buendías and of Latin-America:

There was no mystery in the heart of a Buendía that was impenetrable for her because a century of cards and experience had taught her that the history of the family was a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spilling into eternity were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axle.⁶³

One Hundred Years of Solitude thus employs narrative circularity in a number of ways each of which, however, is distinct from the kind of circularity represented in Chimera. As was mentioned at the beginning of this section in relation to the structure and connection of introduction and ending, the circularity of One Hundred Years of Solitude challenges conventional teleological unilinear historical narrative linked by cause and effect to produce a single, seemingly obvious and objective account. The effect of the text is instead to undermine the "naturalness" of beginnings and endings and the obviousness of the stories which emerge in between through demanding caution and a critical approach from the reader. Caution, since what is unquestioned in bourgeois humanist historical narrative here is challenged and critiqued since a dominant interpretation is not presented as the only interpretation.⁶⁴ Narrative circularity operates also to undermine the conception of the autonomous individual single-handedly forging history. The plans for progress undertaken by

individual members of the Buendía family cannot either succeed or fail on the merits or demerits of the plans themselves. Individual ambitions seem in a very significant way in the text to be connected to and determined by the larger structure of Latin-American history as a whole. Latin-American history itself is bound within structures of underdevelopment which lock it into the circular track of economic decline and social impoverishment.

The effect of narrative circularity in One Hundred Years of Solitude thus is distinctly different to its effect in Chimera where circularity becomes an end unto itself. What begins in both Chimera and One Hundred Years of Solitude as a challenge to bourgeois humanist orthodoxy of the transparency and neutrality of narrative, in Chimera is transformed through the use to which circularity and repetition is put into the similar orthodoxy of textuality itself. The involuntary association of the work of García Márquez with this brand of postmodernism indeed is a part of the blanket condemnation of magic realism by certain critics on the left.⁶⁵ What a dominant understanding of postmodernity, represented by the textual effects of Chimera, tends to do is to renege on the central importance of the materiality of language with which it sets out. It shows language to be not a neutral conduit for representing reality but then goes on to assume a similar apolitical stance to that of bourgeois humanism, this time based paradoxically on the same notion of the material or subjective nature of language which was its point of departure. García Márquez, however, emphasises in the ways described above the subjective nature of language and narrative but within the context of social and historical activity. In this regard, the specific features of the novel's style - magic realism - seem to operate as a brake, precluding the work from

taking the path to a textuality, conservatively defined. (I shall examine these features in the next section). García Márquez's approach thus emphasises that language is not reality abstracted but is rather an activity which develops and transforms in the social and historical contexts of human beings.

In terms of the texts themselves and the motif of circularity, the distinction between Chimera and One Hundred Years of Solitude can be illustrated in the following way. While Chimera reflects on the fact of textuality itself, circularity in One Hundred Years of Solitude addresses political and historical questions. While circularity in Chimera spirals eternally both inward and outward, the circularity of One Hundred Years of Solitude is historically localised and not infinite or universal. For example, at the end Aureliano's final realisation is expressed in the following terms:

Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to One Hundred Years of Solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.⁶⁶

Thus, while textuality in Chimera is elevated to the status of an eternal and universal principle through a politically deceptive manipulation of the idea of self-reflexiveness, One Hundred Years of Solitude similarly challenges a simple instrumental use of language but remains cognisant of language's imbrication in the social and historical.

Although circularity is used in the text to foreground the subjective nature of narrative and consequently the constitutive nature of language, through the text's historical specificity, circularity and repetition cannot be divorced from a consideration of Latin-American material conditions. The circles inscribed in the text can be traced back to an historical "beginning" and have a clearly defined ending which is also the end of the novel - "because races condemned to One Hundred Years of Solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth".

The notions of beginning and ending themselves however are not unproblematic (as the earlier discussion of the introductory line also shows). The circular repetitious story of the Buendías can be traced back, the text constantly reminds us, to the historical event of Sir Francis Drake's attack on Riohacha. The "birth" of the family with the simultaneous "birth" of the incest-fear could not have taken place without Ursula's great-great-grandmother's obsessional fear of the English pirates. Similarly, the family's end is located in the destruction by ants of the monstrous child of the incestuous union. The text does not however lapse into simple myths of origin and end. The historical fact of Sir Francis Drake's activities in South America are refracted through the coloured panes of prior accounts. As was suggested earlier, the novel distorts the texts constituting the common myths of early Spanish and English colonisation through attributing to the English what in English versions had been attributed to the Spanish. To rationalise their competing colonial interests the English commonly represented the Spanish as cruel pirates. Similarly, the representation of the end of the line is acknowledged as a re-presentation since it is accessed through Melquiades's text.

What is significant in this regard, however, is that One Hundred Years of Solitude resists the impulse of Chimera of transforming textuality into an absolute principle. In Chimera, on the one hand, the extent of the reader's activity is to trace the labyrinthine course of the iteration of one text of another text of another text and so on. In One Hundred Years of Solitude, on the other hand, a consideration of the specific formations and transformations of language in society and society in language is encouraged. The social and ultimately "interested" nature of language use is most obviously represented in One Hundred Years of Solitude by the authorities' manipulation of reports of the outcome of the workers' strike:

The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand was finally accepted: there was no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped.⁶⁷

Contrasted with this account, of course, is that of José Arcadio Segundo (and the little child who survives) which is repeated a number of times in the concluding section of the text that more than three thousand had been killed and that they had been dumped into the sea. (García Márquez models the massacre of the striking banana workers on the historical massacre of 6 December 1928, the year in which he was born. In what represents a reminder of the less than simple relationship of reality and fiction, García Márquez observes that his arbitrary estimation of the number of the dead subsequently is taken as historical fact. Bearing in mind that the number of

victims could never satisfactorily be assessed given the massive “cover-up” by authorities, García Márquez settled on “more than three thousand” since it seemed to capture the enormity of the outrage. He mentions in an interview that, subsequent to publication of the novel, he came across a journalistic piece which quite unproblematically refers to the number of dead as “more than three thousand”).⁶⁸ The text juxtaposes the competing discourses regarding the outcome of the strike, namely, that of the authorities and that of José Arcadio Segundo to demonstrate the unavoidable intersection of language with ideology. The text, however, grants greater validity to José Arcadio Segundo’s account in terms of its own fairly explicit ideological position.

The interdependence emphasised in the novel between textuality and history is underscored with a degree of humour also by a different perspective on its evocation of Sir Francis Drake. This consideration is linked to the incest-motif in the novel. Tracing back the chain of events, incest could not have constituted the threat it does had it not been for Drake’s attack on Riohacha. The monstrous nature of incest in the text is symbolically represented by the birth of a child with a pig’s tail. The incest-motif in terms of the novel, however, impinges upon more than just family genealogy - it seems to be connected in some way with the political history of Colombia, if not of Latin-America itself.

At the nadir of the Colonel’s ineluctable slide into deception and tyranny, Ursula remarks: “It’s the same as if you’d been born with the tail of a pig”.⁶⁹ Ursula suggests by this exclamation the heinousness of the Colonel’s abandonment of the

principles for which he began the war which leads him to become as cruel and ruthless as the opposition. This represents almost a crime against nature, a crime of the magnitude of incest. The circular movement of Colombian politics where the Liberal/Conservative distinction eventually becomes non-existent, in this way, thus, is connected with the history of the Buendía family and through the Buendía's to the attack of Sir Francis Drake on Riohacha. Far from suggesting that all of Colombia's (or Latin-America's) economic and social problems are the direct result of first world intervention, the text seems to draw attention instead to the need for a consideration of the specific historical development of third world countries and their particular position in the organisation of the world economy, in any analysis.

This idea is emphasised both by the Mexican writer, Carlos Fuentes, and García Márquez himself as is clear from the Nobel Prize acceptance address. Fuentes suggests, for example, that what takes the form of an apparent jettisoning of the idea of democracy in Latin-American liberation struggles, in fact, is determined by the specific social and political formation of the continent. It does not for a minute mean that the Latin-American left does not value democracy.⁷⁰ The Colombian example is a case in point. Although Colombia claims to be one of the few Latin-American democracies, that democracy is nominal only as a number of García Márquez novels suggest, in particular, *In Evil Hour*. The Liberal/Conservative dichotomy is so ingrained in Colombian society that no political alternatives seem to have any viability. This intense factionalism is, however deceptive to the extent that it suggests popular support and control when, in fact it amounts to nothing more than the competition of elites. It is also deceptive in the sense that Liberal and Conservative

collusion creates the impression that Colombia is one of the few Latin-American democracies when, in fact, elections fairly often are rigged between the two parties.

A study of Garcíá Márquez presents his position in this regard quite clearly:

It is interesting to note that, before the Colombian presidential election of 1978, Garcíá Márquez and others prominent on the Colombian left urged the adoption of a single left-wing candidate to stand against the Liberal and Conservative nominees. No agreement on a single candidate was forthcoming, and the left-wing candidates between them eventually took less than 3 per cent of the total vote. This demonstrated, besides the persistent factionalism on the Colombian left, the firm control which the two major parties still exercised over Colombian politics. It points to the enormous difficulties facing anyone active on the left in Colombia, and helps to explain the importance which Garcíá Márquez has always attached to history and to political education in its broadest sense.⁷¹

A case like the Colombian one may well dictate a paradoxical abandonment of nominal democracy in order precisely to achieve a more democratic social structure.

What is significant, however, is the necessity to address the specific historical contest in any political analysis.

Similarly, in the Nobel address, Garcíá Márquez draws attention to the need for an assessment of Latin-America based on its specific historical juncture:

Perhaps venerable old Europe would be more sympathetic if it tried to see us in its own past; if it remembered that London needed three

hundred years to build her first defensive wall and another three hundred before her first bishop; that Rome debated in the darkness of uncertainty for twenty centuries before an Etruscan king rooted her in history, and that even in the sixteenth-century the pacifist Swiss of today, who so delight us with their mild cheeses and their cheeky clocks, made Europe bloody as soldiers of fortune.⁷²

One Hundred Years of Solitude thus, unlike postmodern texts like Chimera, stresses the constitutive, ideological nature of language without turning textuality into an end unto itself. García Márquez's novel, perhaps as a consequence of its "magic realist" style, seems to be quite firmly rooted in the material world.

Magic Realism: The Politics of Definitional Shifts

As I noted above, John Barth unequivocally names Gabriel García Márquez as one of the foremost postmodern writers in his essay "The Literature of Replenishment". Although in the essay Barth does not specifically address the question of magic realism, more often in critical opinion than not magic realism is what is stressed in García Márquez's inclusion as a postmodern. Magic realism, the style in which "fantasy and reality are indistinguishable"⁷³ in metropolitan literary discourse has been defined in such a way that it emerges as a sub-genre of postmodern fiction.⁷⁴ Furthermore, García Márquez himself, as a leading representative of magic realism, through the inflections of metropolitan criticism, is constituted as a postmodern writer in an idiom in which postmodernism itself is ultimately quite conservatively defined.

Although the origin of the term "magic realism" can be traced considerably further back chronologically than the fiction of García Márquez, it seems to gain currency with his success particularly in the milieu of the Latin-American Boom. As Michael Palencia-Roth suggests, it is specifically One Hundred Years of Solitude (García Márquez's first big success) which transforms the group of writers, including Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso and others into the phenomenon known as "el boom".⁷⁵ The term has since been applied to the literary production of a geographical expanse so diverse as to include the writing of Milan Kundera in Czechoslovakia, Salman Rushdie's novels about Pakistan and India and most recently the work of the Nigerian author, Ben Okri.⁷⁶

The application of the term "magic realism" it seems, furthermore, is not genre specific but can be applied with equal validity to film. Of the commercially more successful films, Robert Redford's The Milagro Beanfield War has been shown to have magic realist elements.⁷⁷ The same claim could be made for films like Baghdad Cafe or Rosalie Goes Shopping which manipulate the conventions of classic Hollywood narration to show up the mysteriousness of reality. In his assessment of magic realism in film, the marxist theoretician, Fredric Jameson, makes mention also of a Polish film, Fever, by Agnieszka Holland.⁷⁸

As in literature however, magic realism in film seems to be dominated by the Latin-Americans. The films of a group of Mexican directors are making significant inroads into the Hollywood market, operating unlike their American counterparts on

shoestring budgets. As with the popularity worldwide of Latin-American novels, García Márquez has had a hand in the growing success of Latin-American film. Apart from the adaptations of his own short stories and novels for the screen, among them Chronicle of a Death Foretold and “The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and her heartless Grandmother”, García Márquez’s tutelage of the new generation of Latin-American directors through his Havana based film institute seems to have played a part in their success. The latest contribution of Mexican director, Alfonso Arau, called “Like Water for Chocolate” has broken United States box-office records for foreign language films and is said to be “the first successful screen interpretation of the continent’s best known literary genre [sic], magical realism”.⁷⁹

Despite the association of García Márquez’s name with the term “magic realism” in both literature and film, García Márquez in interviews and essays distances himself quite emphatically and surprisingly from the concept. This rejection must, however, be considered in the context of the politically deceptive blurring of the boundaries of the concept to fit within somewhat questionable definitions of the postmodern among other attempts to assimilate the term. Regina Janes in her assessment of the term notes that at the proceedings of the 1973 International Association of Iberoamericanists devoted to the topic “the disputants produced so many different and incompatible definitions that it was proposed the term be abandoned forever”.⁸⁰

García Márquez’s rejection of what the term has come to mean is clear. Referring to his documentary novel, The General in his Labyrinth, on the final days of the great independence hero, Simón Bolívar, García Márquez comments:

El General is more important than the rest of my work put together. It demonstrates that my work as a whole is founded on a geographic and historical reality. That reality is not that of magic realism and all those other things which people talk about. When you read [this novel], you realise that everything else in some way has a documentary, geographic and historical basis that is borne out by El General.⁸¹

And this is not an isolated remark. One gets the impression in interviews with García Márquez that the author becomes quite impatient with the metropolitan insistence that his work is “magical”. He has, for example, quite dismissively commented that European readers see only the magic, not the reality “because their rationalism prevents them seeing that reality isn’t limited to the price of tomatoes and eggs”⁸²

I take this remark to expose some of the tensions imbricated in the term “magic realism”, as it is used in the West contrasted with its use in third world literatures. Ben Okri, for example, also suggests that his work represents a confrontation with reality not fantasy.⁸³ As has been mentioned above, the term significantly pre-dates the Latin-American Boom. The term “magic realism” in fact was coined in 1925 not in the context of literature but of painting and not in Latin-America but in Europe. (The concept was first referred to in the Latin-American literary context with the publication of Alejo Carpentier’s The Kingdom of this World in 1949). The German art critic, Franz Roh, first referred to and defined the concept in an analysis of German Post-Expressionist painting. Moylan C Mills in his assessment of magic realism in film relies on Seymour Menton’s retrospective study of German Post-

Expressionism to determine what the term meant in that context.⁸⁴ Magic realism, it is suggested, consists in the following elements:

1. Reality portrayed so overwhelmingly realistically that it is rendered illusive.
2. Ordinary material things instilled with seemingly magical powers, yet which remain easily identifiable.
3. An objective perspective which becomes the basic point of view.
4. A "coldness" which betrays the work's intellectual not emotional appeal, i.e. a lack of passion.

What Seymour Menton's study suggests furthermore is that while the fantastic represents a clear departure from reality, magic realism through an intense attention to the material world itself transforms reality into a thing of mystery and eeriness.

One strand in the development of the concept of magic realism, thus, challenges the rationalism represented by realism through the distorting transformations attendant upon the intensification of the procedures of rationalism themselves. In this regard magic realism represents just one form of a challenge to rationalism so diverse as to include the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, Saussurean structural linguistics and the Frankfurt School's "reassessment of Hegelianism and the metaphysics of dialectical thought".⁸⁵ What is common to each of these expressions of a challenge to rationalism is an attention to the inherent instability of the concept given its structural dependence on its opposite, namely, the irrational.

The term magic realism (or more specifically in the early Latin-American context, “marvellous” realism) makes an impact on the international artistic scene again some twenty-five years after the publication of Roh’s book.

In 1949 the Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier, published his novel, The Kingdom of this World,⁸⁶ set in Haiti. In the prologue, he refers to what he regards as the “marvellous reality” (“lo real maravilloso”) of the Latin-American continent. He identifies this altered magical reality in the tropical vegetation, the “incredible tangle of plants and the obscene promiscuity of certain of its fruits”, in the improbable legends upon which the history of the continent is built and the “magical”, “invocatory” character of the popular religious rites, be it a belief in voodoo or Christ. Jean Franco, a specialist on Latin-American literature emphasises the influence of Parisian Surrealism on Carpentier, but with an important difference.⁸⁷ The comments in the prologue to The Kingdom of this World suggest, despite Surrealist influence, a distinction between European Surrealism and Latin-American marvellous realism. Referring to his experience in Haiti Carpentier suggests, “... I was moved to compare the marvellous reality I had recently experienced with that exhausting attempt to invoke the marvellous which has characterized certain European literatures of the last thirty years”.⁸⁸ While Surrealism is regarded as the wilful imposition of magic upon reality, Latin-American magic realism captures “the marvellous *in* the real” (emphasis added). Regina Janes also emphasises the difference in conception of Latin-American marvellous realism to Surrealism: “Like Roh’s original magic realism, it [marvellous realism] was invented in opposition to surrealism and the fantastic.”⁸⁹ In the context

of literary criticism Angel Flores in 1955 applied the term "magic realism", as it is contemporarily current, to Latin-American writing.⁹⁰

It is this view of artistic production, namely, that Latin-America is possessed of an inherent telluric wonderment that is entrenched both by García Márquez himself and the other Boom writers. On the question of the relation of fantasy and imagination, for example, García Márquez suggests: "... I believe the imagination is just an instrument for producing reality and that the source of creation is always, in the last instance, reality. Fantasy ... without any basis in reality is the most loathsome thing of all".⁹¹

Whether or not this conception of magic realism is influenced by its European precursor, namely, German Post-Expressionism is not spelt out in the literature on the topic, but seems to be implied. Lori Chamberlain in an investigation of the topic of magic realism implicitly suggests that there is a link between Latin American and German Post-Expressionist magic realism, a link more pronounced in the Spanish speaking world than in the English, given the fact that Roh's book was translated from the German first into Spanish and only later into English.⁹² The connection would appear even more solid bearing in mind the boom writers' interest in the European modernists. García Márquez, for example, displays a specific fascination with Kafka. Novelists in particular tended to look to Europe for models given the absence of a novelistic tradition in Latin America. Jean Franco observes of the nineteenth-century, for example:

The novel was a genre which had no past in Latin America. There was no tradition of the novel and writers simply imitated what was most popular in contemporary Europe.⁹³

More recently, however, the opinion of the absence of a novelistic tradition in Latin America, expressed also in an impression fostered by some of the Boom writers that they emerged from a local literary vacuum has been challenged. Gerald Martin in Journeys Through the Labyrinth published in 1989 suggests that the origin of the Boom of the 1960's, in fact, lies in the regionalist social realist novels of the 1920's - what he terms the "Novel of the Land": "[The] origins [of the New Novel] lie, precisely, in the 1920's, the period of the earlier Novel of the Land, and thus the celebrated "boom" of the 1960's is actually a climax and consummation, not a sudden emergence from "nowhere", that is to say, from underdevelopment.⁹⁴ Even more recently in her 1991 work Foundational Fiction: The National Romances of Latin America,⁹⁵ Doris Sommer argues that the often disregarded sentimental romances of the nineteenth-century, in fact, played a significant social role in bringing together disparate groups to forge, borrowing a term from Benedict Anderson, the "imagined community" of the nation.⁹⁶ And the social importance of the nineteenth-century romances determines their literary significance. (García Márquez's latest novel, Love in the Time of Cholera seems, however, to reassess the neglect of prior fiction of the continent, although in a characteristically ironic way. Love in the Time of Cholera recognises the earlier tradition, paradoxically, through parodying the nineteenth-century romances, in particular, Jorge Isaac's Maria.⁹⁷)

Whatever the European literary influences, what emerges more strongly, from the writers concerned is that magic realism is not radically different from realism itself. What metropolitan critics enthusiastically hail as magic realism, it is suggested, is simply a realism which reflects the difference of order of the Spanish world as compared with the Anglo-Saxon or the French.

The Mexican writer, Carlos Fuentes, in an essay on Cervantes's Don Quixote suggests an historical division between the Spanish worldview on the one hand and the English and French on the other:

Robinson [Crusoe] and Quixote are the antithetical symbols of the Anglo-Saxon and Hispanic worlds.

Americo Castro, the greatest modern interpreter of Spanish history, has defined it as "the story of an insecurity." France, he goes on to say, has assimilated its past, at the price of maximal sacrifices, through the categories of rationalism and clarity; England, those of empiricism and pragmatism.

The past is not a problem for the Frenchman or the Englishman. For the Spaniard, it is nothing but a problem, the latent strains of its multiple heritages - Christian, Muslim, and Jewish - throb unresolved in the heart and mind of Spain... Spain has been unable to participate in modern European values, defined by a rational articulation between the objective world and the subjective being.⁹⁸

(García Márquez, it would appear, endorses this view given his reluctance to attend a Paris conference on "Culture and Society", feeling he would be out of place in the "thoroughly glacial sphere of pure ideas" in which he believes the French move.⁹⁹)

Magic realism according to this opinion, therefore, is the somewhat misleading name attributed by Western criticism to what purports to be a realist reflection (albeit poetic) of Latin American society. García Márquez in his 1982 Nobel Prize acceptance speech mentions some of the incredible events and claims which have historically structured the South-American continent in the imagination of its inhabitants. These include, for example, the claims of an early Florentine navigator to have seen in South-America birds without feet and an animal "with the head and ears of a mule, the body of a camel, the hooves of a deer and the neigh of a horse." He refers also to the mythical "Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca [who], in search of the fount of Eternal Youth, spent eight years exploring the north of Mexico in a crazy expedition whose members ate one another [so that] only five of the six hundred who set out returned home".¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, in an interview García Márquez implicitly suggests that Western accolades for the originality of the magic realism of the Boom writers is fundamentally misguided since the Caribbean's first work of magical literature, in fact, was The Diary of Christopher Columbus, "a book which tells of fabulous plants and mythological societies."¹⁰¹ According to García Márquez, thus, magic realism simply is the realism of Latin America.

It would appear, furthermore, that García Márquez's sensitivity to the wonders of the continent is more pronounced bearing in mind the peculiar nature of the region in

which he spent his formative years. The “magic” of the Latin American continent as a whole seems to be intensified in the Caribbean coastal region where García Márquez lived with his grandparents. Here more than in the conservative Spanish Colombian highlands, a vivid new culture has been forged drawing on the influences of the Spanish conquistadores, African slaves, Swedish, Dutch and English pirates and Christian Arab traders.

Cognisant of the kind of society from which he emerged, credibility certainly is lent to García Márquez’s emphatic insistence that, regardless of how bizarre, the incidents in his novels all have their basis in reality. Far from suggesting a role for the writer as a neutral conduit of reality, García Márquez’s emphasis needs to be viewed in the context of the Western critical categorisation of his work as a prime example of an ultimately conservative postmodernism. The fact that García Márquez does not hark back to a naive realism is underscored by his parallel insistence that his novels are also a “poetic” transposition of reality,¹⁰² that is, the language of the text is not simply a transparent medium for viewing the world.

To return, however, to García Márquez’s claim that every line in his novels has its “starting point in reality”, one observes that indeed he is able to explicate even the more wondrous scenes in his works. He suggests further that in many cases it is precisely his journalistic skills, acquired at various Latin American press agencies, which have enabled him to make his fictive endeavours so gripping. In One Hundred Years of Solitude, for example, García Márquez maintains that it is his journalist’s eye, inspired by the sight of a woman hanging washing on an especially windy day,

which accounts for the credibility of Remedios the Beautiful's ascension to heaven on the small-hearted Fernanda's Brabant sheets as opposed to some alternative means for her passage heavenward.¹⁰³ Similarly, the butterflies which Garcíá Márquez has accompany the ill-fated Mauricio Babilonia, and which uncannily reappear in texts as diverse as Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses and Ben Okri's Songs of Enchantment, are a flashback to a childhood reminiscence.¹⁰⁴ Apparently the departure of an electrician called in to do repairs in his grandparents' house in Aracataca, invariably left in its wake a moth or two. According to its Latin-American proponents thus, magic realism is a reflection of the realities of the continent.

Yet even this position needs refinement since as the literary trajectory shows Latin America does not hold the monopoly on magic realism. Magic realism as a style which emerges out of the articulation of specifically Latin American experience is not the whole story either. Indeed, magic realism can be regarded to have found its first contemporary expression in the first African novel to be published in London, namely, the Nigerian, Amos Tutuola's, The Palm-Wine Drinkard.¹⁰⁵ What The Palm-Wine Drinkard emphasises is the connection of magic realism with the oral tradition in pre-industrial societies where capitalist print culture is only beginning to make its impact. This, indeed, is also the nexus which goes unrecognised in critiques of magic realism which unproblematically regard the style as a postmodern inflation of what has been constituted as a politically unthreatening mode.

It is the connection of magic realism with questions of orality which widens its scope considerably further than South America. Although thus defining magic realism

operates to the exclusion of writers like Kundera whose sources are the Western philosophical and literary traditions, it simultaneously includes writers from underdeveloped countries like Rushdie in India and Okri in Nigeria.

In discussing his novel, the Booker Prize-winning Midnight's Children, Salman Rushdie, for example, makes clear the influence on him of the Indian oral tradition. Referring to his decision to substitute first-person for third-person narration in the draft stages of the novel, Rushdie suggests:

Now suddenly, that opened up the story. It suddenly fell into a tradition which is related to the oral storytelling tradition in India. It enabled him [the first-person narrator, Saleem] to tell a story in the way in which Indian people tell stories, which is very roundabout, full of digressions, and jokes, and asides, and parentheses, and goes on forever, and exaggerates and fantasises. And suddenly, his narrative voice made the book come to life for me. I remember being told stories in that way by both my parents, as a mode of conversation, as a way of recounting your family to you.¹⁰⁶

The 1991 Booker Prize-Winner, Ben Okri, whose award-winning novel The Famished Road, has also been regarded as magic realist,¹⁰⁷ seems similarly to be influenced by the local Nigerian oral tradition. Although Okri has not as yet on record acknowledged the influence of Yoruba oral culture on the structure and style of The Famished Road, the protagonist, the spirit-child Azaro, emerges directly from the local animistic tradition in which the division between this world and the next is not absolute. The Famished Road's specific articulation with Yoruba oral culture can

perhaps be better understood through juxtaposing this text with Tutuola's The Palm-Wine Drinkard which draws more directly on oral sources. In this regard, the similarities between these two texts are striking.

In recent García Márquez scholarship also the influence of an older oral tradition on the style and subject matter of his novels has been emphasised. García Márquez is frequently on record as suggesting that all of his novels are reminiscent of his early years at his grandparents home in Aracataca. Raymond Williams, a specialist on Colombian literature, examines García Márquez's claim in relation to the oral tradition of the Colombian Costa. What Williams suggests is that "magic realism", in fact, is a misnomer for the effect created by the textual representation of oral traditional features.

One can examine this claim in relation to what has been noted as the features of magic realism in German Post-Expressionist painting. To recap Seymour Menton's summary mentioned above, the style is identified by an attention to reality so intense that it becomes illusive, ordinary material things are instilled with magical powers yet remain identifiable, objective perspective is the basic point of view and finally a "coldness" which suggests the work's lack of passion. Williams identifies some of these features in García Márquez's style but suggests instead that they emerge from the oral tradition of his native region. Taking "coldness" of style as a case in point, García Márquez often acknowledges his debt to his grandmother who could say the most astonishing things in a completely expressionless way. García Márquez suggests that it is only upon fine-tuning his grandmother's oratorical style that he discovered

the key to his writing.¹⁰⁸ Williams emphasises that this feature is not specific but general to the local oral culture. Williams thus emphasises:

What has often been identified by the now overused and frequently vague term magic realism in this novel [One Hundred Years of Solitude] is more precisely described as a written expression of the shift from orality to various stages of literacy. The effects of the interplay between oral and written culture are multiple. García Márquez has fictionalised numerous aspects of his youth in the tri-ethnic oral culture of the rural Costa. The unique traditionalism and modernity of this novel are based on the various roles the narrator assumes as oral storyteller in the fashion of the tall tale, as narrator with an oral person's mindset, and as the modern narrator of a self-conscious (written) fiction.¹⁰⁹

It is the association of magic realism with orality which highlights a more significant consideration in relation to the political implications of the style. The trajectory one traces in the development of the style is very important in this regard. If one holds that magic realism in Latin America is a simple imitation of European forms, namely, German Post-Expressionism or Surrealism, and that more diverse third world literary production merely rides the wave of the Latin American success, then there is credence in the opinion that magic realism is lauded in the metropolis since it mirrors its own ideology, postmodernism, which often parades as being ideology-free. As was mentioned at the outset, John Barth bills García Márquez (hence magic realism) as the quintessential example of postmodernism. What postmodernism means for Barth, as we have seen, is a concept far less democratic than is suggested in his essay.

Barth's critical claims for the democratic nature of the postmodern are contradicted by a fictional practice which replaces the political disingenuousness of the universal morality of bourgeois humanism with the universal truth of pristine textuality. It is in unproblematically charting the emergence of magic realism in Europe and its celebration as a particular brand of postmodernism which leads certain postcolonial theorists to reject it as an especially duplicitous effect of late-capitalism. On the one hand, magic realism is regarded as the authentic voice of third world literature (even though or precisely because it mirrors Western cultural developments), on the other it is rejected out of hand as a grateful metropolitan exultation of an ultimately politically unthreatening fictional mode.

The Indian marxist theoretician, Aijaz Ahmad's, criticism of the postmodern analyst Homi Bhabha is a case in point. Referring to what he deems to be Bhabha's unnamed interest as a "migrant" intellectual based in the first world Ahmad suggests:

The affinities of class and location then lead Bhabha, logically, to an exorbitant celebration of Salman Rushdie [hence magic realism] which culminates in pronouncements like the following, itself assembled in the manner of a postmodernist pastiche:

"America leads to Africa, the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to write the history and fiction of the metropolis. The island story is told from the eye of the aeroplane which becomes that "ornament that holds the public and the private in suspense." The bastion of Englishness crumbles at the sight of immigrants and factory

workers. The great Whitmanesque sensorium of America is exchanged for a Warhol blow-up, a Kruger installation, or Mapplethorpe's naked bodies. "Magic Realism," after the Latin America boom, becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world."

It is doubtful, of course, that "magic realism" has become "the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world," any more than the "national allegory" is the unitary generic form for all Third World narratives, as Jameson would contend. [Ahmad refers here to Fredric Jameson's essay "Third World literature in the era of multinational capitalism"] Such pronouncements are now routine features of the metropolitan theory's inflationary rhetoric.¹¹⁰

From the above excerpt, the terms of the debate are clear. While to an extent Ahmad's criticism of Bhabha is justified, given Bhabha's approach to magic realism as a kind of happy detachment, what Ahmad disregards is the emergence of magic realism from the articulation of specific modes of production in the former colonies. Ahmad quite correctly criticises the kind of postmodernism of which magic realism is regarded as a type which unproblematically "dismisses the history of materialities as a 'progressivist modes-of-production narrative', historical agency itself as a 'myth of origins', nations and States (all nations and all states) as irretrievable coercive, classes as simply discursive constructs and political parties themselves as fundamentally contaminated with collectivist illusions of a stable subject position".¹¹¹

What Ahmad does not acknowledge is the alternative analysis of magic realism which recognises the distinctions between that style and postmodernism in general. While

postmodernism is the cultural effect of an advanced capitalism,¹¹² magic realism evolves out of a rather different set of variables. Jean Franco, suggests the distinction in the following way:

“Lo real maravilloso” [magic realism] is not so much a school of writing as a conviction that American “reality” is of a different order to that of Europe. Authors come from pre-industrial areas and this distinguishes them from European surrealists, who celebrated the “marvellous” but did so in reaction to an industrialised society which had imposed its own grey mechanistic standards.¹¹³

For Franco, the crucial difference between European and Latin American magic realism is the specific material conditions out of which each emerges. But, as the example of Amos Tutuola shows, magic realism is not particular to Latin America. Tutuola’s work which significantly pre-dates the Latin-American Boom displays magic realist elements. Magic realism seems instead to be a style crystallised out of an economic transition in the regions of its emergence. The specific form taken by that transition in cultural terms is that of a move from orality to various stages of literacy. Expressed in more general terms, the shift from orality to literacy can be read as symptomatic of the encroachment of print capitalism in pre-industrial societies. Magic realism thus is the literary effect of the transition of one mode of production to another. Fredric Jameson, in his analysis of magic realism in film, distinguishes magic realism from the postmodern on precisely these grounds

... the possibility of magic realism as a formal mode is constitutively dependent on a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is

structurally present; or, to generalise the hypothesis more starkly, magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features.¹¹⁴

Magic realism is far from synonymous with the postmodern; it, in fact, emerges from a vastly different economic, social and historical dynamic. The postmodern in certain of its forms seeks to deny the material in favour of the textual, disregarding the inextricable interconnectedness of the two in language as a social and material practice. (Jameson refers to this relationship as “a continuous reciprocal interaction”).¹¹⁵ Magic realism, emerging as it does from the articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, seems in a sense to contain a structural consciousness of the materialities which produced it.

Raymond Williams, quoted above, refers to this tendency as the “unique traditionalism and modernity” of magic realism, where the narrator assumes the position both of oral storyteller “and as” modern narrator of a self conscious (written) fiction. This consciousness of the articulation of two modes can be seen to operate also in García Márquez’s claims to a double debt both to first world modernist writers like Kafka and Faulkner and to the characters who peopled his rural childhood upbringing in Aracataca.

As the examples of Barth and García Márquez in the earlier sections demonstrate, while postmodernism seeks to escape the material, magic realism is structurally compelled to address the material world at every turn. While both the texts under

consideration Barth's Chimera and García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, complicate a simple realist conception of language, the former disingenuously replaces realist "objectivity" with a textual neutrality while the latter emphasises the intrinsic connection of material and linguistic practices. And it is in García Márquez's emphasis on the ideological nature of writing and reading practises that his reassessment in marxist critical circles ought to lie.

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 - 4 Barth, J. "The Literature of Exhaustion" 72
 - 5 Barth, J. "The Literature of Exhaustion" 76
 - 6 Barth, J. "The Literature of Exhaustion" 79
 - 7 See, for example, Con Davis, R. "The Case for a Post-Structuralist Mimesis: John Barth and Imitation" American Journal of Semiotics Vol.3 No.3 (1985) or Poznar, S. "Barth's 'Compulsion to Repeat: Its Hazards and Possibilities'" in Vol.10, Part 2 (1990).
 - 8 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 71.
 - 9 Hassan provides a comparative table distinguishing modernism from postmodernism in his book, The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature University of Wisconsin Press: Madison (1982)

Modernism	Postmodernism
Romanticism/Symbolism	Pataphysics/Dadaism
Form (conjunctive, closed)	Antiform (disjunctive, open)
Purpose	Play
Design	Chance
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Mastery/Logos	Exhaustion/Silence
Art Object/Finished Work	Process/Performance/Happening
Distance	Participation
Creation/Totalization	Decreation/Deconstruction
Synthesis	Antithesis
Presence	Absence
Centering	Dispersal
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext
Semantics	Rhetoric
Paradigm	Syntagm
Hypotaxis	Parataxis
Metaphor	Metonymy
Selection	Combination
Root/Depth	Rhizome/Surface
Interpretation/Reading	Against interpretation/Misreading
Signified	Signifier
Lisible (Readerly)	Scriptible (Writerly)
Narrative/Grande Histoire	Anti-narrative/Petite Histoire
Master Code	Idiolect
Symptom	Desire
Type	Mutant
Genital/Phallic	Polymorphous/Androgynous
Paranoia	Schizophrenia
Origin/Cause	Difference-Differance/Trace
God the Father	The Holy Ghost
Metaphysics	Irony
Determinacy	Indeterminacy
Transcendence	Immanence

10 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 68

11 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 70

12 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 70

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- 13 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 71
- 14 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 71
- 15 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 70
- 16 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 70
- 17 Barth, J. "The Literature of Replenishment" 69
- 18 Allen, B. Review in Library Journal
- 19 Review on the front cover of the 1992 Fawcett Crest reprint of Chimera.
- 20 "Dunyazadiad" first appeared in Esquire June 1972, "Perseid" in Harper's, September 1972.
- 21 Apuleyo Mendoza, P. and Garcíá Márquez, G. The Fragrance of Guava 71³
- 22 Noted by Garcíá Márquez, G. In an interview with Bell-Villada, G. In South 1983 January
- 23 Gerald Martin in Journeys through the Labyrinth: Latin-American Fiction in the Twentieth Century considers some of the other Boom writers in Chapter 7 "The 'boom' of the 1960's".
- 24 Sommer, D. And Yudice, G. In "Latin American Literature" from Postmodern Fiction
- 25 Sommer, D. And Yudice, G. In "Latin American Literature" 190
- 26 Reported as part of an interview with Garcíá Márquez, G. In South 1983 January
- 27 Quoted by Williams, R.L. in Gabriel Garcíá Márquez 1

28 The distinction between the “irrational” challenges to Enlightenment rationalism represented alternatively by oral traditional worldviews and certain currents in postmodernism can be illustrated by contrasting anthropological findings with some contemporary analyses. In Vail, Leroy, White and Landeg’s historiography of anthropological approaches to orality what is undisputed in often racist condescending accounts is the oral-person’s conviction of a relatively stable reality even though it may not be organised along Western Enlightenment lines. (Vail, Leroy, White and Landeg Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History University Press of Virginia: Charlottesville; James Currey: London (1991)). Consider, for example, the assessment of one anthropologist, Marshall McLuhan: “the African child lives in the implicit, magical world of the resonant oral world. He encounters not efficient causes but formal causes of configurational fields such as any non-literature society cultivates” (p.19). In other words, the oral person for McLuhan cannot understand the Western rationalist “truth” of reality, but establishes certain magical, mythical (“formal”) approximations of “truth”. Reality is, however, held to exist.

This conception can be contrasted with, for example, that of the postmodern analyst, Robert Young, whose notion that reality is immaterial emerges most strongly in the chapter of his book, White Mythologies (Routledge: London and New York, 1990), which critiques Frederic Jameson, playfully titled “The Jameson Raid”.

29 Con Davis, R. “The Case for a Post-structuralist Mimesis: John Barth and Imitation” 49

30 Barth, J. Chimera 142

31 Cited in Praz, M. The Romantic Agony 43

32 Cixous, Hélène “The Laugh of Medusa”

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- 33 Cixous, Hélène "The Laugh of Medusa" 255
- 34 Cixous, Hélène "The Laugh of Medusa" 255
- 35 De Lauretis, T. "Desire in Narrative" in Alice Doesn't
- 36 De Lauretis, T. "Desire in Narrative" 134
- 37 Barth, J. Chimera 141
- 38 The idea that language is not an abstract logical phenomenon like a calculus superimposed upon material existence is suggested by the examination of a number of issues in the Philosophical Investigations (Wittgenstein, L. Philosophical Investigations Basil Blackwell: Oxford 1958). The discussion of the prerequisites for the concept of "naming" in language (remarks numbers 1 to 60) to exist suggests not a divorce of language from the world, but the necessity of the real world as among the "instruments" of language associated with a social training. This is the gist also of the notion of "language games" and the refutation of the idea of a private language among other concerns. The imbrication of the material world with language is suggested most forcefully, however, by the rather cryptic remark that "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (p.223) What this line hints at is the impact represented by material existence upon language. Since we do not share the same "form of life" (remarks numbers 19,23, 241 and pages 174 and 226) as the leonine species, the possibility of understanding a hypothetical lion-language is precluded.
- 39 I shall examine the specific criticisms of the Marxist analyst, Aijaz Ahmad, in more detail in one of the later sections.
- 40 Barth, J. Chimera 93
- 41 Barth, J. Chimera 103
- 42 Barth, J. Chimera 109

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- 43 Barth, J. Chimera 98
- 44 Said, E. The World, the Text, and the Critic, Faber and Faber: London, Boston (1984) especially postmodernism. 3, 35, 40.
- 45 Regina Janes in One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading (Twayne: Boston, 1991) also emphasises the question of narrative circularity and repetition in the novel. With regard to the manipulation of time in the text she suggests: "The narrative is always curving back, making loops to catch up to its present..." (70) On the topic of repetition, she observes: "Once we notice the presence of repetition and contrasts, patterns begin to multiply. Everywhere we look, we see parallels, echoes, contrasts, emblems of the whole. Nothing happens only once in One Hundred Years of Solitude, and nothing happens the same way twice" (87-8).
- 46 Martin, G. Journeys through the Labyrinth 219. 3
- 47 Stephen Minta in Gabriel García Márquez: Writer of Colombia discusses neo-colonialism in terms of the destruction of Macondo by the Banana Company (p.163). Doris Sommer and G. Yudice also stress One Hundred Years of Solitude's historical concern: "... this novel prefigures a post-Boom concern with rewriting national history. ("Latin American Literature" in postmodernism Fiction, 191).
- 48 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 18
- 49 Regina Janes identifies this as a feature of "Latin American historiography and self-representation": "... there is little sense of a colonial period. Instead the narrative makes a great leap from conquest/founding to independence". (One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading 70).
- 50 Walcott, Derek "Crusoe's Journal" in The Castaway and Other Poems London (1965)

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- 51 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 10
- 52 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 17
- 53 Hulme, P. Colonial Encounters 113.
- 54 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 23
- 55 García Márquez, G. Quoted in Williams, R. The Colombian Novel 1844-1987
87.
- 56 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 183
- 57 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 184
- 58 Minta, S. Gabriel García Márquez 165
- 59 Neruda, P. "The United Fruit Company" from Canto General
- 60 Minta, S. Gabriel García Márquez 164
- 61 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 240
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- 62 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 200
- 63 García Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 320
- 64 Hayden White in "The Value of Narrativity" (Critical Inquiry Autumn 1980)
exposes the ideological subjective nature of some of the assumptions
historical narrative presents as universal or natural. White suggests: "... we
can comprehend the appeal of historical discourse by recognizing the extent
to which it makes the real desirable, makes the real into an object of desire,
and does so by its imposition, upon events that are represented as real, of the
formal coherency that we ourselves lack. The historical narrative... reveals to
use a world that is putatively "finished", done with, over, and yet not
dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of a
meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never

experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. (24)

- 65 I shall consider the specific case of the Indian critic, Aijaz Ahmad, in the next section.
- 66 Garcíá Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 336
- 67 Garcíá Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 252
- 68 Noted by Garcíá Márquez, G. In an interview with Bell-Villada, G. In South 1983 January.
- 69 Garcíá Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 142
- 70 Fuentes, C. "The Argument of Latin-America: Words for the North Americans".
- 71 Minta, S. Gabriel Garcíá Márquez 6-7
- 72 Garcíá Márquez, G. "The Solitude of Latin America: Nobel address 1982" 210.
- 73 De Carvalho, Susan "Origins of Social Pessimism in Garcíá Márquez: 'The Night of the Curlews'" 332 and Janes, R. One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading 98.
- 74 In one reference guide to postmodern fiction, for example, the Dictionary of Postmodern Fiction, two of the introductory articles discuss magic realism at some length. Magic realism is classified as a type of postmodernism and writers considered magic realist are included in its listing.
- 75 Palencia-Roth, M. "Gabriel Garcíá Márquez: Labyrinths of Love and History" 54

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- 76 Okri's 1991 Booker Prize-Winner is titled The Famished Road. His other works include Flowers and Shadows, written at the age of 19, a collection of short stories called Stars of the New Curfew, a novel Incidents at the Shrine and most recently another novel Songs of Enchantment.
- 77 Mills, M.C. "Magic realism and García Márquez's *Erendira*" 113.
- 78 Jameson, F. "Magic realism in Film" 302.
- 79 Fleming, C. and Padgett, T. "An Appetite for Cinema con Salsa" Newsweek January 24, 1994, 44-5.
- 80 Janes, R. One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading 98.
- 81 García Márquez, G. Quoted in Palencia-Roth, M. "Gabriel García Márquez: Labyrinths of Love and History" 56.
- 82 Apuleyo Mendoza, P. and García Márquez, G. The Fragrance of Guava 35.
- 83 Ben Okri in a television interview with Edward Blishen, "Guardian - Conversations".
- 84 Mills, M.C. "Magic realism and García Márquez's *Erendira*" 114
- 85 Young, R. White Mythologies 7
- 86 Carpentier, A. The Kingdom of this World (translated by Harriet de Onís) Andre Deutsch: London (1990).
- 87 Franco, J. An Introduction to Spanish-American Literature 310.
- 88 Carpentier, A. The Kingdom of this World Introductory paragraph of prologue.
- 89 Janes, Regina One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading 103-4.
- 90 Janes, One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading 98

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- 91 Apuleyo Mendoza and Garcíá Márquez. The Fragrance of Guava 31.
- 92 Chamberlain, L. "Magicking the Real: Paradoxes of Postmodern writing" 7
- 93 Franco, J. Spanish American Literature since Independence 56.
- 94 Martin, G. Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century 4.
- 95 Sommer, Doris Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America. University of California Press: Berkeley; L.A. London (1991)
- 96 Anderson, B. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism
- 97 Bueher, D. "A Second Chance on Earth: The Postmodern and the Post-Apocalyptic in Garcíá Márquez's Love in the Time of Cholera" 17. 3
- 98 Fuentes, C. "Cervantes, or The Critique of Reading" 64
- 99 Garcíá Márquez, G. "Not His Cup of Cafe" in New York Times Book Review 1988 Feb.21
- 100 Garcíá Márquez, G. "The solitude of Latin America: Nobel Address 1982" 207
- 101 Apuleyo Mendoza, P. And Garcíá Márquez, G. The Fragrance of Guava 52.
- 102 Apuleyo Mendoza, P. And Garcíá Márquez, G. The Fragrance of Guava 35
- 103 Garcíá Márquez, G. One Hundred Years of Solitude 195
- 104 Rushdie, S. The Satanic Verses Viking: London, NY, Victoria (1988) 216-7.
- Okri, B. Songs of Enchantment Jonathan Cape: London (1993) 15.

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- 105 Tutuola, A. The Palm-Wine Drinkard Faber and Faber: London (1952). See also Asselin, C. "The Limits of Marvelous Realism: Alejo Carpentier, Jacques Stephen Alexis, and Amos Tutola" Dissertation Abstracts International (1989) Aug. V.50 no.2.
- 106 Rushdie, S. "Dialogue with History" Interview in South 1983 Jan.
- 107 Omotoso, K. "Fantastic dreams of the poor" Guardian Weekly
- 108 Janes, R. One Hundred Years of Solitude: Modes of Reading 31
- 109 Williams, R.L. The Colombian Novel 1844-1987 120
- 110 Ahmad, A. In Theory 69
- 111 Ahmad, A. In Theory 35
- 112 Jameson, F.
- 113 Franco, J. Spanish American Literature Since Independence 234.
- 114 Jameson, F. "Magic Realism in Film" 311
- 115 Jameson, F. Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Introduction XV.

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