

Twentieth-
Century
Literature



Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism

Author(s): Scott Simpkins

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer, 1988), pp. 140-154

Published by: [Hofstra University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441074>

Accessed: 12/11/2011 12:26

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Hofstra University is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Twentieth Century Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism

SCOTT SIMPKINS

Magic realism seems plagued by a distinct dilemma, a problem arising primarily from its use of supplementation to “improve” upon the realistic text. The source of this nagging difficulty can be attributed to the faulty linguistic medium that all texts employ, and even though the magic realist text appears to overcome the “limits” of realism, it can succeed only partially because of the frustrating inadequacies of language. The magical text appears to displace these shortcomings through a textual apparition, but this appearance itself illustrates the representational bind which hampers its desired success. And thus the magic realists, always trying to overcome textual limitations, continuously fall short of their numinous goal.

In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes offers an appropriate example of the textual strategies employed in magical texts, and their ultimate failure, as Sancho betrays the creaky machinations that fool the less wary reader (Don Quixote himself, in this instance). Sancho, after all, is not deceived by “magic”—although Don Quixote insists otherwise.

Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez contribute further to this supplemental discourse by examining the condition of textual magic itself in their own writings. Largely because of his close ties with the fantastic, the designation of Borges as a magic realist has created critical dissension, although he is credited by some critics as one of the major early influences on the contemporary magic realism movement which has flourished internationally since the early part of this century.¹ And, indeed, Borges’ presence surfaces throughout a great deal of the magical strategies employed by the many practitioners of this textual sleight of hand. Moreover, his work also anticipates several of the major

textual concerns which have developed among the generations of writers who have followed him. As Robert Scholes observes in *Fabulation and Metafiction*, the “opposition between language and reality, the unbridgeable gap between them, is fundamental to the Borgesian vision, and to much of modern epistemology and poetic theory.”²

Even the term “magic realism” has engendered disagreement since Franz Roh introduced it into artistic discourse in the mid-1920s through the German phrase *Magischer Realismus*, a “counter-movement” in art through which “the charm of the object was rediscovered.”³ When his *Nach-Expressionismus (Magischer Realismus): Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei*, published in German in 1925, was translated and disseminated in Spanish through the *Revista de Occidente* two years later, his articulation of this new sensibility in art doubtlessly had a strong influence on Latin American writers searching for a suitable means to express the “marvelous reality” unique to their own culture.⁴ In *German Art in the 20th Century*, Roh later schematized the differences between expressionism and post-expressionism (which he associates with magic realism), but his focus upon the visual arts reduces the usefulness of his charted oppositions in a literary context. Still, the differences between realism and magic realism could, following Roh, be presented in this manner:

<i>Realism</i>	<i>Magic Realism</i>
History	Myth/Legend
Mimetic	Fantastic/Supplementation
Familiarization	Defamiliarization
Empiricism/Logic	Mysticism/Magic
Narration	Meta-narration
Closure-ridden/Reductive	Open-ended/Expansive
Naturalism	Romanticism
Rationalization/Cause and Effect	Imagination/Negative Capability

Through these necessarily limited oppositions, it may be much easier to envision how magic realism, as Roh suggested, “turned daily life into eerie form.”⁵ Roberto González Echevarría, in *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home*, traces the historical development of this concept from Roh, to Carpentier’s *real maravilloso* and connections with surrealism, to Angel Flores’ influential but limited 1955 essay, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction,” so that any further recounting of its growth may well be superfluous. He maintains that the term arose from an

"effort to account for a narrative that could simply be considered fantastic." The magic realist text "does not depend either on natural or physical laws or on the usual conception of the real in Western culture" because it is "a narrative . . . in which the relation between incidents, characters, and setting could not be based upon or justified by their status within the physical world or their normal acceptance by bourgeois mentality."⁶ But, again, the allowance of the fantastic within this realm has led some critics, such as Luis Leal, to assert that

magic realism cannot be identified with either fantastic literature or with psychological literature, neither with surrealism nor the hermetic literature that Ortega describes. Magic realism does not use, like superrealism, dream motifs; nor does it distort reality or create imaginary worlds, as do fantastic literature or science fiction; nor does it place importance on a psychological analysis of the characters, since there is no attempt to explain the motivations behind their actions or which prevent them from expressing themselves.⁷

These differences in boundaries offer yet another example of the difficulties involved in defining the limits of any period or genre. "The formula" for delimiting magic realism "has been used by many [critics] . . . as though they will find comfort in a concept with universal validity, like Classicism, or Romanticism, or (even) Realism," Emir Rodríguez Monegal observes, adding that "it is necessary to insist on the danger of general use of a formula that . . . is anything but universal."⁸ As Fredric Jameson remarks, however, the term "magic realism"—despite its shortcomings—"retains a strange seductiveness."⁹

The similar interests of surrealism have also led to critical confusion regarding the concept of magic realism, especially since several writers have produced works strongly suggestive of both. In his book-length study of Alejo Carpentier, for example, González Echevarría stresses both Carpentier's ties with surrealism and those elements which set him apart distinctly as a magic realist. Even Carpentier's identification of "marvelous American reality" points to his preference for an ontological outlook toward the textual enterprise favored by Latin Americans, as opposed to the phenomenological, European stance proffered by Roh, as González Echevarría suggests.¹⁰

The Latin American writer preferred to place himself on the far side of that borderline aesthetics described by Roh—on the side of the savage, of the believer, not on the ambiguous ground where miracles are justified by means of a reflexive act of perception, in which the consciousness of distance between the

observer and the object, between the subject and that exotic other, generates estrangement and wonder.¹¹

Yet, both González Echevarría, and Rodríguez Monegal in "Lo Real y lo Maravilloso en *El Reino de Este Mundo*," note that Carpentier—and several other magic realists—chose to move away from some of the more restrictive tenets of surrealism and turn toward what has become known as magic realism. "In spite of his fascination with Surrealism at one time in his life, Carpentier never completely succumbs to Breton and his theories," González Echevarría contends. "On the contrary, Carpentier endeavors to isolate in his concept of the 'marvelous' something which would be exclusively Latin American."¹² Others such as Borges and García Márquez, however, have departed from surrealism far more substantially than Carpentier.

Despite the various critical disagreements over the concept of magic realism, one element which does recur constantly throughout many magic realist texts, and therefore points to a unifying characteristic, is an awareness of the ineluctable *lack* in communication, a condition which prevents the merger of signifier and signified. Perhaps the problem with this type of supplementation is really nothing more than that of a rigorous, but overwhelmingly frustrated, endeavor to increase the likelihood of *complete* signification through magical means, to make the text—a decidedly unreal construct—become real through a deceptive seeming. Rosemary Jackson suggests that "the issue of the narrative's internal reality is always relevant to the fantastic, with the result that the 'real' is a notion which is under constant interrogation," and this seems to be the case. Use of the "real," in terms of signification, actually appears to eliminate the difference between the construct and the object it somehow reconstructs. Despite its undeniable artificiality, a super-realist painting of an apple, for example, may appear more "real" than an impressionistic rendition of one.¹³

Gabriel García Márquez, on the other hand, is a member of the generation of textual magicians to follow Borges (since Borges had a head start of twenty-five years). Like Borges, García Márquez employs a variety of supplemental strategies in an attempt to increase the significative force texts seem able to generate. In one of a series of interviews published as *The Fragrance of Guava*, he maintains that "realism" (he cites some of his realistic novels as examples) is "a kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive a vision of reality. However good or bad they may be, they are books which finish on the last page."¹⁴ A "realistic" text is hardly a satisfactory mode, much less an accurate presentation of the thing in itself, García Márquez

contends, because "disproportion is part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself out of all proportion."¹⁵ In other words, García Márquez suggests that the magic text is, paradoxically, more realistic than a "realistic" text. And this realism is conjured up by a series of magical supplements—such as those found in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

To Jameson, Carpentier's concept of the "marvelous real" establishes a stance distinctly antithetical to the notion of supplementation as an active component of magic realism. Carpentier's "strategic reformulation" of the label of magic realism through the term *real maravilloso* produces "not a realism to be transfigured by the 'supplement' of a magical perspective," Jameson claims, "but a reality which is already in and of itself magical or fantastic."¹⁶ But, with this assertion, Jameson seems to neglect the transmission and portrayal of the marvelous, an act effected through a textual medium which is clearly a supplementation of the agency of realism.

For someone who has said he would rather be a magician than a writer, García Márquez meets his desires halfway by being both in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.¹⁷ Despite the many magical events (flying carpets, living dead, accurate portents, telekinesis, and so on), García Márquez claims he "was able to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude* simply by looking at reality, our reality, without the limitations which rationalists or Stalinists through the ages have tried to impose on it to make it easier for them to understand."¹⁸ In effect, he is arguing that the magical text operates virtually as a corrective to traditional tenets of mimesis, incorporating those unreal elements which in themselves antithetically ground reality.

One Hundred Years of Solitude offers numerous examples of magical supplementation amid the description of approximately a century in the history of one family, a genealogy which recounts fantastic occurrences as though they were quite commonplace.¹⁹ Generations of characters, beginning with the marriage of José Arcadio Buendía and Ursula Iguarán, also encounter the bizarre aspects of "real" life in the inherently supernatural tropics. Early in the novel, for instance, José Arcadio realizes that his plan to found a new village—Macondo—"had become enveloped in a web of pretexts, disappointments, and evasions until it turned into nothing but an illusion."²⁰ This unreal reality is reinforced further as a contagion of amnesia infects the entire village. But a plan is developed to label everything in Macondo so that its increasingly forgetful inhabitants can remember reality by writing it, a strategy which reveals the unseen fantastic element behind writing and its magical ability to create a reality.

As the amnesia worsens, the villagers' situation parallels the seemingly universal—and also realistic—dilemma that accompanies language's indeterminacies: "Thus they went on living in a reality that was slipping away, momentarily captured by words, but which would escape irremediably when they forgot the values of the written letters" (*OHY*, p. 53). In the amnesia episode, accordingly, García Márquez discusses this decidedly realistic concern through a magical layer, a supplemental strategy that may enhance, through its own theatricality, the force of an otherwise commonplace development, boosting its significative show in the process through a transcendent power.

To prevent an overwhelming sense of disbelief, magic realists present familiar things in unusual ways (flying carpets, Nabokovian butterflies, mass amnesia, and so on) to stress their innately magical properties. By doing this, magic realists use what the Russian formalists called defamiliarization to radically emphasize common elements of reality, elements that are often present but have become virtually invisible because of their familiarity. And through a process of supplemental illusions, these textual strategies seem to produce a more realistic text. But whether this endeavor succeeds is another matter.

Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths" offers a distinct illustration of this point. Within its detective-story framework, his story describes a magical novel (*The Garden of Forking Paths*) which, through a play of textual supplementation, attempts to encompass infinite linguistic possibilities. The story revolves around Ts'ui Pên's labyrinthian novel, first thought to be, as his grandson Yu Tsun describes it, "an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts" because it consists of a nearly endless series of events which involve the same characters in different roles.²¹ But a sinologist, Stephen Albert, whom Yu Tsun plans to murder, discovers another hermeneutical path through this textual maze. Albert claims that Ts'ui Pên's novel is designed to create a multi-narrative which saturates its textual capacity and thus achieves the desired state of complete signification. This textual strategy of magical supplementation seems to include everything, thereby overcoming the seemingly unavoidable linguistic lack.

Or does it? It is possible that Ts'ui Pên overlooks a basic problem concerning the text itself by taking its *textuality* for granted without calling its own provisional status into question. Ts'ui Pên (not unlike the surrealists) tries to subvert and overcome the text, but fails because he ironically remains bound by textual restraints. Still, this strategy, which reveals the desire to increase signification, to embrace the fluttering essence of illumination, always ends—because it begins—in loss.

Therefore, a magical text such as Ts'ui Pên's can never enforce a center by remaining forever decentered. Yet Borges (through Ts'ui Pên) forces the reader, as does Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, to consider the properties often unknowingly granted to texts while they surreptitiously reveal a certain absence that usually goes unnoticed. If this absence is taken further, multiplied in a self-consciously reflexive manner as in *The Garden of Forking Paths*, the text seems to encompass everything and lack nothing—although finally it cannot. But the magical attempt is there: bypassing the commonplace unity found in most realistic texts, the magical text tries to go beyond, to make the necessary swerve that Harold Bloom discusses in a different context, a *clinamen* away from the shortcomings associated with "realistic" texts.²²

This plan appears to produce an "infinite text" such as the one Ts'ui Pên tries to create, even though its use of a static medium (language) constantly hampers its signification. Borges does manage to focus the reader's attention upon textual processes, producing as a result the defamiliarization which seems to form a major tenet of magic realism. And, the consciously poly-scenic text portrays more accurately an important aspect of reality, for there are always many different viewpoints of something at any given moment.

In Borges' story, for instance, Yu Tsun is not only a narrator; he is also concurrently an English professor, a prisoner, a friend (albeit newly acquired) to Albert, a spy for the Germans, an assassin, and a character in Ts'ui Pên's novel (as his actions magically duplicate those of several fictive pasts). Like the cubists who tried to show several perspectives of objects in order to capture three-dimensional essences, Borges constructs a multi-perspective text which appears to cover all fictional possibilities. Still, of course, this inherently faulted construct cannot go beyond its frustrating limitations as a linguistic text.

The stress here on the textual element of magic realism is not incidental, because its semiotic dysfunction may be caused by the medium magic realists use: language. Many theorists of the fantastic, in fact, identify the contemporary concern with language's shortcomings as a symptom of the modern temperament. To them, magical texts are one way of supplementing not only the failures of the modern text, but also the inadequacies of what is now called the postmodern condition (perhaps exemplified by existential thought) as well. Christine Brooke-Rose contends that this epistemological crisis has led to new desires in textual generation, revaluations of textual properties, and a poetics of defamiliarization:

The burden of this meaningless situation being unbearable, we naturally escape, and easily, into our more familiar reality, endowed with significance by our desire, whatever it might be, and displace the meaningless situation into a mere backdrop, apocalyptic no doubt, but a backdrop we cease to see.²³

Perhaps magic realism's goal is to return our focus to the backdrop of textual reality, its production and function, by defamiliarizing it.

Consequently, the supplemental strategies used by magic realists may be geared toward "improving" the realistic text, a movement which realizes itself by exploiting language's ability to represent reality through fictive constructs. Borges' "fictions and inventions," for example, "move language *toward* reality, not away from it," Robert Scholes contends.²⁴ The textual project of magic realism, then, is displayed through its linguistically bound attempt to increase the capabilities of realistic texts. Yet this same strategy is necessarily undermined by the problematical nature of language. Borges' "The South" demonstrates this dilemma well as its protagonist, Juan Dahlmann, tries to use a magical text (*The Thousand and One Nights*) to direct his reality, to write (and rewrite) his existence fictionally. "To travel with this book, which was so much a part of the history of his ill-fortune, was a kind of affirmation that his ill-fortune had been annulled"; the narrator says, "it was a joyous and secret defiance of the frustrated force of evil."²⁵ But Dahlmann catches on to the lack amid this solely textual reality, a drawback that undoes its effectiveness.

As his train ride continues, Dahlmann abandons the book for the more real (though slightly less magical) magic of everyday life, and the narrator comments:

The magnetized mountain and the genie who swore to kill his benefactor are—who would deny it?—marvelous, *but not so much more* than the morning itself and the mere fact of being. The joy of life distracted him from paying attention to Scheherezade and her *superfluous miracles*. Dahlmann closed his book and allowed himself to live. (TS, p. 170, emphasis added)

Here the narrator reveals the immanent failure of magical artifices as textual supplements: the magical text is not *much more* magical than reality itself, and to go too far beyond these natural perimeters seems an unnecessary and ineffective diversion. Dahlmann's observations suggest that even a more subtle magic still falls prey to this representational dilemma, although admittedly to a lesser extent. In fact, the diversion of a textual reality moves subjects farther away from reality itself, as Dahlmann, for instance, finds he cannot name the "trees and crop

fields" he passes, "for his actual knowledge of the countryside was quite inferior to his nostalgic and literary knowledge" (TS, pp. 170–71). The fictive reality, rather than offering a more accurate reality, actually distances itself away from what could be called "actual" reality. Thus when Dahlmann is later accosted by "some country louts," he "decided that nothing had happened, and he opened the volume of *The Thousand and One Nights*, by way of suppressing reality" (TS, p. 173). The magical text, in this manner, overturns its *assumed* corrective nature and instead apparently displaces the reality it was thought to somehow enhance and re-ground.

Angel Flores traces the inception of magic realism during this century to a reaction to the "blind alley" of photographic realism, a textual approach that may undermine its effectiveness through its literality. Realism, in effect, produces a text plagued by the ordinary, the *too real*. And imagination, another aspect of the "real," is given short shrift at best. As Borges' narrator in "The Secret Miracle" says, compared with his imagination, "the reality was less spectacular. . . ." ²⁶ Brooke-Rose identifies the particularly modern element of this concern by noting that

the sense that empirical reality is not as secure as it used to be is now pervasive at all levels of society. Certainly what used to be called empirical reality, or the world, seems to have become more and more unreal, and what has long been regarded as unreal is more and more turned to or studied as the only "true" or "another equally valid" reality.

Amid this worldview it is not at all surprising that the "inversion of real/unreal is perfectly logical." ²⁷

Within this arena of uncertainty, magic realism demonstrates its hopeful scheme to supplement the realistic text through a corrective gesture, a means to overcome the insufficiencies of realism (and the language used to ground realism). Alain Robbe-Grillet describes his use of some imaginary seagulls that closely parallels this situation:

The only gulls that mattered to me . . . were those which were inside my head. Probably they came there, one way or another, from the external world, and perhaps from Brittany; but they had been transformed, becoming at the same time somehow more real *because* they were now imaginary. ²⁸

This use of imagination claims to supplement reality by heightening its distinctive elements through ideal imagination, the essence and not necessarily the vehicle. Borges' use of imaginary authors and works, a practice also found in such magical writers as Jonathan Swift and Flann

O'Brien, demonstrates this textual strategy as he creates a new reality through imagination, a reality which becomes "more real" (to return to Robbe-Grillet's assertion) as a result of the magical gloss applied to it through the process of creation.²⁹

But this supplementary act also reveals an implicit despair, a collective lament about the problems involved in using language to convey reality (especially through the delusion of realism). (This is reflected by a comment about a later Aureliano in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* who abandons worldly pleasures for a lesser "written reality" [p. 357].) In other words, through the use of magical supplements, the linguistically determined text seems to span the chasm between signifier and signified. But it cannot. "Reality is too subtle for realism to catch it," Robert Scholes maintains. "It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, by fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come."³⁰ Scholes's claim, however, betrays that very element which undermines such an assertion: attempts to signify can never overcome the deficiencies which any sign system presupposes. This is not to say that magical texts do not have any champions, however; Jameson, through a Heideggerian formula, observes that a magical supplement may allow the *world-ness* of the *world* to show itself.³¹

The magic realist's predilection toward the unreal may also reveal an awareness of the impossibility of successful signification—complete information transference—as magic is used to flaunt these same limitations. "You who read me, are You sure of understanding my language?" asks Borges' narrator in "The Library of Babel."³² Magic realism courts the inevitable problem of signification by offering the impression of success, a supplemental diversion which appears to bypass the limitations of the realistic text, evading its failures through the incorporation of imagination.

Still, as neat as this sounds, perhaps it does not work. Although Jameson, while referring specifically to magic in the genre of romance, may be overstating the situation when he asserts that "the fate of romance as a form is dependent on the availability of elements more acceptable to the reader than those older magical categories for which some adequate substitute must be invented," he is also at least partially correct, for there is undoubtedly something unsatisfactory about the strategy of magic realism.³³ Even the naive inhabitants of García Márquez' Macondo eventually become indifferent to flying carpets.

Plato contends in *Phaedrus* that the ideal language to use in any discourse is inescapably just that—ideal. In his Second Speech, Socrates says:

“As for the soul’s immortality, enough has been said. But about its form, the following must be stated: To tell what it *really is* would be a theme for a divine and a very long discourse; what it *resembles*, however, may be expressed more briefly and in human language.”³⁴

Socrates’ assertion also unveils a major dilemma of magic realism: the divine language needed to bring about complete signification (what it “really is”) can never transcend its illusory status. Supplementation (magic, in this instance) only adds another layer to the significative deception. The *thing itself* always slips away.

The textual economy that magic realism creates for itself undoubtedly introduces several problems. Angel Flores suggests that the desire to maintain some semblance of reality as a textual ground engenders an indeterminate element which further decreases what could be called reader comprehension. To Flores, supplementation of realism is far less preferable than working from an entirely fantastic base. After all, it is possible that the purely magical mode more closely approaches Socrates’ “divine language” than does realism heightened by magic. In addition to the previously mentioned linguistic drawback that magic realism faces, the concern for the limits of partial magic adds another difficulty to the act of textual transmission, for—as Coleridge noted—the reader’s doubt carries a great deal of weight.³⁵ Yet Tzvetan Todorov offers an interesting counterassertion: “‘*I nearly reach the point of believing*’: that is the formula which sums up the spirit of the fantastic. Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life.”³⁶ It is unlikely, however, that a reader would have any reason to “believe” what is said in a text; the question of doubt always lurks (or should always lurk, anyway) between the lines because the physical presence of the text ceaselessly calls attention to its inherent falseness as a construct.³⁷

This stifling predicament may, in fact, explain why Borges and García Márquez themselves became disenchanted with magic and moved on to other concerns. In an interview Borges remarked:

I feel that the kind of stories you get in *El Aleph* and in *Ficciones* are becoming rather mechanical, and that people expect that kind of thing from me. So that I feel as if I were a kind of high fidelity, a kind of gadget, no? A kind of factory producing stories about mistaken identity, about mazes, about tigers, about

mirrors, about people being somebody else, or about all men being the same man or one man being his own mortal foe.³⁸

As Borges observes, the magical text cannot maintain its illusion under close scrutiny. García Márquez reveals a similar disquietude in this exchange with interviewer Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza:

A. M.: Is it that you feel the success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is unfair to the rest of your work?

G. M.: Yes, it's unfair. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a much more important literary achievement. But whereas it is about the solitude of power *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is about the solitude of everyday life. It's everybody's life story. Also, it's written in a simple, flowing, linear and . . . superficial way.

A. M.: You seem to despise it.

G. M.: No, but since I knew it was written with all the tricks and artifices under the sun, I knew I could do better even before I wrote it.

A. M.: That you could beat it.

G. M.: Yes, that I could beat it.³⁹

The underlying desire for rhetorical strategies which may increase the possibility of successful signification seems to be an optimistic semiotic gesture. Discontent with the strictures of realism, magic realists such as Borges and García Márquez construct elaborate magical supplements which imply a purifying concern for textual generation. "Fantasy has always articulated a longing for imaginary unity, for unity in the realm of the imaginary," Rosemary Jackson suggests. "In this sense, it is inherently idealistic. It expresses a desire for an absolute, an absolute signified, an absolute meaning."⁴⁰ Still, as García Márquez and Borges demonstrate, the use of magic is a self-conscious (perhaps painfully so) attempt to overcome significative loss, to bridge that space between the ideal and the achievable (or, semiotically—to remove the bar between signifier and signified). And in this regard, magical texts necessarily reveal their limits in the course of their operation.⁴¹ But the magical text almost triumphs over its otherwise crippling imperfections by commenting on its own questionable condition while simultaneously presenting itself. In this manner, magical texts reflect upon their own blind spots, generating a metacritical discourse about their own indeterminate modality.

Such is the case of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which deals with this slippery situation by creating itself through the very workings of the novel it conceals itself within. Accordingly, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is "about" a book titled *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. García Márquez' novel becomes and betrays itself at the same time, playing upon the slippery textuality that can be granted only conditionally to any text, even one which tries to transcend this representational trap through magical supplementation.

García Márquez achieves—or attempts to achieve—this magical effect by having one character (Melquíades) write the novel, and another (Aureliano) decipher it from an unknown "code" (which is actually Sanskrit). The novel ends as Aureliano comes to the close of Melquíades' manuscript, and by manipulating the unavoidable conclusion that any text presupposes by beginning (perhaps with the exception of such arguably cyclical texts as *Finnegans Wake* and Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*), García Márquez correlates the two events as though it were a textual possibility—which ultimately it may be. By doing this, he manages to go beyond the bounds of realistic texts (mentioned earlier: "However good or bad they may be, they are books which finish on the last page") as his text ends both literally and magically within itself. The text virtually supplements itself out of its textual plane through a magical dodge which appears to prevent its conclusion (that is, the physical end of the book). Yet, within the drive behind the magical supplement, a maneuver constantly outmaneuvering itself like a dog chasing its tail, the text always disappears into itself, an envelope of infinite beginnings forever grounded by the medium it employs to escape the textual dead end.

¹ See, for example, Emir Rodríguez Monegal's "Realismo Mágico Versus Literatura Fantástica: Un Dialogo de Sordos," in *Otros Mundos Otros Fuegos: Fantasía y realismo mágico en Iberoamérica*, Memoria del XVI Congreso Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana (Michigan State University, Latin American Studies Center, 1975), pp. 25–37, and Roberto González Echevarría's *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), which both discuss Borges in relation to magic realism.

² Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 9.

³ Franz Roh, *German Art in the 20th Century* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968), p. 70.

⁴ González Echevarría develops this assertion at length in *Alejo Carpentier*, p. 115.

⁵ Roh, *German Art*, p. 84.

⁶ Angel Flores, "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction," *Hispania*, 38 (1955), 109.

⁷ Cited in Rodríguez Monegal's "Realismo Mágico Versus Literatura Fantástica." All translations of this essay and Rodríguez Monegal's "Lo Real y lo Maravilloso en *El Reino de Este Mundo*," *Revista Iberoamericana*, 37 (1971), 619-49, are by Kate Meyers. In Spanish, this passage reads:

el realismo mágico no puede ser identificado ni con la literatura fantástica ni con la literatura psicológica, pero tampoco con el surrealismo o la literatura hermética que describe Ortega. El realismo mágico no se vale, como el sobrer-realismo, de motivos oníricos; tampoco desfigura la realidad o crea mundo imaginados, como lo hacen los que escriben literatura fantástica o ciencia ficción; tampoco da importancia al análisis psicológico de los personajes, ya que no trata de explicar las motivaciones que los hacen actuar o que les prohíben expresarse.

⁸ Rodríguez Monegal, "Realismo Mágico Versus Literatura Fantástica," p. 26. The second half of this passage reads in Spanish: "Es necesario insistir en el peligro de esta utilización general de una fórmula que . . . tiene de todo menos de universal."

⁹ Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (Winter 1986), 302.

¹⁰ González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier*, pp. 109-17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹³ Thus Rosemary Jackson was probably off base when she concluded, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 36:

The text has not yet become non-referential, as it is in modernist fiction and recent linguistic fantasies (such as some of Borges's stories) which do not question the crucial relation between language and the "real" world outside the text which the text constructs, so much as move towards another kind of fictional autonomy.

¹⁴ Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza and Gabriel García Márquez, *The Fragrance of Guava*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1983), p. 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," p. 311.

¹⁷ George R. McMurray, *Gabriel García Márquez* (New York: Ungar, 1977), p. 86.

¹⁸ Mendoza and García Márquez, *The Fragrance of Guava*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁹ After all, as Alejo Carpentier notes in "Lo Real y lo Maravilloso en *El Reino de Este Mundo*," "what is the history of [Latin] America but a chronicle of marvelous reality?" (p. 636). In Spanish, this passage reads: "¿qué es la historia de América toda sino una crónica de lo real-maravilloso?"

²⁰ Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p. 22. All subsequent quotations from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* will be taken from this text and cited parenthetically as *OHY*.

²¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 20.

²² See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973).

²³ Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), p. 9.

²⁴ Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*, p. 10.

²⁵ Borges, *Ficciones*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1962), p. 170. All subsequent quotations from "The South" will be taken from this text and cited parenthetically as *TS*.

²⁶ Borges, *Labyrinths*, p. 92.

²⁷ Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, p. 4.

²⁸ Alain Robbe-Grillet, "From Realism to Reality," in *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 161–62.

²⁹ Aureliano and his friend Gabriel suggest that texts verify reality when they settle a debate about the reality of an alleged event by asserting that "after all, everything had been set forth in judicial documents and in primary-school textbooks." Writing is therefore granted the capacity to confirm reality. But the narrator points out this semiotic dilemma by noting that the two "were linked by a kind of complicity based on real facts that no one believed in . . ." (*OHY*, p. 359).

³⁰ Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*, p. 13.

³¹ Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History*, 7 (1975), 142.

³² Borges, *Labyrinths*, p. 58.

³³ Jameson, "Magical Narratives," p. 143.

³⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p. 28 (emphasis added).

³⁵ Magic realism presupposes a certain amount of doubt from the reader who can never escape that element of make-believe which pervades magic. The reader, like José Arcadio, faces "the torment of fantasy" (*OHY*, p. 45).

³⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland, Ohio: Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1973), p. 31.

³⁷ Even those texts which question the notion of truth/fiction—such as the nonfiction novel, the new journalism—or even those forms of the media which present daily *versions* of current events, exhibit nothing more, in the long run, than a purely provisional status, a status forever shifting under the influence of relative values and acts (perception, interpretation, analysis, and so on).

³⁸ Richard Burgin, *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Holt, 1969), p. 130.

³⁹ Mendoza and García Márquez, *The Fragrance of Guava*, p. 63.

⁴⁰ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 179.

⁴¹ Borges' narrator in "The Secret Miracle" comments: "Hladik felt the verse [drama] form to be essential because it makes it impossible for the spectators to lose sight of irreality, one of art's requisites" (*Labyrinths*, pp. 90–91).