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A GENETIC MODEL OF DUALITY IN LATIN AMERICAN MAGICAL REALISM

SPEAR

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A Genetic Model of Duality

in Latin American Magical Realism

(TITLE)

BY

Keith Spear

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1995

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Abstract

Latin American magical realism is characterized by the reportorial exposition of absolutely impossible "facts." Spiced and flavored by its inclusion of social and political themes, Latin American magical realism has evolved into an armored vehicle for social and political dissent which affords authors a measure of protection from the kind of governmental censure and political persecution which have so often dominated the history of Latin America. Magical realists can deflect criticism by insisting on the fictionality of their work, a fictionality which is underscored by its inclusion of the fantastic and magical. Gabriel Garcia-Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits, and Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate provide excellent examples of a dynamic of conflict endemic to magical realism.

Social and political conflicts abound in Latin American magical realism, and they are representative of even larger conflicts and concerns. In a regional context, these concerns center around legitimizing the Latin American experience to an international intellectual community. Toward this end, magical realists adopt such strategies as retrospective arrangement, inter-authorial solidarity, and a circular model of time -- strategies which lend credibility to otherwise incredible narratives. In a universal and philosophical context, Latin American magical realism is concerned with representing unresolved duality. Toward this end, magical realists undermine their credibility and legitimacy by including incredible tales of the illegitimate.

The theme of illegitimate children which is so common in the extended family histories recounted by Garcia-Marquez, Allende, and Esquivel suggests a genetic model of duality in which a struggle between many antithetical elements finds expression. European civilization and native Indian culture, Man

and Woman, the political Right and the political Left, even Life and Death are as contrary and difficult to synthesize as the magical and the real. The struggle for synthesis -- for unity and harmony -- recapitulates the biological history of Latin America and the superimposition of an Old World Caucasian consciousness and gene pool on the indigenous Indians of the New World. Clearly, the suggested synthesis of such a marriage would be represented by the genetically rich, hybrid race -- the mestizo of Central and South America. But just how categorically such a synthesis has historically been repudiated is evidenced by the fact that the progenitors of the new race, the conquistadors, did not typically marry the Indian women; furthermore the literal meaning of the name given to an entire race of racially mixed descendants presupposes their repudiation. In Spanish, *mestizo* means half-breed, bastard, or mongrel dog.

Ultimately, magical realists are most concerned with obviating a facile synthesis, maintaining an identity -- a genetic solitude -- that is as inviolable as a gene on a chromosome. The dualities with which Latin American magical realism is principally concerned are as unresolved as the terms magic and real. Furthermore, magical realists present these terms as essentially unresolvable, short of apocalypse. Just as fuel and air combine to form fire, to their mutual destruction, these novels' apocalyptic closures represent the result of a forced and failed synthesis.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated
to the genetic messengers who made it possible.

To my mother, Marjorie Faye Miller Spear,
who taught me to decipher the mysteries
of butterfly life.

And to my father, Norman Richard Spear,
who taught me how to work
and to keep the hours of a moth.

Acknowledgements

I offer my gratitude to the rich lode of intellectual professionalism lodged in the faux-marble of Coleman Hall and known as the English Department of Eastern Illinois University. In particular, my director, Dr. John Guzlowski, has been enormously helpful; his suggestions, as well as the excellent suggestions of my readers, Dr. John Kilgore and Dr. Michael Loudon, have proved indispensable.

In a community like Charleston, it is difficult to know where to begin and where to end acknowledgements. It is a town after all that has a major state university and yet went over two years without a hardware store. If the wrong person is left out, we might find ourselves without a movie theater, or a grocery store. To focus on a source of inspiration that everyone can agree on, I would like to offer special thanks to Larry Shobe of the Eastern Illinois University grounds crew for designing and maintaining the magically real, breathtakingly beautiful, perennial and annual flower beds around campus.

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A Genetic Model of Duality in Latin American Magical Realism: Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits, and Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate.

Predilections, Definitions, and Duality

There are more butterflies than usual this summer. They fall down from the sky like eagles to prey on the Lamb's Ear and Tiger Lily, whose embarrassed faces shine up from their beds of mulch where this strange season of winds from the wings of Japanese Beetles and August heat in June and July has battered them. The butterflies' wings are as iridescent as this wet ink; they flutter like fingers over a keyboard. Prodigious lovers, their curling probosci sip secret nectars as six hairy hands graze sticky pistils like the paws of a nursing kitten.

Biologists tell us that the Viceroy Butterfly *mimics* the Monarch Butterfly, to which it bears a striking resemblance. The Monarch caterpillar feeds on Milkweed, rendering the taste of the adult odious; birds avoid the Monarch and are duped by the Viceroy's mimicry into avoiding it equally absolutely. The problem with this neat analysis of butterfly life is that, in over thirty years of bird watching and butterfly collecting, I have never seen a bird attack a large butterfly of any denomination: Monarch, Viceroy, Fritillary, or Swallowtail. The internal logic and symmetry of the concept of mimicry is beautiful enough to be a butterfly, and it should be studied as one: airy and arbitrary as a butterfly -- explaining nothing. An intellectual concept brings the separate species

together in an apparent unity that is more poetic than scientific, for no serious butterfly collector, and certainly no butterfly, has ever mistaken a Viceroy for a Monarch. No Monarch has ever mated with a Viceroy, and none ever will.

Magical realism mimics mimicry in that it is a critical term born of the blood of its primary texts and should be used as a metaphorical term of analysis. Perhaps because the term is sticky as a stamen, perhaps because the dualities it suggests are as formidable as the Hickory Horned Devil, a huge and hideous caterpillar, and the rare and beautiful Royal Walnut Moth into which it metamorphoses, critics have been cautious when talking about magical realism. Raymond Leslie Williams remarks that "One Hundred Years of Solitude is an utter joy to read yet, paradoxically, an elusive book to write about. What we most enjoy reading is not necessarily the same as what we can most comfortably explain or analyze" (69).[1] I have a couple of collections: one of butterflies, and the other of delayed publication notices which suggests that some critics, like reluctant swimmers, are splashing their toes, waiting for the water to warm -- water that, to me, seems already boiling -- ready, in the words of Laura Esquivil, "like water for chocolate" (151).

Latin American magical realism continues to be an incendiary fictional forum that has leaped over genreic boundaries in a rolling boil, making a big splash in the realms of literature, painting, cinema, and music. The music of Toni Childs provides an example of this influence as do the reconstructive murals of Latino artists who are restoring the dome of Saint Mary of the Angels, near Milwaukee, North, and Damen in Chicago. Although I will limit this discussion to the literature of Latin American magical realists, it is interesting to

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[1] Nelly Sfier de Gonzalez, the head curator of the University of Illinois's Latin American Studies Library, identifies Williams's Gabriel Garcia Marquez as perhaps the best and most complete work in English on the Colombian author.

note that the impact upon the film world of some of the primary texts under consideration has been enormous. Like Water for Chocolate sold more tickets than any foreign film with English subtitles ever. The House of the Spirits stars such monsters as Glenn Close and Meryl Streep. And The Milagro Beanfield War is directed by Robert Redford.[2]

As Williams notes, the popularity of these and other works is, however, no guarantee that the genre is particularly well understood, even on the level of definition. Edwin Williamson agrees with Williams when he notes that

> For all the attention it has received since its publication, One Hundred Years of Solitude remains an elusive and enigmatic novel. Although accepted as one of the major examples of Latin America's contribution to modernist writing, the problem of understanding how its highly acclaimed technique of magical realism actually works is still unresolved. (45)

A crucial question for me is whether or not Latin American magical realism represents a viable synthesis of the apparently antithetical terms magic and real. These terms serve as signposts for the host of far reaching dualities -- social, political, cultural, racial, and philosophical -- with which magical realism is intimately concerned. Of course these disparate elements are united in the sense that they co-exist within unified works of literature. But is simple co-existence and co-terminality synonymous with unity and synthesis? Like the unresolved social and political conflicts that dominate the settings of so many Latin American novels, the conflict between the magical and the real may represent a paradox that is irresolvable.

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[2] For an account of Magic Realism in European cinema, see the appropriate chapters in Jean Weisgerber (ed.), Le Realisme Magique: Roman, Peinture, et Cinema. Fredric Jameson deals with Latin America cinema in "On Magic Realism in Film" in Critical Inquiry 12, 301-25.

In fact, my thesis is that this is the case. Latin American magical realism is ultimately concerned with representing unresolved and unresolvable duality. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits, and Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate provide excellent examples of a dynamic of conflict endemic to magical realism, and these three novels will serve as the primary texts for this thesis. In the extended family histories which unfold in these works, the authors present a genetic model of duality in which antithetical elements remain in solitude, as discrete and inviolable as genes on a chromosome. The parallel structure of the texts -- in that they all are comprised of extended family histories-- recommends them, as does the fact that they spring from three different Latin American homelands and include both male and female perspectives.

To briefly introduce the subject of definitions and how they effect one's perception of unity or duality, Michael Palencia-Roth, in his essay "Prisms of Consciousness; The 'New Worlds' of Columbus and Garcia Marquez," observes that

> Modern hermeneutic theory of interpretation is founded on the commonsense notion that what we see depends on what we are prepared to see and that what we understand depends on what we already understand. What one already understands may be called . . . the forestructure of the understanding: it determines the structure of our understanding before we begin to understand. (243)

In other words, a preexisting critical perspective may in large part color one's understanding of new styles and techniques, such as those found in magical

realism. The resultant definition of the new genre may reflect preconceived biases which determine if one sees unity or duality reflected in the works of magical realists. For this reason, it is necessary to scrutinize how the term has been employed; is it a descriptive term of critical analysis, or is it, inevitably, as Palencia-Roth seems to suggest, a prescriptive term? Williams observes that the "panoply of different and even contradictory readings [of One Hundred Years of Solitude] has led Garcia Marquez to comment that critics, unlike novelists, find 'not what they can, but what they want'[3]" (69). And William Spindler adds "The lack of an agreed definition [of magical realism] and the proliferation of its use in various contexts have resulted in confusion . . . and have led to the indiscriminate use of the term to describe almost any work of literature or art that . . . departs from the established canons of realism" (75).

The term magical realism was first coined by Franz Roh in 1925 as a way of talking about a school of twentieth-century German painters, especially the *neue Sachlichkeit* artists of Munich. Their work was marked by the use of still, sharply defined, smoothly painted images depicted in a somewhat surrealistic manner. The themes and subjects were often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic and with a certain dream-like quality. Gradually, the term caught on in literary circles and by the 1980's had become a well established "label" for some forms of postmodern fiction that feature "the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic " (Cuddon 522). M. H. Abrams observes that magical realists "violate . . . standard novelistic expectations . . . [by] interweav[ing] a sharply etched realism with fantastic and dreamlike elements" (122). Stephen Elliott defines magical realism simply as "a fantastic situation realistically treated" (575) and further as "a technique used to heighten the

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[3] El Olor de la Guayaba [The Smell of the Guava], 75.

intensity of [a] realistic portrayal of social and political issues by introducing grotesque or fanciful material" (333).

A working definition of magical realism will determine in large part whether one sees duality or unity -- opposition and conflict, or resolution and synthesis -- in the works of Latin American magical realists. Williamson writes that "at the level of simple definition there can be little disagreement: magical realism is a narrative style which consistently blurs the traditional realistic distinction between fantasy and reality" (45). While I would agree that "there can be little disagreement" over the detection of discreet elements in this art form, the verb choice for how these elements are combined makes a tremendous difference in one's understanding of the ultimate message. If the distinctions are "blurred," if the elements are "interwoven," then they combine to form a unified *tertium quid*. But if they are "juxtaposed," or if they merely "mingle," then they are simply co-terminously present without any real suggestion of the resolution of conflict. Two brown haired people can have a blond child because genes for blondness have been juxtaposed and mingled with genes for brownness somewhere in their lineage. If the genes had truly blended, this would be impossible, but they do not; they maintain their discreet individuality, a solitude which is inviolate (except in the case of random mutations). The emphasis on genetic and racial themes in the family histories of our primary texts encourages the employment of this type of genetic metaphor as a model of duality. The centuries-long unresolved social and political conflicts of the novels also recommend a dualistic interpretation of Latin American magical realism.

Palencia-Roth believes that "the inner, psychological history of

colonization in Latin American letters [a history which postulates the duality between the colonizers and the colonized] passes through three major stages, the last of which has not yet been completed" (244). The first stage is marked by the attempt by the colonizers to assimilate the newly discovered culture and reality. "Ironically," he reports, "the attempt sometimes results in the colonization of the colonizer" (244). In the second stage, "the colonial mentality is internalized; this occurs in succeeding generations, once the colony is well established and its people have known no other reality but the colonial one" (244-45). He believes that the "principal psychological characteristic during this stage seems to be ambivalence and duality. [The colonized are p]oised between two worlds and insecure in a dual cultural identity. . . ." (244). He postulates that the "third and final stage in the inner history of colonization is rebellion and the attempt at emancipation, both of which involve rejection of the colonial mentality" (245). He speculates that the "psychological emancipation from the colonial mother culture (in this case, Europe and Spain) tends to occur long after the political emancipation" (245).

Even as Palencia-Roth describes what might be called the emergence of the third world, his third stage invokes a new battle between old adversaries and rekindles incipient dualities. Even more telling in this dialectic of the colonized is the fact that, despite centuries of revolution, this third stage "has not yet been completed." Do the texts support the conviction that this stage will ever be completed; do they point toward synthesis rather than Sisyphusian struggle? In the context of the texts, in which the indomitable matriarch is omnipresent, is the "psychological emancipation from the colonial mother" a likely eventuality? I think not.

An Overview of the Argument

Latin American magical realism is characterized by the reportorial exposition of absolutely impossible "facts." Spiced and flavored by its inclusion of social and political themes, Latin American magical realism has evolved into an armored vehicle for social and political dissent which affords authors a measure of protection from the kind of governmental censure and political persecution which have so often dominated the history of Latin America. Magical realists can deflect criticism by insisting on the fictionality of their works, a fictionality which is underscored by its inclusion of the fantastic and magical. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude, Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits, and Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate provide excellent examples of a dynamic of conflict endemic to magical realism. Their structure invites comparison, yet they offer an array of perspectives.

Social and political conflicts abound in Latin American magical realism, and the dualities they imply are, in turn, representative of even larger conflicts and concerns. In a regional context, these concerns center around legitimizing the Latin American experience to an international intellectual community. Toward this end, magical realists adopt such strategies as retrospective arrangement, inter-authorial solidarity, and a circular model of time -- strategies which lend credibility to otherwise incredible narratives. In a universal and philosophical context -- a context which Williams identifies as "transcendental regionalism" (156) -- Latin American magical realism is concerned with representing unresolved duality. Toward this end, magical realists undermine their credibility and legitimacy by including incredible tales of the illegitimate.

The theme of illegitimate children which is so common in the extended family histories recounted by Garcia Marquez, Allende, and Esquivel suggests a genetic model of duality in which a struggle between many antithetical elements finds expression. European civilization and native Indian culture, Man and Woman, the political Right and the political Left, even Life and Death are as contrary and difficult to synthesize as the magical and the real. The struggle for synthesis -- for unity and harmony -- recapitulates the biological history of Latin America and the superimposition of of an Old World Caucasian consciousness and gene pool on the indigenous Indians of the New World. Clearly, the suggested synthesis of such a marriage would be represented by the genetically rich, hybrid race -- the mestizo of Central and South America. But just how categorically such a synthesis has historically been repudiated is evidenced by the fact that the progenitors of the new race, the conquistadors, did not typically marry the Indian women; furthermore the literal meaning of the name given to an entire race of racially mixed descendants presupposes their repudiation. In Spanish, *mestizo* means half-breed, bastard, or mongrel dog.

The conquistadors also brought the Catholic faith to Latin America where it has been embraced with an unparalleled fervor. The Catholic Church has been instrumental in resisting the synthesis of critical dualities with which Latin American magical realism is principally concerned. The Church's message of love and forgiveness has been an immeasurable blessing, but at the same time, orthodox doctrines have often perpetuated cultural discrimination in favor of the high-born -- the legitimate. The doctrine of original sin has lent ontological justification to an entire race's semantically engendered sense of inferiority. A profound ambivalence toward the Church is reflected in the works of Latin

American magical realists and is accompanied by numerous references and allusions to the Bible.

Ultimately, magical realists are most concerned with obviating a facile synthesis, maintaining an identity -- a genetic solitude -- that is as inviolable as a gene on a chromosome. The dualities with which Latin American magical realism is principally concerned are as unresolved as the terms magic and real. Furthermore, magical realists present these terms as essentially unresolvable, short of apocalypse. Just as fuel and air combine to form fire -- to their mutual destruction -- these novels' apocalyptic closures represent the result of a forced and failed synthesis.

This thesis is divided into sections that are designed to reconstruct and elaborate on an interpretation of Latin American magical realism which emphasizes a genetic model of unresolved duality. These sections include: Predilections, Definitions, and Duality; An Overview of the Argument; The Social and Political Climate of the Caribbean; The Authors' Political Orientations; Magical Realism as an Armored Vehicle for Social and Political Dissent; Social and Political Conflict as a Metaphor for Broader Issues; Philosophical Duality; A Genetic Model of Duality; Bridging the Gap: Legitimacy and Credibility (a discussion which includes three techniques that help establish legitimacy and credibility: retrospective arrangement, inter-authorial solidarity, and a circular model of time); Incredibility; Illegitimacy; A Repudiated Synthesis; The Church and the Bible: Duality in the Name of Unity; Resignation, Resilience, and Racial Survival; and "Shot-gun" Synthesis: Apocalyptic Closure.

In an anticipated armistice with those who would argue that I could not possibly understand the Latin American experience foregrounded in the fiction,

I will accede that perhaps I do not. I do not know what it is like to awaken to find myself the only living person on a train of two hundred cars, loaded with three thousand dead, bound for the dumping ground of the ocean (Garcia-Marquez, 312).[4] I haven't lived the experience of surviving the Odyssey of return to my village, where the voices of protest have been massacred, to find that the official version that, "nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town," has been universally accepted out of fear (316). I do not have ancestral memories of centuries of persecution; I do not know what it is like to be told who I can and cannot marry; and although I am fluent in Spanish, even this is not the same as being born into the avian music of the language.

Still, in some ways, the profound differences between my experience and that of the Latin American authors being discussed may prove to be a strong suit. By this I mean that the dualities implied between my world and the world of the novels suggest precisely the type of unresolvable dualities imbricated in the works of Latin American magical realists. No matter how much I study the texts, I will never capture the experience of having friends and family members eliminated or *disappeared* by a censorial junta, in much the same way that the magical will never achieve synthesis with the real. The European reality of monarchs and viceroys is by nature foreign to the Latin American reality of monkeys and macaws. Though they may be juxtaposed and intermixed, they never truly blend -- they remain essentially separate and solitary. Thus, in many ways, my task, as I approach these important contemporary texts, recapitulates

[4] One Hundred Years of Solitude, published in 1967 as Cien Anos de Soledad, and subsequently translated into over thirty languages, is a primary text in this work. Although other works by the same author are referred to, unless otherwise noted, citations to Garcia-Marquez refer to the 1991 Harper edition of One Hundred Years of Solitude, translated by Gregory Rabassa.

the tone and task of magical realists who juxtapose dual realities which mutually constitute dual realms of magic and miracle. As Earl Shorris has suggested, "Perhaps no Latino writer can write a book about Latinos" (13).

The Social and Political Climate of the Caribbean

Unresolved social and political conflicts foregrounded in the fiction of Latin America ultimately point toward the unresolvable nature of even more universal dualities shared by all men everywhere, and by Latinos in particular. A discussion of Latin American magical realism as a vehicle for social and political comment and dissent deserves priority treatment because the inclusion of these elements is an important part of the definition of the sub-genre for some critics. It is not enough to point out, as David Danow does, that in "what has come to be known and appreciated world wide as Latin American 'magical realism,' [impossible] pieces of information are . . . presented in precise factual manner as basic reportage" (65). For Stephen Elliott, as for others, what is equally important is that the techniques of Latin American magical realists are used to "heighten the intensity of [a] realistic portrayal of social and political issues by introducing grotesque or fanciful material" (333).

The dual role of the Latin American writer as an artist and also as a social and political "voice" proceeds from a dual predicament unique to Latin American intellectuals. In the first place, contemporary Latin American writers have an important message to encode; they are frequently highly active in the political environment of their countries, and they choose to use their creative talents to expose the oppression and repression that have so often been the social and political reality in Latin America. As Jorge Castaneda reports,

"through the long night of South American military dictatorships and dirty wars, intellectuals [have] denounce[d] human right abuses, [and] resisted attempts at censorship, often becoming, at great personal risk, the core of the resistance against authoritarian rule" (178-9). The active and chosen involvement of writers in the political evolution of their countries is complemented by the fact that, in Latin America, social and critical comment has traditionally been required and expected of writers and other intellectuals. Writing in countries where open opposition to military and political regimes is so brutally prohibited as to be nearly inconceivable, intellectuals, Castaneda states,

> . . . have always fulfilled a central function -- and perhaps played a disproportionate role -- in Latin American societies and politics. . . . Partly as a result of the weakness of representative institutions, key intellectuals [have] occupied a decisive space in many Latin societies . . . [and] a thin line between intellectual activity and political activism has made for a tenuous distinction. (177)

Castaneda goes on to explain that, in Latin America, "where societies are polarized, and knowledge and social recognition are rare, almost anyone who writes, paints, acts, teaches, and speaks out, or even sings, become 'an intellectual'" (177).

Cast, willingly or not, into the arena of social and political critique, Latin American intellectuals "for nearly five centuries . . . . dating back to Fray Bartolome de las Casas's fruitless attempts to protect the Indians of New Spain, have through their writings, teachings, speeches, and other activities systematically substituted for innumerable institutions and social actors" (178). As Mario Vargas Llosa, author of such masterpieces of magical realism as Aunt

Julia and the Scriptwriter and The Green House, has written:

> Why is it that in Peru and other Latin American countries writers have to be basically politicians, agitators, reformers, social commentators, moralists, instead of creators and artists? The fundamental reason is not to be found so much in the social condition of our countries or in the problems they face, as in the fact that literature, for better or worse, has for centuries been the only effective means of exposing these problems. (5)

As Peru's "most distinguished author, [Vargas Llosa] was virtually drafted to run for [the] office [of president] against the perceived origins of the country's debacle" (Castaneda, 179). Responding to Vargas Llosa's statement, Peter Earle has written:

> The problems Vargas Llosa refers to are reflected, literarily, in many ways -- most strikingly perhaps through the figure of the antihero that dominates some of the sprightliest Latin American novels of the twentieth century . . . in which military or dictatorial characters determine the atmosphere and course of action. (544)

Earl reports that while Vargas Llosa "overemphasizes the extraliterary at the expense of the literary (a literary work is *always* more than a social, moral, or political vehicle), books have . . . been a steadier and more reliable source of disclosure in Latin America than radio, television, or the press" (544-45).

That repressive governments have even allowed literature critical of its policies to be published at the same time that they have vigorously censored other media is surprising, and as we will see, perhaps part of the explanation derives from elements peculiar to magical realism. Isabel Allende reminds us,

with considerable irony, of the suppressive Pinochet regime's uncharacteristic tolerance of dissident literature:

> A poet friend of mine says that since the military doesn't read, it hasn't realized that books can be dangerous. So, in Chile, while they censor press notices of the fall of Marcos and Baby Doc, they still sell in bookstores works like Missing or Labyrinth, or the books of Antonio Skarmeta, Ariel Dorfman, and many others who have written on the tragedy of Chile in recent years. (Lecture, 1987)

Garcia-Marquez echoes the ironies reported by Allende, and suggests that, with the notoriety of their status as intellectuals, writers often became power brokers, power players, and ultimately power sources. Castaneda suggests that "Garcia-Marquez stretches things perhaps, but he says aloud what many think" (196):

> There is a curious relationship between intellectuals and political power in Latin America. The State and the powers-that-be both need us and fear us. They need us because we give them prestige they lack; they fear us because our sentiments and views can damage them. In the history of power in Latin America, there are only military dictatorships or intellectuals. No wonder then -- and it is a fascinating thing -- that there was so much coddling of the intellectuals by the State. Under these circumstances, one cannot be always completely independent. (Interview with Castaneda, 196)

The Authors' Political Orientations

The political affiliations of Isabel Allende and Gabriel Garcia Marquez are well known. Laura Esquivel's political orientation is less obvious, although in some ways the themes she incorporates are more revolutionary than those of her overtly political contemporaries. Allende, the daughter of a Chilean diplomat, was born in 1942 in Lima, Peru. Donna Olendorf reports that, "When Chilean President Salvador Allende was assassinated in 1973 as part of a military coup against his socialist government, it had a profound effect on his niece, novelist Isabel Allende" (4-5). Allende told Publishers Weekly interviewer Amanda Smith: "I think I have divided my life [into] before that day and after that day. In that moment, I realized that everything was possible -- that violence was a dimension that was always around you" (1 March, 1985).

Allende and her family did not at first believe that the Pinochet dictatorship could last in Chile, but they soon found it too dangerous to remain in the country and fled to Venezuela. Although she was an accomplished journalist, Olendorf reports that, "Allende found it difficult to get a job in Venezuela and did not write for several years; but after receiving word from her grandfather, a nearly one hundred year old man [he was ninety-nine] who had remained in Chile, she began to write in a letter to him" (5). "My grandfather thought people died only when you forgot them," the author explained to Harriet Shapiro in People. "I wanted to prove to him that I had forgotten nothing, that his spirit was going to live forever" (10 June, 1985).

Peter Earle reports that,

> The letter to Grandfather got longer and longer. A year later (1982) it had grown to five-hundred pages. It was a diary in

> retrospect, a family chronicle, an autobiography, a political testimony, a group portrait and contemporary history,a series of experiments with magic. In other words, a novel [The House of the Spirits].[5] Allende was a journalist in search of a complementary medium. Aesthetically, she would now participate in the basic ritual of Latin American literature: a celebration of reality. Ethically, she wanted to bear witness to social injustice, political violence, and repression -- having been motivated by the betrayal and murder by right-wing conspirators of an uncle on her father's side, President Salvador Allende. (543-4)

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's affiliation with the political left is perhaps even more well known. He was born in 1928 in the small town of Aracateca *la Guajira* (the peasant) near the Caribbean coast of Colombia. He was the first of sixteen children. Collier, Skidmore, and Blakemore report that "in the 1940's he studied law at the National University, Bogata, but never qualified, turning instead to journalism. He worked for the Bogata newspaper *El Espectador*, which also printed his first fiction" (393). While Garcia Marquez was on assignment in Europe, *El Espectador* was closed down by the dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinella, "leaving the Colombian writer stranded in poverty in Paris" (393). Williams reports that while in Paris, the author worked on manuscripts of *La Mala Hora* (In Evil Hour) and *El Colonel No Tiene Quien le Escribe* (No one Writes to the Colonel) (Chronology, unpaginated). In 1958, he moved to Venezuela. Shortly thereafter, Fidel Castro gained an appreciation of the value of Garcia Marquez's eloquence and he invited the Colombian writer to Cuba

[5] As in the case of Garcia-Marquez, page-only citations of Allende's work will refer to The House of the Spirits, the 1993 Bantam edition, translated by Magda Bogin.

(Collier, Skidmore, and Blakemore, 393). In Cuba, together with Ricardo Massetti, he founded the leftist Presa Latina news agency (Castaneda, 56), where he continued to work until 1961 when he resigned to pursue a career as a novelist. While in Cuba, he became a close friend of Fidel Castro and a champion of left-wing political activism.

After Garcia Marquez left Cuba to write in Mexico, Castaneda relates the story of his fifteen year old son's request for a trip to Cuba as a present: "The Colombian writer agreed. He gave his son a camera and some spare change and asked the young man to travel the island, find a barefoot child, and bring back a snapshot of that 'archetypal image of the region's poverty'" (190). Castaneda reports that "Rodrigo crisscrossed Cuba and found no shoeless child, much to his father's and his own pride and delight" (190). Castaneda conjectures that

> if it wasn't true, it could have been, and most intellectuals familiar with the anecdote thought it should have been. Cuba *did* eradicate extreme poverty. It did provide education for everyone, and did deliver free, universal, quality health care for the immense majority of its inhabitants. Moreover, Cuba, in the eyes of its intellectual supporters, avoided one great cost: the abdication of national sovereignty. (190)

As Garcia Marquez revealed in an article entitled "Le recit du recit," the politically motivated murder of a close friend during this period caused the author to abandon his career as a novelist for a time and prompted his return to journalism (34).[6] In an interview with Castaneda, Garcia Marquez offered the

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[6] In an essay entitled "En Chile Como en Chicago," Garcia Marquez details a series of murders of political prisoners and political figures.

reflection that the "definition of Latin American *intelectual de izquierda* [the intellectual left] became the unconditional defense of Cuba. And the Cubans, through their own mechanisms, determined who complied with this solidarity, and who did not, taking advantage of the situation that prevailed for many intellectuals in their countries" (184-85).

Indeed, Garcia Marquez became perhaps too close to Castro. Castaneda reports that "Garcia Marquez himself was the only well-known confidant Fidel Castro retained in the autumn of his patriarchy, and . . . [he] knew full well that his closeness made it virtually impossible for him to truly exercise his influence and ease Fidel toward change and history" (196). Castaneda compares Garcia Marquez's predicament to that of the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa. He reports that "Llosa, finally, took the bond between the intellectual and the Prince to its ultimate conclusion: he tried to *become* the Prince, running for president of Peru in 1990" (196). Castaneda concludes his discussion of the political impact of Latin American magical realists by observing

> The too-close-for-comfort ties all of these intellectuals, and so many others less reowned and affluent, established with power stem from the fact of their own power. The chumminess and, in the last analysis, the erosion of critical distance are a logical consequence of the intellectuals' strength: one cannot exist without the other. (196-97)

The personal biography of Mexican writer Laura Esquivel, whose Like Water for Chocolate will be closely examined in this work, reads far less like a

litany of left-wing political activism.[7] Born in 1951, the daughter of a telegraph operator, Esquivel is a successful novelist and screenwriter and is married to Alfonso Arau, a successful film director. Esquivel is a generation removed from some of the most brutal political battles in Latin America, and this distance is multiplied by the fact that most parts of Mexico are significantly more removed, in a historical sense, from political violence than are Colombia and Chile. Still, when one visits that country and encounters the never smiling, dark, brooding eyes of the rifle carrying police-children who guard government buildings, even in the most peaceful states like Yucatan and Quintana Roo, a sense of smoldering danger, and of the presence of deep-seated and ever-viable seeds of discontent and resentment, is disconcertingly palpable. Ursula Buendia, the indomitable matriarch of One Hundred Years of Solitude, may not be afraid of young soldiers who are, "after all, school children playing at being grownups" (Garcia Marquez, 108), but she should be.

In spite of Esquivel's apparent lack of leftist credentials, and in spite of the enormous success of her first novel, Like Water for Chocolate is in some ways more profoundly revolutionary than the works of Garcia-Marquez and Allende. Her depiction of the traditional matriarchically organized Latino family (Latin American children are given four names, and it is the last name of their mother which becomes their last name) as an odious, reprehensible, and utterly unsatisfactory institution cuts more deeply than the overtly political statements of many other writers.

[7] The edition of Like Water for Chocolate that will be referred to is the 1992 Doubleday edition, translated by Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen.

Magical Realism as an Armored Vehicle for Social and Political Dissent

Despite the caution, respect, and even coddling with which intellectuals are often handled, Earle reminds us that

> . . . of course books *are* dangerous. Even if, in Chile's current economy, one like The House of Spirits sells for the equivalent of a month's salary at the minimum wage, they do get read. They circulate on loan and in photocopies or mimeograph; they're discussed in informal seminars; they help stimulate clandestine opposition and preserve the historical memory. (545)

In a lecture at the University of the District of Columbia entitled "Writing in Latin America," Allende emphasized the "moment of history the writer is born into," especially in Latin America, a world of great "struggles and defeats, brutality and magic" (qtd. in Earle, 545). Earle reports that the author became more and more aware of Latin America's centuries-old tradition of violent revolution, and he remarks that "Allende matured intellectually with her uncle's socialist movement and became a novelist at her reactionary grandfather's death" (545). He characterizes her book as a

> celebration of a momentous social struggle in which those two figures were principals. Only fictitious names are used in the story, for places as well as for people, but the implications are obvious: this was to be a composite testimony of many voices (like One Hundred Years of Solitude, with which superficial comparisons have often been made), written with a recent exile's sense of

urgency, and a family member's intimacy. (546)[8]

Earle feels that "the political dispersion of the family [Allende] tells about is microcosmic, for contemporary Chilean history is also one of dispersion, beginning the day after Salvador Allende's election in 1970" (546). Guided and financed by the United States government, a "complex opposition program" orchestrated a *coup d'etat* on September 11, 1973 in which General Pinochet was installed as president, eventually necessitating the author's relocation. Earle identifies definitive parallels between politics and Allende's fiction when he observes that

> Soon after Allende's election, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared at a National Security Council meeting, 'I don't see why we have to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people.' In The House of the Spirits President Allende's niece has her principal male character say of the impoverished tenant farmers at Tres Marias, his country estate, 'They're like children, they can't handle responsibility.' (545)

Like the "ever distant" United States Secretary of State, Allende's *patron*, Esteban Trueba, is not comfortable being a spectator. He envisions a "paternalized utopia" of well-fed, industrious peasants who are educated enough "to follow simple instructions and read signs, to write brief messages, and to count, *y nada mas* [and nothing more], 'for fear they would fill their minds with ideas unsuited to their station and condition'" (545-6).

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[8] Many critics have pointed to Allende's mimicry of Garcia Marquez, among them Orlando Castellanos, Mario Rodrigez Fernandez, and Flora Schiminovich. Robert Antoni suggests that Allende's mimicry is so circumspectually self aware that The House of the Spirits actually constitutes a parody of One Hundred Years of Solitude.

In response to the dangers inherent in voicing dissent in countries with centuries-old traditions of censorship and political persecution, and death by summary execution and mysterious disappearance, Latin American magical realism has evolved into a unique vehicle for social and political dissent, a vehicle that is capable of affording its authors a measure of protection from persecution. It has become an <u>armored</u> vehicle, fortified by its fictionality, a fictionality which is underscored by its inclusion of the fantastic and the magical. The authors can claim that social and political horrors exposed in their work are just as fictional as, for example, Remedios the Beauty ascending directly to heaven before the eyes of her family (Garcia Marquez, 242).

The themes of political suppression, social injustice, and the horrors of warfare are omnipresent in Garcia Marquez, Allende, and Esquivel, just as they are in the works of Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortazar, Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, and countless other Latin American authors. The residents of Macondo must paint their houses in accordance with the colors of the ruling political party (Garcia Marquez, 57). Blanca remembers the story of

> the Socialist leader who a few years earlier had bicycled across the province, distributing pamphlets on the haciendas and organizing the tenants until the Sanchez brothers caught him, beat him to death, and hanged him from a telephone pole at the intersection of two roads where everyone could see him. (Allende, 172)

Revolutionary forces make it "impossible to travel in safety" (Esquivel, 132).

But just as omnipresent are fantastic installments of magical realism, the matter-of-fact, reportorial exposition of absolutely impossible "facts." There are

believable "rains" of machine gun fire in which

> . . . the wave of bullets, . . . [like] a seismic voice, a volcanic breath, the roar of cataclysm [cuts down three-thousand protesting workers] penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns. (Garcia Marquez, 311)

But there are also unbelievable rains that last "for four years, eleven months, and two days" (320) and onions that, when peeled, provoke a wave,

> . . . a great tide of tears that spilled over the edge of the table and flooded across the kitchen floor. . . . That afternoon, when the uproar had subsided and the water had been dried up by the sun, Nacha swept up the residue the tears had left on the red stone floor. There was enough salt to fill a ten-pound sack -- it was used for cooking and lasted a long time. (Esquivel, 6)

Within the armored vehicle of magical realism, authors are capable of <u>dis</u>arming an interpretation of their fiction that might result in the kind of governmental censorship that stranded Garcia Marquez in Paris and that exiled Allende to Venezuela. They can avert such censure and escape nearly naked of blame by simply claiming that any apparently volatile or incendiary material is just as fanciful as the spontaneous combustion of a shower stall due to the effects of eating quail in rose petal sauce on a hot blooded young woman:

> The only thing that kept her going was the image of the refreshing shower ahead of her, but unfortunately she was never

> able to enjoy it, because the drops that fell from the shower never made it to her body: they evaporated before they reached her. Her body was giving off so much heat that the wooden walls began to split and burst into flame. Terrified, she thought she would be burned to death, and she ran out of the little enclosure just as she was, completely naked. (54)

Allende's jest that "the military doesn't read" notwithstanding, the idea of magical realism as an armored vehicle for social and political dissent which offers a measure of protection to its authors is somewhat problematical. As John Kilgore has written,

> If 'magical realism' is a way of encoding political protest, how is this encoding different from outright suppression? It's very hard to have it both ways here: if the political protest is there, then it ought to be apparent to everyone; if it's not apparent to everyone, then how is it there? Are the right-wing colonels somehow less capable of understanding what was meant than sympathetic liberals? This seems very unlikely . . . . (letter to the author, 10 July 1995)

Kilgore suggests that the Freudian concept of "overdetermined symbolism" may point the way toward the resolution of this conflict, in that the plating of the armored vehicle may consist in reflective and refractive symbols that have been deployed in so many ways in this literature of excess that it becomes impossible to say with certainty that an event, even an event with apparently obvious overtones of reference to historical situations, can be interpreted to mean any one, clear thing with any degree of precision.

The cloaking of social and political dissent in multiple meanings conveyed within the armored vehicle of magical realism is further complicated by many authors' pervasive ambivalence in their depiction of social and political reform. This ambivalence is reminiscent of Palencia-Roth's characterization of his "second stage" in the internal psychology of colonialism. Colonel Aureliano Buendia, the "Commander in Chief of the revolutionary forces, with jurisdiction from one border to the other, and the man most feared by the government" (Garcia Marquez, 106), ultimately renounces all the important principles he had championed by signing the treaty of Neerlandia (180) after coming to the realization that what he has thought he has been "fighting for. . . [is really] something that doesn't have any meaning for anyone. . . . 'I've come to realize only just now that I'm fighting because of pride'" (139). Allende's archetypal conservative, Esteban Trueba, a man of rigorous and righteous principles, comes full circle by pulling political strings to rescue Pedro Tercero, the consummate liberal revolutionary. Similarly, the humanitarian, liberal ideals for which Pedro Tercero composes his revolutionary songs become abysmally perverted by the power hungry, bastard offspring of Esteban Trueba, who repeatedly rapes his captive political prisoner, who is also his step niece.

Esquivel demonstrates the same thoroughgoing ambivalence toward revolution. Revolutionary forces plunder the De la Garza ranch (89); they make it "impossible to travel in safety" (132) and prohibit a doctor's attendance at the birth of a baby (71); they are more than likely responsible for the rape of Mama Elena which leaves her an invalid (129). Still, it is the revolution which offers Gertrudis the opportunity to triumph in life: "When they got close enough, [Tita] could see that the person in charge of [the] troop was none other than her sister

Gertrudis. . . . She had come back with the intention of showing Mama Elena how she had triumphed in life. She was a *general* in the revolutionary army" (177-8).

Social and Political Conflict as a Metaphor for Broader Dualities

The ambivalence with which Latin American magical realists portray social and political themes renders any identification of this sub-genre with social and political critique highly problematical. As much as by an armored vehicle for social and political dissent, magical realists are shielded from suppression by the fact that they often depict the left as being just as bad as the right. Williamson reports that, in One Hundred Years of Solitude, "the chaotic violence which ravages the country . . . converts the liberals into the mirror-image of their conservative enemies" (53). Even more than representing a "voice" for reform, magical realists seem to be employing ideological concerns as a metaphor for even more far-reaching dualities that permeate human experience on a universal scale. If Latin American magical realism were principally concerned with the exposition and correction of certain undeniably legitimate social and political problems, then it follows that if these problems were to be resolved, magical realism would evaporate like the drops of water falling toward Gertrudis's naked body. But although the seeds of dissatisfaction in Latin America remain deep-seated and viable, two facts remain: first, the social and political climate has dramatically improved in most of the countries of Latin America and some of the most serious problems have indeed shown signs of evaporation; and second, at the same time, Latin American magical realism is enjoying an unprecedented explosion of popularity. The by-product

of these two observations can only be that, while the inclusion of revolution, politics, and social critique is an important element in Latin American magical realism, Latin American magical realism is, in truth, concerned with even broader issues.

Magical realism, in the regional context of contemporary Latin American literature, is an attempt to legitimize the Latin American experience to an international intellectual community. Latin American writers, like all living beings, are prompted by biological needs, and their works must be interpreted with these needs in mind. To be heard and to be understood are categorical imperatives for any artist; these imperatives are magnified in the case of "third world" artists.[9] In a larger, philosophical context -- a context that Williams describes as "transcendental regionalism" (156) -- magical realism is about duality -- premonitionally divined, unresolved duality -- duality which is unresolvable short of apocalypse.

Donald Shaw essentially agrees with this multi-contextual assessment of the nature of Latin American magical realism. He observes, of One Hundred Years of Solitude for example, "that the novel appears to function on three different levels of meaning: one related to the nature of reality, a second concerned with universal human destiny and a third connected with the problems of Latin America" (99).

Philosophical Duality

It doesn't take a brain surgeon to notice that magical and real do not work

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[9] The by-product of an author's autobiographical experience and his biological imperative to write has been described by the term "autobiology." Autobiology would like to be autobiography, but it is biology talking. See the author's Ulysses: The Autobiology of James Joyce and Bluebeard: The Autobiology of Kurt Vonnegut.

well together as descriptors for the same phenomenon. What is "real" can be accounted for by plausible and realistic explanations: it is natural. What is "magical" cannot be explained in plausible and realistic terms, without exposing some legerdemain: it is supernatural.

The magical can be understood in terms of the real in only one of two ways: either the "magical" is an illusory appearance of reality in which the observer is being deceived about the "real" nature of the phenomena observed -- in this case, the "magical" is not really magical; or, the magical is really a manifestation of the supernatural, which challenges the foundations of a common sense, scientific, natural "reality" as it is supposedly understood -- in this case, "reality" is rendered the illusory appearance of an at best partially apprehendable, supernatural reality.

To approach magical realism as a reformulation of the ancient western duality between appearance and reality is to cross the border between literature and philosophy, the first of many inter-disciplinary borders that the student of Latin American literature must be prepared to cross. Forays into the fields of politics, sociology, anthropology, geography, theology, and biology are likewise necessitated because "the dualistic world" of magical realists is, according to David Danow, a world that includes

> animals living in close proximity to man, close enough to devour his cash [and] colossal vegetation with an equally prodigious appetite. . . . Magical realist texts derive from a host of Latin American realities. Among the most apparent are an imposing geography, composed of daunting natural barriers -- impenetrable forests, dangerous waters, and portentous heights -- and a

> frequently unbearable humid Caribbean atmosphere that inevitably dampens the spirits. (67-71)

Danow notices that "the geographical proximity of the jungle to the city elicits a related omnipresent sense of the closeness of the prehistoric past to modern life, of myth, or primordial thinking, to scientific thought" (71). And it is that closeness,

> filtered through a creative human imagination nurtured on a mix of the traditions and beliefs of the native Indians, as well as those of the transplanted Africans and Europeans absorbed into that world of prolific cultural hybridization, allows for a seemingly inevitable portrayal of the fantastic as factual and realistic. (67-71)

The crazy tropical isthmus that connects the enormity of North America with the inverse logic of Patagonia offers itself as a physical metaphor -- a twisted strand of DNA, blended and hybridized but maintaining individual regional characteristics as discrete and inviolable as genes on a chromosome. Like the genetic makeup of the Latin American *mestizo*, magical realism presents an apparent synthesis that is actually a war without end between irreconcilable and ancient adversaries. In Latin America, the European lineage of the *conquistadors* has been superimposed on the Clan of the Jaguar, and though a fascinatingly diverse *pinata* of surprises has resulted, the obdurate inability of genes to change, blend, or give up their inviolate individuality is the biological reality. Tobin believes that if a "zero-degree of reductionism" is applied to a study of the dualities inherent in Latin American magical realism, the results look "so much like the double helix of DNA" (217).

A Genetic Model of Duality

A genetic model representing the dualities inherent in Latin American magical realism is much more than a metaphor. The themes of genetics, heredity, and racial responsibility dominate the narration of family histories within the works: they consistently explore the question of who can marry whom and with what consequences. Although Ursula and Jose Arcadio Buendia's "marriage was predicted from the time they had come into the world" (20), potential genetic repercussions make the union problematical:

> . . . when they expressed their desire to be married their own relatives tried to stop it. They were afraid that those two healthy products of two races that had interbred over the centuries would suffer the shame of breeding iguanas. There had already been a horrible precedent. An aunt of Ursula's, married to an uncle of Jose Arcadio Buendia, had a son who went through life wearing loose, baggy trousers and who bled to death after having lived forty-two years in the purest state of virginity, for he had been born and had grown up with a cartilaginous tail in the shape of a corkscrew and with a small tuft of hair on the tip. A pig's tail that was never allowed to be seen by any woman and that cost him his life when a butcher friend did him the favor of chopping it off with his cleaver. Jose Arcadio Buendia, with the whimsy of his nineteen years, resolved the problem with a single phrase: 'I don't care if I have piglets as long as they can talk.' (20-1)

In The House of the Spirits, despite the fact that Blanca's lineage is already hybridized -- "[s]he had inherited the Truebas' Spanish and Arab blood,

their regal bearing and haughty grin, and the olive skin and dark eyes of her Mediterranean genes, all colored by her mother's heritage, from which she drew a sweetness no Trueba had ever known" (143) -- she is denied marriage to Pedro Tercero Garcia because he is racially (and socially) inferior. In Like Water for Chocolate, part of the mortal conflict between Tita and her mother proceeds from Mama Elena's transference of her own romantic frustrations onto her daughter's destiny. The love of Mama Elena's life was denied to her for racial and genetic reasons, as Tita discovers when she finds a packet of her mothers letters:

> [Mama Elena] hadn't been allowed to marry [Jose Trevino] because he had Negro blood in his veins. A colony of Negroes, fleeing from the Civil War in the United States, from the risk they ran of being lynched, had come to settle near the village. Young Jose Trevino was the product of an illicit love affair between the elder Jose Trevino and a beautiful Negress. When Mama Elena's parents discovered the love that existed between their daughter and this mulatto, they were horrified and forced her into an immediate marriage with Juan De la Garza, Tita's father. (137)

Genes, the messengers of biological diversity, remain, in spite of the most vigorous racial mixing, separate and inviolable -- individual and alone. Garcia-Marquez describes this situation as solitude. In the terms of this genetic model of duality, the solitude and inviolability of its component elements make the resolution or synthesis of duality impossible, short of apocalypse. And just as fire combines fuel and air to their mutual destruction, so apocalypse, rather

than representing a synthesis, represents the antithesis of synthesis, because in apocalyptic closure, the constitutive elements at work in the dynamics of the novels are destroyed.

Some of the principle dualities with which Latin American magical realism is concerned and which find expression in this genetic model include: the super imposition of the Old World on the New; the introduction of new languages, especially Spanish, and their imperfect assimilation into the tropical tongues of native speakers; the effect of the Roman Catholic Church on a tradition which likewise worships human sacrifice; legitimacy and illegitimacy; credibility and incredibility; truth and lies; reality and appearance; the political right and the political left; the experiences of men and the experiences of women; and, ultimately, life and death. Penuel offers an extended list of

> binary oppositions . . . and polyphonic elements . . . almost too lengthy to enumerate: sexual purity and modesty vs. prostitution and free love, life vs. death, the official version vs. the empirical version, history vs. literature, liberals vs. conservatives, the fusion of past, present, and future times, pagan vs. Christian values, the sacred vs. the profane, the conscious vs. the unconscious, the private vs. the public, the serious vs. the comic. (63)

Clive Griffin amplifies Penuel's notation of the inclusion of the duality between the serious and the comic by writing, in "The Humour of One Hundred Years of Solitude," that "it is the fate of fine comic writers to be taken seriously" (81). The imperfect and ultimately impossible synthesis of duality is consistently suggested in the magical realism of Latin American authors. The magical and the real can no more be melded than can, as witnessed by more than two-

thousand years of oscillating effort by western philosophy, the concepts of appearance and reality.

A brief and parenthetical word about Leonardo DaVinci -- he is advanced by some as the last universal man. His expertise embraced virtually everything that was known in his day about art, music, literature, science, medicine, and engineering. It has been suggested that, since his time, the complexities of the modern world have necessitated specialization. There is simply too much information for any one mind to circumnavigate, and we have become, by necessity, a universe of *specialistas.* While superficially legitimate -- one researcher has, obviously, no hope of learning everything about everything (as Leonardo might nearly have done) -- it is hard to conceive of a more misguided plan of study. Precisely because the world is so complicated, the fields of inquiry are intimately interrelated. Even if the attempt is a failed attempt which recapitulates the attempt to synthesize the dominant dualities of human existence, one simply must attempt to be a universal thinker if the results of his work are to have any relationship to the multi-textured reality of the modern world. For this reason, perhaps it does take a brain surgeon, and maybe a bit of a butterfly collector, to discover anything meaningful about Latin American magical realism.

Bridging the Gap: Legitimacy and Credibility

Latin American magical realists have attempted to bridge the gap between dual literary worlds -- the unique representation of the Latin American New World experience, described by Alejo Carpentier as *lo real maravillosa* [the marvelous real] on the one hand, and the world of the Western tradition of

literature on the other.[10] Writing of Garcia Marquez's country, Williams remarks that "Colombia prides itself on being a stronghold of Spanish tradition. Colombians consider Bogota the 'Athens of South America.'" He goes on to observe that ". . . the nation's relatively conservative attitude toward the arts and lack of a publishing house of international stature have limited the viability and visibility of the Colombian novel *extra muros*, so to speak" (4).

In a discussion of magical realists' attempts to legitimize their world to the international intellectual community, Brian Coniff reports that, in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, Gabriel Garcia Marquez explained that writers like himself "had been forced to respond to one of the saddest and most productive challenges in modern literature: 'the want of conventional resources to make our life credible' (Garcia Marquez, Nobela Lectura, 208-9)" (Coniff,168). There was talent, spark, and genius of a kind never known before because, genetically speaking, there was a new mix of possibilities for excellence. But the "backward colonies" and "dark chambers" of Central and South America were almost intellectually unheard of (212). Latin American writers, like singers, like to be heard.

"Retrospective Arrangement"

One way that credibility is established in many Latin American works is by the employment of what James Joyce called a "retrospective arrangement" in the structure of the text.[11] That is, some works are presented as historically

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[10] See Carpentier's prologue to his novel El Reino de este Mundo [The Kingdom of This World, translated by Harriet de Onis].

[11] In Ulysses, for example, retrospective arrangement not only consists in the narrators' reminiscences; retrospective arrangement also forces the reader to look backward in the text to re-examine previously reported "facts" in the light of new information. See Brook Thomas's James Joyce's Ulysses: A Book of Many Happy Returns, p. 52-56.

reliable records in which the ending is known from the beginning and the story you are about to hear is prefaced by a voice that testifies to the authenticity and historicity of the events about to be described.[12] Consider lines from the very first pages of four important Latin American texts:

> Although you have every right not to believe me after putting up for so long with my sly tricks and falsifications, I swear to you by the bones of my mother that what I am now about to show you is no illusion but the plain and simple truth . . . . (Garcia Marquez, "Blacaman the Good, miracle-salesman," 1)

> Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point. (Garcia-Marquez, 1)

> . . . the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy. She was already in the habit of writing down important matters, and afterward, when she was mute, she also recorded trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own. (Allende, 1)

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[12] See Ian Watt's the Rise of the Novel for a more complete discussion of narrative authenticity.

> Take care to chop the onion fine. To keep from crying when you chop it (which is so annoying!), I suggest you place a little bit on your head. The trouble with crying over an onion is that once the chopping gets you started and the tears begin to well up, the next thing you know you just can't stop. I don't know whether that's even happened to you, but I have to confess it's happened to me, many times. Mama used to say it was because I was especially sensitive to onions, like my great-aunt, Tita. (Esquivel, 5)

In these four works, as in many others, a voice of authenticity recounting a history retrospectively arranged is never allowed to fade from the consciousness of the reader. It turns out that One Hundred Years of Solitude is a recounting of the centuries-old predictions of Nostradamus, deciphered and encoded by the gypsy Melquiades. As Williams remarks "the entire family history had been written already: every action throughout the generations had been the fulfillment of the family's destiny. Having been written, it is a fiction, just as is One Hundred Years of Solitude" (76).

The authenticity engendered by the retrospective arrangement of a family history structured around the (albeit fictional) history of a national hero, Colonel Aureliano Buendia, is reinforced when it turns out that the story unfolds exactly as predicted by a cryptic gypsy to whom "everything is known" (371). Lois Parkinson Zamora remarks that the narrator "constantly relates past events to subsequent events in a retrospective future tense, because the events for which the characters must wait are already known to him: [as] for Melquiades, the

future is past" (51).

The House of the Spirits is not only based on the diary entries of a clairvoyant grandmother; the authenticity of the retrospective narrative is further reinforced by the inclusion of journal entries and letters from the grandfather, a respected Senator in the conservative government -- letters which are recovered with the grandmother's effects. Earle describes the novel as "a diary, a family chronicle, an autobiography, a political testimony, a group portrait and contemporary history . . . *in retrospect*" (my italics, 543). Tita, in Like Water for Chocolate, also recovers love letters and diary entries from her mother's locked wardrobe, and the insights they afford are passed on to her grand niece, who writes the story "many years later," further reinforcing her tale by including monthly installments, recipes, and home remedies.

Solidarity

In addition to employing a retrospectively arranged historical narration as the structure for their story, Latin American magical realists reinforce their credibility by maintaining solidarity with one another. In things large and small they consciously mimic their contemporaries like Viceroys mimic Monarchs. The truthfulness of these authors' renditions of their Latin American experience is suggested, in spite of episodes which, taken one at a time, seem to be impossible, because they so frequently tell the same story in the same way: they present a united, if unlikely, front. As Roger Shattuck writes:

> They're all saying the same thing. It goes on and on. Having assimilated Borges and Robbe-Grillet and God knows who else, Gabriel Garcia Marquez created the masterpiece in the

> genre. In <u>One Hundred Years of Solitude</u> everything begins in reality and ends in fantasy. You can watch it happen. The natural gives birth to the supernatural, the surreal -- with no detectable shift in style or tone. Believe or disbelieve the events at your own risk. It's like an unstoppable roller coaster -- but we're not supposed to get dizzy! . . . (334)

When shopping for names, magical realists visit the *mercados* (marketplaces) of their contemporaries and pluck appellations like apples from their colleagues' collages. Both "Prudencio," the rival who precipitates the founding of Macondo, and "Melquiades," the gypsy who brings ice and alchemy, flying carpets and telescopes, and who encodes the predestined history of the Buendia family in Garcia-Marquez's Macondo, are lifted directly from the pages of Juan Rulfo's <u>Pedro Paramo</u>: ". . . there are still a few people around. Haven't you seen . . . Melquiades or old Prudencio?" (51) Williams reports that Garcia Marquez includes "characters . . . from the fiction of other writers, such as Carlos Fuentes and Julio Cortazar" (976). Garcia Marquez's Remedios the Beauty becomes Allende's Rosa the Beauty, who becomes Esquivel's Rosaura. Ursula Buendia is very phonetically similar to Ferula Trueba, especially when the written orthographical accent marks of the Spanish language are considered. There is a resident gringo in all three of these novels. A gringo brings the banana company to Macondo; a gringo agriculturalist brings insecticides to Allende's Tres Marias; and a gringo doctor brings North American medicine to replace the native herbal remedies in Esquivel's Piedras Negras. In all three novels, the North American gringo is named Mr. Brown. Naturally, the irony is hammered home in that, in each case,

Mr. Brown is the embodiment of everything white.

One could use up a tree committing to paper a catalog of all the careful cross references Latin American authors conscientiously make to one another. A signature of solidarity is discernible in tiny things, like almonds: "Jose Arcadio Buendia . . . decided . . . that they should plant almond trees instead of acacias on the streets, and [he] discovered, without ever revealing it, a way to make them live forever" (Garcia Marquez, 40); "Nana's gypsy tricks did not suffice, . . . and Nivea wished the ceremony would end at once so that she could return to her cool house . . . and taste the pitcher of barley water flavored with almonds" (Allende, 4); and "Tita extracted just a teaspoon of this . . . to mix with sweet almond oil for an excellent lip ointment" (Esquivel, 166-7). The solidarity is discernible in larger things, like rocks: the "smooth white stones, like prehistoric eggs" on the banks of Garcia Marquez' Macondo (1) have aged and discolored into Esquivels' Piedras Negras [black rocks] (239), and Allende's Tres Marias is "just a lawless heap of rocks, a no-man's land" (48). And certainly the solidarity of Latin American magical realists is discernible in the larger, global, and thematic elements of the books.

Clairvoyance is consistently presented as a natural fact. Aureliano is clairvoyant, as are Clara the Clairvoyant and Great Aunt Tita.[13] Hereditary memory is reported as a biological reality.[14] Indefatigable women play central roles,[15] and when the absurd demands they are confronted with become

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[13] Many instances of inter-authorial solidarity are so pronounced that they require extended citations to facilitate an appreciation of their premeditation. For clairvoyance, see Garcia Marquez, 15, 59, 67, 77, and 106; Allende,7, 8, 75, 76, 77, 98, 105, 119, and 158; Esquivel, 33, 49, 50, 73, 124, 167, 202, and 243.

[14] Hereditary memory: 6, 11; 7, 81, 119, and 145; 180.

[15] Indefatiguable women: 4, 108, 109, 151, 162, and 173; 19, 80, 89, 90, 106, 117, 121, 127, 132, 164, 177, and 193; 10, 11, 38, 89, 138, 147, 150, 171, 179, 213, 215, 229, and 238.

intolerable, these women consistently resort to a coping strategy of voluntary and extended periods of muteness: "Ursula . . . prohibited any talking aloud for a year" (Garcia Marquez, 91); "Clara was ten years old when she decided that speaking was pointless and locked herself in silence" (Allende, 73); and "Some day, when she felt like talking, she would tell John that; but now, she preferred silence" (Esquivel, 108). And in all of these novels, a youngest daughter in the family remains unmarried so that she can stay home to take care of her mother (Amaranta; Ferula; and Tita).

The magic of machines is represented in countless ways -- by Jose Arcadio Buendia's conviction that the internal magic of the pianola might be modified to make all engines of work self perpetuating (Garcia Marquez, 62); by the decision "to decipher the mysteries of the sewing machine" (Allende, 59); and by the discovery of a device that had "a thirty-gallon tank that was six feet high . . . that you filled with water, then you got a shower using gravity" (Esquivel, 54).

The ghosts that form the principal cast of Juan Rulfo's <u>Pedro Paramo</u> return to populate the texts of Garcia Marquez, Allende, and Esquivel (Garcia-Marquez, 22-23; Allende, 91; Esquivel, 243). In this hot climate, a character whose experience leaves him with a permanent chill is a recurring theme (106; 170; 107). Birds in cages reoccur (10; 17; 90-92). Gypsies are a fixture (8; 4; 110). Women cook, which is not so remarkable, except that they consistently cook up little artificial animals, and if they aren't cooking them, they are embroidering them or fashioning them in clay (39; 59; 8). An Indian nanny is present like a missing link: Visitacion (Garcia Marquez, 44); Nana (Allende, 28); and Nacha (Esquivil, 30). There is always a singing, guitar playing

revolutionary: Francisco the Man (Garcia-Marquez, 52); Pedro Tercero (Allende, 174); and Juan (Esquivel, 179). And there is always what they sing about: revolution.

Arnold Penuel discusses Garcia Marquez's solidarity with other authors in his Intertextuality in Garcia Marquez. He writes that

> Garcia Marquez's fiction presents an interesting challenge to intertextual studies First, because the Colombian writer brings to his fiction a wide reading background, spanning the centuries from Homer's time down to the present. Second, because, like most great writers, he is quite adept at covering his authorial tracks. Although he has revealed the identity of many of his favorite writers through numerous interviews--especially in the lengthy conversations with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza--the novelist is reserved about the writers who have influenced him, and, for the most part, he has spoken of influences only in a general way. Moreover, he invents and avails himself of an ample repertory of means to conceal his intertexts: displacement, the combination of displacement and straightforwardness, condensation, metaphor, juxtaposition, hyperbole, irony, paradox, and symbolism. Although his fiction can be read with pleasure on many levels, the stronger the reader's collaborative effort the richer the yield of meanings and the greater the pleasure. Needless to say, perhaps, a great part of this yield is produced in the discovery of the intertexts that lie hidden in his fiction. (xi-xii)

A Circular Model of Time

Latin American magical realists present a united front by cross referencing their fiction in a way that enhances their credibility, even as they relate the incredible. "They're all saying the same thing" (Shattuck, 334). They further reinforce the legitimacy of the Latin American experience they portray by adopting, within their novels, a circular model of time. Not only do they all appear to be telling a very similar story; within each text, the same events recur again and again in a way that convinces the reader of their plausibility by means of pure persistence. For example, Aureliano is not merely involved in the warfare of revolution in Garcia Marquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude:

> Colonel Aureliano Buendia organized thirty-two armed uprisings and he lost them all. He had seventeen male children by seventeen different women and they were exterminated one after the other on a single night before the oldest one had reached the age of thirty-five. He survived fourteen attempts on his life, seventy-three ambushes, and a firing squad. (my emphasis,106)

Williams concurs that "the political situation seems to repeats itself in interminable cycles: when there are not rebellions or wars among opposing parties, they arise against the Americans" (74).

The events that occur in Macondo reoccur, especially when it is time to christen children. There are actually a total of twenty-two Auriliano's, in addition to three Jose Arcadios, two Amaranta's, two Remedios', one Aureliano Jose, one Aureliano Babilonia, and one Arcadio. The house is repaired again and again, for over a century. The gypsies come, bringing magnets, music, alchemy, and ice. And the more things change, the more they stay the same.

The repetition of names in The House of the Spirits is less exaggerated -- there is only Old Pedro Garcia, Pedro Segundo Garcia, and Pedro Tercero Garcia -- but the theme of the circularity of time is just as omnipresent. Allende's narrator reports that "Golf was a novelty, bringing the cream of society together around a tiny ball, just as the Indians had done two hundred years before in these same places" (68). Esteban Trueba watches "the expressionless cows chewing their cuds, the sluggish labors of the peasants repeating the same motions day after day throughout their lives, the unchanging background of the snowy *cordillera*, and the frail column of smoke rising from the volcano" (97). Pedro Tercero waits for Blanca "in the place where they had met the summer before and where, years earlier Esteban Trueba had stolen Pancha Garcia's humble virginity" (156). Clara creates "imaginary animals, gluing half an elephant to half a crocodile, without realizing that she was doing in clay what her Aunt Rosa, whom she never knew, had done with thread on her enormous tablecloth" (174). In the political setting of the novel, Clara, the daughter of a leftist Senator (whose assassination by means of a poisoned bottle of brandy is averted when his daughter, Rosa the Beautiful, inadvertently takes a dose for medicinal purposes), marries Esteban, the consummate conservative. But in the midst of a chaotic revolutionary coup, in which the atrocities of the liberals replace those of the conservatives, Esteban comes full circle by pulling political strings to rescue Pedro Tercero, the consummate liberal revolutionary.

Tita repudiates a repetition of names in Like Water for Chocolate because she doesn't want her fate to be revisited on any subsequent generation. Olendorf reports that "Tita is a victim of tradition: as the youngest daughter in a Mexican family she is obliged to remain unmarried and to care for

her mother" (125). Tita refuses to allow her niece to be named after her in hopes of diverting a repetition of this custom. Her tactics are successful enough that the niece eventually marries (although only after her mother Rosaura, Tita's sister, has died of a seismic fart) and produces a daughter who is the narrator of the novel. Yet a circular model of time is still present in important thematic elements in the work.

Tita's infatuation and love for the forbidden Juan, husband of her sister, recapitulates Mama Elana's love affair with Jose Trevino, a love affair she discovers in a locked wardrobe, a love affair which produced Tita's other sister Gertrudis:

> Full of morbid curiosity, Tita opened the box. It contained a diary and a packet of letters written to Mama Elena from someone named Jose Trevino. Tita put them in order by date and learned the true story of her mother's love. Jose was the love of her life . . . [but s]he hadn't been allowed to marry him. (137)

A circular model of time is made most manifest when the narrator of Like Water for Chocolate prepares, on the final page of the novel, the same recipe for Christmas rolls that is being prepared in the opening chapter of the novel (246, 5).

Danow remarks that magical realists offer

> . . . a veritable compendium of possibility for chronicling the passage of time, One Hundred Years of Solitude, a classic instance of magical realism, conceives of time in multitudinous ways: as capable of (carnivalesque) reversal ('It's as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning' [Garcia-

> Marquez, 185]); as repetitive ('It's as if the world were repeating itself' [276]); and as circular ('Time was not passing . . . but . . . was turning in a circle'[310]). (146)

Williams reports that "the circular structure of the first chapter will be repeated constantly throughout the novel's innumerable inner circles, and in the novel's overall structure, which is also circular" (76). Levitt reports a "usage of time that . . . [is] circular in its development . . . , simultaneous rather merely chronological in its enactment . . . , a function ultimately of the mind and not of the clock (not simply a measure of life's passing, but a force in men's lives)" (235). Danow further observes that one cumulative effect of magical realists' manipulation of time is a sense of time's coexistence and reports that this possibility "is reiterated by Allende: 'We believe in the fiction of past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously'" (146). The circular model of time reinforces a sense of credibility and legitimacy, in the face of the incredible and illegitimate, because it suggests a consistency and an inevitability to otherwise unbelievable narratives.

Incredibility

Latin American authors are interested in legitimizing the Latin American experience to the international intellectual community. Toward this end, they frequently adopt a retrospective arrangement that emphasizes the historicity and de facto veracity of their narratives. As Melquiades says, "All things are known" (Garcia-Marquez, 371). They present a united front, testifying on one another's behalf by consistently telling the same story, borrowing copiously from fictional elements in one another's work in a way that challenges the very

concept of authorship in the western tradition of literature; even as they relate miracles and apparently impossible "facts," they do so as a group with a consistency and lack of spectacularity that is the signature of magical realism. As Morton Levitt observes, even when magical realists relate incidents which "in themselves are realistic, even mundane . . . what raises them to the level of metaphor and the fantastic is, paradoxically, the matter-of-fact tone in which they are told" (232). Magical realists further reinforce the legitimacy of their stories by depicting time as circular, by recounting the repetition of events and themes in a way that convinces by means of pure persistence. These three techniques are consistent with Garcia Marquez's explanation of the task Latin American writers face: "to make their life credible" (208-209).

But when he offered this explanation, Garcia Marquez stood before the tuxedo clad Nobel Academy in Stockholm, Sweden, dressed in the casual khakis of a guerrilla fighter. Furthermore, he stood before the creme de la creme of the intellectual world as the best friend of Fidel Castro, as the man that, according to Castaneda, came to be the only intellectual Fidel trusted "in the autumn of his patriarchy" (196). Anyone who has ever read the fictional creations of Gabriel Garcia Marquez knows that he should be very leery of any explanation the author might offer -- that his words should be taken with a grain of salt, or, to borrow a metaphor from Esquivel, perhaps a "ten pound bag" of salt "that last[s] a long time" (6).

If one wanted to offer a credible account of a way of life, would he populate his novels with ghosts like Prudencio and Melquiades, Ferula, Mama Elena, the Kikapu and Nacha -- spirits that come and go with no more notoriety than the mailman? Would he make his characters clairvoyant like Aureliano,

Clara the Clairvoyant, and Great Aunt Tita? Would the population of his credible civilization ride around on flying carpets and, from time to time, ascend directly into heaven?

It would seem clear that, if anything, magical realists are concerned with offering to the world a glimpse of the Latin American experience that is profoundly incredible. This counter concern, the drive to embody the incredible, is diametrically opposed to the nevertheless legitimate stated purpose of capturing serious recognition from the international intellectual community: of establishing credibility. The juxtaposition of the credible and the incredible is but a variation on the theme of duality incipient in the term magical realism, and it is the route by which Latin American magical realists obviate a trap discussed by Ariel Dorfman.

Dorfman believes there is a value laden presupposition by traditional western thinkers which equates the "privileged access to truth" with a "natural authority over those who lack such insight" (35). Dorfman explains how the government of the United States has attempted to cultivate this ideology in Latin America as part of our domination (Conniff, 169). In How to Read Donald Duck, referring to the United States' assistance in the overthrow of the Allende government, Dorfman and Armand Mattelart write: "There were, however, two items which were not blocked: planes, ships, tanks, and technical assistance for the Chilean armed forces; and magazines, TV serials, advertising, and public opinion polls for the Chilean mass media" (9).

If Latin American authors were solely interested in establishing a sense of legitimacy and credibility to an international intellectual community, it would be easy to reduce their motivation to accord with a logic that would equate

"what is foreign" with "what is better." And yet, this trap, which is a concomitant danger of appealing to the international intellectual community for understanding and acceptance, is obviated when Latin American magical realists consistently parody supposedly superior foreign influence.

Jose Arcadio Buendia brays his eagerness to join the modern, foreign world when he tells Ursula, "Right there across the river there are all kinds of magical instruments while we keep on living like donkeys" (8). He is so fascinated by the gypsies and by the newest inventions of "the journeymen geniuses of Jerusalem" (79) that he wants to construct a memory machine to be able "to remember the marvelous inventions of the gypsies" (49). Later, during the insomnia plague, when Macondo's first efforts to avert a communicable disease that wipes out memory appear to be failing, Jose Arcadio Buendia returns to the drawing board to invent the machine that will ensure that his people do not forget the most simple and elemental bits of knowledge. The absurdity of Jose Arcadio Buendia's mentality -- despite the fact that he is actually inventing a primitive computer[16] -- is underscored when the master gypsy Melquiades, for whose splendid inventions the memory machine was first conceived, returns in primitive fashion to cure the insomnia plague with a potion from a vial.

> The artifact was based on the possibility of reviewing every morning, from beginning to end, the totality of knowledge acquired during one's life. He conceived of it as a spinning dictionary that a person placed on the axis could operate by means of a lever, so that in a very few hours there would pass before his eyes the

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[16] Arnold M. Penuel suggests that other space-age inventions are anticipated in primitive Macondo, namely satellite television (24) and airplanes (27).

> notions most necessary for life. He had succeeded in writing almost fourteen thousand entries when along the road from the swamp a strange-looking old man with the sad sleepers' bell appeared, carrying a bulging suitcase tied with a rope and pulling a cart covered with black cloth. (48-49)

In The House of the Spirits, Esteban Trueba admits that he is

> no great lover of innovation, and had, in fact, a deep distrust of the dislocations of modernity, [yet] he decided his house should be constructed like the new palaces of North America and Europe, with all the comforts but retaining a classical style. He would hear nothing of three courtyards, corridors, rusty fountains, dark rooms, walls of whitewashed adobe, or dusty tiles on the roof; he wanted two or three heroic floors, rows of white columns, and a majestic staircase that would make a half-turn on itself and wind up in a hall of white marble, enormous, well-lit windows, and the overall appearance of order and peace, beauty and civilization, that was typical of foreign peoples and would be in tune with his new life. (93)

Yet Esteban, more than once, smashes the new telephone whenever it brings him bad news, and the house is later totally destroyed in an earthquake. Esquivel's narrator tells of Mama Elena's relative's invention of the gravity fed shower, a contraption with a

> thirty-gallon tank that was six feet high [that] you filled with water. Years later some gringos got this invention from Mama Elena's cousin for a song and made a few improvements. They made

> thousands of showers that used pipes, so you didn't have to do all that damned filling. (54)

The questionably beneficial contribution of the foreign influence is frequently made an object of ridicule, and yet the attempt to foreground a tone of authenticity and historicity by means of a retrospective arrangement plays into a logic that would equate history with fact, fact with reality, reality with science, science with foreign, and foreign with better.

Even more ironic is the revolutionary aplomb with which magical realists establish this logic, then proceed to infest the credibility they have established by including the impossible. This, too, is consistent with Joyce's habit of retrospective arrangement, in which the reader must revise or *re-vize* her prior understanding as new perspectives are made available.[17] Unlike Joyce's psychological approach to questionably credible historical narratives, magical realists do not complicate their credibility by including contradictory perspectives -- their point of view remains as unchallenged and irrefutable as their omniscient narrative voice -- they simply narrate absolutely impossible "facts." John S. Brushwood remarks that "there are no barriers created by difficult narrative techniques" (13), and Williams concurs that "there are only rare exceptions to the narrator's basic position of third-person omniscience" (88). Williams goes on to observe that the narrative technique in One Hundred Years of Solitude is marked by "an absolute coolness or understatement when describing the incredible situations, and overstatement or exaggeration when dealing with the commonplace" (87). Levitt reports that "the 'brick face' of the narration is as important to the meaning of the metaphor as is the strange image

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[17] Robin William Fiddian offers a more complete evaluation of Joyce's legacy to Spanish-American fiction, and to Garcia-Marquez in particular, in his essay, "James Joyce and Spanish-American Fiction: A Study of the Origins and Transmission of Literary Influence."

itself" (231). According to Spindler, "the narrator in . . . Magic Realism is not puzzled, disturbed or skeptical of the supernatural . . . ; he or she describes it as if it was a normal part of ordinary everyday life" (82).

With the clout of a Catholic priest as his verification, Garcia Marquez recounts:

> Father Nicanor chanted the gospels in a voice that had been lacerated by his pleading. At the end, when the congregation began to break up, he raised his arms signaling for attention.
>
> "Just a moment," he said. "Now we shall witness an undeniable proof of the infinite power of God."
>
> The boy who had helped him with the mass brought him a cup of thick and steaming chocolate, which he drank without pausing to breathe. Then he wiped his lips with a handkerchief that he drew from his sleeve, extended his arms, and closed his eyes. Thereupon Father Nicanor rose six inches above the level of the ground. It was a convincing measure. He went among the houses for several days repeating the demonstration of levitation by means of chocolate while the acolyte collected so much money in a bag that in less than a month he began the construction of the church. (85)

Allende's narrator reports that Clara the Clairvoyant's

> mental powers bothered no one and produced no great disorder; they almost always surfaced in matters of minor importance and within the strict confines of their home. It was true there had been times, just as they were about to sit down to dinner and everyone

> was in the large dining room, seated according to dignity and position, when the saltcellar would suddenly begin to shake and move among the plates and goblets without any visible source of energy or sign of illusionist's trick. Nivea would pull Clara's braids and that would be enough to wake her daughter from her mad distraction and return the saltcellar to immobility. The other children had organized a system so that in case of visitors, whoever was closest would reach out and stop whatever might be moving on the table before the guests noticed and were startled. The family continued eating without comment. They had also grown accustomed to the youngest daughter's prophecies. She would announce earthquakes in advance, which was quite useful in that country of catastrophes, for it gave them a chance to lock up the good dishes and place their slippers within reach in case they had to run out in the middle of the night. (7-8)

A magical realistic account of Great Aunt Tita's tearful birth, a birth that was prematurely precipitated by the fetus's inter-uterine reaction to the smell of onions, has already been discussed. A suggestion for at least a theoretical reconciliation of the duality suggested between impossible events and a rational explanation is eventually thwarted by the preponderance of magic which overwhelms the capacities of science. This reconciliation would be the simple equation of Latin American magical realism with the attempt to chronicle the mutually constitutive and nearly unrelieved sense of wonder created by the superimposition of an Old World, class conscious civilization upon the tropical wonderland of Central and South America.

Macondo's European "conquerors" are just as amazed by monkeys and macaws as are the natives by mirrors and magnets. Allende's European visitor to Tres Marias has made a career of

> traveling through exotic countries selling shark-fin aphrodisiacs, ginseng to cure all ills, carved Eskimo statues, stuffed Amazonian piranhas, and chinchillas for ladies' coats. He was thirty-eight years old, at least that is what he admitted to, and he felt that he had finally found paradise on earth, where he could settle into some sort of easygoing business with a few ingenuous partners. (184)

Dr. John Brown, a physician from North America, is entranced, in Like Water for Chocolate, by the medicinal knowledge of Indian *brujos* (witch doctors).

The apparently magical imported inventions from Europe and North America are balanced by another side of magical realism that consists in the simple description of the incredible geography and biology of Latin America. As mentioned, new-comers to Garcia Marquez's Colombia are overwhelmed by monkeys and macaws. Visitors to Allende's Chile face the incredible backdrop of "the snowy *cordillera*, and the frail column of smoke rising from the volcano" (97). On a more modern, mundane, but equally amazing level, foreign observers of Esquivel's Mexico might be hard put to explain the necessity of washing clothes by wetting

> . . . the reddish stains with a solution of potassium chlorate, plain water, and soft alkaline lye, scrubbing them repeatedly until she managed to get them out, and this difficult job was added to her job of washing the black clothes her mother wore. To wash those,

> she had to dissolve cow bile in a small amount of boiling water, fill a soft sponge with it, and use it to dampen the clothes all over; then she had to rinse the clothes in clear water and hang them out to dry.
>
> Tita rubbed and rubbed the clothes as many times as she had rubbed Roberto's diapers to remove the stains. What worked was to heat up a little urine, dip the stain in it for a minute, and wash it afterward in water. That is the one way to make stains fade away. (95)

Even though the stylistic techniques Latin American magical realists adopt may appear to be dedicated to the garnering of international recognition and acceptance, which would suggest the acceptance of Dorfman's "foreign is better" logic, the "magicality" of imports foreign to Latin America is dwarfed by the natural, geographical splendor of the region, and their benefits are, likewise, constantly and consistently parodied in the texts. The new breed of Latin American writers may desire credibility, but they want it on their own terms, in terms that effectively undermine the very notion of credibility.

The adoption of stylistic and thematic techniques designed to reinforce veracity and historicity, immediately and irremediably riddled and undermined by <u>in</u>credible "facts," reinforces the idea of unresolved duality and is reminiscent of the weaving and subsequent unraveling of the bridal veil by Penelope in Homer's <u>Odyssey</u>. It is more than a coincidence that this theme is explicitly present in many Latin American texts. If direct current might be seen as a metaphor of continuity, these texts are electrified by an alternating current.

The narrator of <u>One Hundred Years of Solitude</u> reports that "[Amaranta's] life was spent in weaving her shroud. It might be said that she wove during the day and unwove during the night, and not with any hope of defeating solitude in any way, but, quite the contrary, in order to nurture it" (Garcia Marquez, 264). Zamora observes that "Amaranta devises ways to prolong her task and thus prolong her life . . . [and] she understands why Colonel Aureliano spent his last years making little gold fishes, melting them down, and making them again" (54).

Rosa the Beautiful passes the time waiting for the return of her betrothed, "unperturbed by the enormous task she had taken upon herself: to embroider the largest tablecloth in the world" (Allende, 6). Tita, similarly, survives epochs of solitude by embroidering an enormous bedspread. At the midpoint of the novel it is so big that

> it didn't fit inside the carriage. Tita grabbed it so tightly that there was no choice but to let it drag behind the carriage like the huge train of a wedding gown that stretched for a full kilometer. Tita used any yarn she happened to have in her bedspread, no matter what the color, and it revealed a kaleidoscopic combination of colors, textures, and forms that appeared and disappeared as if by magic in the gigantic cloud of dust that rose up behind it. (Esquivel, 101)

By the end of the novel, Tita's bedspread is so large that, when it is unfolded, it covers the entire De la Garza ranch of three hectares, an area equal, in the terms of North American agronomy, to over three hundred acres (245).

Illegitimacy

The unraveling of credibility by inclusion of the incredible suggests a closer look at the idea of legitimacy so carefully documented in the preceding discussion. Even as retrospective arrangement, inter-authorial solidarity, and a circular model of time are strategical techniques for establishing legitimacy, legitimacy itself is an overt thematic consideration in many Latin American works. Latin authors' quest for recognition in the international intellectual community is recapitulated in the conflict between bastards and legitimate children in the stories of many magical realists. Allende writes that, "that part of the country . . . was littered with illegitimate children and even legitimate children who had never met their fathers" (189). At least half the children in One Hundred Years of Solitude are illegitimate; Aureliano alone has seventeen -- all named "Aureliano" (106).

Patricia Tobin remarks on a literature "riddled with incestuous, alchemic, bastardly, celibate and pig-tailed sons escaping the system and exceeding the Father!" (203) Williams likewise observes that

> the Oedipus myth and the genealogical tree, when viewed carefully and carried to their ultimate consequences, are mutually exchangeable: the incest of the Oedipus myth pervades the genealogy of the Buendia family and the family's history is constantly determined by incest. (81)

The narrator of The House of the Spirits is the illegitimate offspring of Clara's daughter Blanca, who is herself the product of a mixed marriage, and either Blanca's revolutionary lover or her rapist uncle. Blanca's father, Esteban Trueba, who has practically populated his hacienda with bastard offspring,

precipitates Blanca's "shot gun" wedding with Jean de Satigny in an attempt to thwart her love affair with the unacceptable Pedro Tercero. The co-heroine of Like Water for Chocolate, Tita's older sister Gertrudis, is secretly the product of Mama Elena and her illicit lover Jose Trevino, and once again, the narrator herself is almost illegitimate; she is technically legitimate, but only by means of a loveless and deliberately deceitful marriage in which Juan marries Tita's sister Rosaura, only so he can be near "the woman he truly loves" (38): the narrator's "great Aunt Tita" (246).

The theme of illegitimacy is not so omnipresent in these Latin American novels because it is a realistic portrayal of lands populated by polymorphously omnivorous reproductive maniacs. Rather, the conflict between respectability and ignominy inherent in the plight of bastard children goes to the heart of Latin American magical realism. What these bastards are representing is the irreconcilable conflict engendered by the superimposition of an Old World European culture on a race of indigenous Indians.

This genetic model of duality recapitulates all the irresolvable oppositions that are the gist and jism of magical realism. If there were to be an acceptable synthesis of this coming-together of disparate elements, clearly it would be represented by the new race -- a race of innocent, genetically rich children -- that has flowered since the Spanish conquest. The name of the new race that is the product of intermarriage between Spaniards and Indians is the Mestizo. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines mestizo as a "mixed race . . . of European and non Caucasian stock; *specifically* : [a person] of European (as Spanish or Portuguese) and American Indian ancestry." But this race, this synthesis, has been by definition, rejected and repudiated

throughout the history of Latin America. For, in the Spanish language, the literal meaning of mestizo reveals quite a different sentiment toward the potential synthesis of the old and the new. William's Spanish Dictionary lists only three possible meanings for mestizo: "half-breed, bastard, and mongrel dog." Similarly, the first entry for Mestizo in the Diccionario Enciclopedico, a dictionary of roots and races, is "Half-breed." In this era, when an appreciation of racial diversity is at a high water mark, "half-breed" is a clearly pejorative substitute for "racially rich" or even "racially mixed."

In a biological context, there are only two options open to juxtaposed gene pools: they can intermix, or they can remain solitary and self-inseminating. Often, in Latin American magical realism, the union of races is simply prohibited, which leads to themes of separation, longing, and sometimes, if the sufferers are lucky, illicit love affairs. When the magic of true love is consummated and real children result, these children remain unrecognized, disinherited, and illegitimate; the synthesis is repudiated. When "racial solitude" is practiced, out of the same kind of misdirected but socially proper etiquette by which dinner guests leave "a [solitary] chile in nut sauce . . . sitting on the platter out of etiquette, for not wanting to look greedy" (Esquivel, 240-41), the self-inseminating race "suffer[s] the shame of breeding iguanas" (Garcia Marquez, 20). "Ironically," Williamson observes, "the family can only perpetuate itself by continually courting the disaster it most fears" (51). He goes on the observe that

> The result is that the legitimacy of the Buendia line is mocked by the emergence of a subsidiary tribe of bastards, mistresses, natural mothers and similar illicit kin that surround the official

> family and creates in the long run a confusing situation which allows the last two Buendias to commit incest without fully realizing the true nature of their kinship. (51)

The Buendia family begins with a marriage that should never have been legitimate: a marriage between cousins. A dread of genetic repercussions clouds Ursula's anticipation of each new birth for all of her hundred-plus years. This fear is well founded, for, as the ghost of "the first of the line (Jose Arcadio Buendia) is tied to a [chestnut] tree [in the courtyard], the last of the line [who has been born with the tail of a pig] is being eaten by the ants" in accordance with the prophesies of Melquidies (420). The Trueba and De la Garza families fare scarcely better, for while they achieve a degree of hybridization that translates into the relief of genetic solitude, they pay for the symbolic recapitulation of this union between European and native American races with their painful destinies. Williamson reports that

> the dialectic between identity and difference . . . operate[s] symbolically within the fictional world . . . through the motivating theme of incest. Like magical realism, incest tends towards the fusion of differential categories, and as such constitutes a threat to social organization. (47)

The Spaniards and the other Western Europeans who interbred with Central American peoples did not recognize the new generation of mixed children as their legitimate children, and they did not marry the mothers. Most of them already had wives -- at home in Spain or Portugal -- good Catholic, European wives. Thus, even as a new race was emerging from the biological crucible of Central America, certain inherent dualities were adamantly

perpetuated. In the first place, a sexual double standard was genetically inculcated: the progenitors of what has come to be the race that populates Latin America were virtually all white men and native women. In the second place, the precedent of a cultural double standard between legitimate and illegitimate children was established and supported by the ponderous authority of the Catholic church. In the third place, the illegitimate overtones with which an entire race was defined and by which unborn children's identities underwent a prenascent shift in definition from "racially-mixed" to "half-breed" and "mongrel dog" was ontologically justified by the Church's doctrine of original sin. Martin feels that the Buendias' "morbid fear of the birth of a child cursed with a pig's tail is a condensed metaphor for the combined ideologies of original sin and biological determinism" (105).

A Repudiated Synthesis

Before discussing the role of the Church in perpetuating discriminatory and divisive dualities in Latin America, it might be useful to review some of the dualities that have allegedly been perpetuated. It is to be remembered that the driving impetus behind the creative inventions of Latin American magical realists is a need to legitimize the Latin American experience to the international intellectual community. This task has been described as an "impulse to create a fictive world that can somehow compete with the insatiable fount of creation that is Latin America's actual history" (Conniff, 167). This concept of magical realism, in which Latin American novels recapitulate the international intellectual community's assimilation of a magical reality of monkeys and macaws, "received perhaps its most influential endorsement in

the Nobel Prize acceptance speech of Gabriel Garcia Marquez" (167). Conniff goes on to report that "critics have been quick to make use of such a powerful precept" as magical realism and have seen the fiction as an attempt in Garcia-Marquez's words, "to bring light to [the] chamber" of Latin America -- to create "a minor utopia" (165).

In an attempt to "make their life credible," Latin American magical realists have been seen as bridge builders between the Old World and the New, and the concept of magical realism represents a new synthesis between dualities which found radically exaggerated exemplification in the discovery of the "new" world, but which are, in fact, older than recorded history. David Danow has advanced this notion of synthesis and finds it particularly exemplified in the metaphor of the "spirit of carnival," a spirit which he finds pervasive in the riotous, "stunning and engaging magical realistic texts of contemporary Latin America" (10). Danow applies the critical work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who writes that the "sensitive ear will always catch even the most distant echoes of a carnival sense of the world" (107), to suggest that just as life and death, order and chaos, appearance and reality come together in the carnivalesque, so the "seemingly neat division of 'separate realities,' reflected [through magical realists' works], does not preclude the equally distinct possibility that their respective characteristic features may at times coincide" (7).[18] He observes, for instance, that Garcia Marquez juxtaposes the "fantastic" and the "commonplace" in a chapter in which

> 'it rained for four years, eleven months,and two days' (291). That matter of fact statement is shortly followed by the remark that 'the

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[18] Penuel also offers an extensive interpretation of <u>Cien Anos de Soledad</u> in terms of its "carnivalized discourse" (57-87).

> worst part was the rain was affecting everything and the driest of machines would have flowers popping out among their gears if they were not oiled every three days' (291-92). So, alongside the commonplace fantastic, there also exist practical concerns [in] this carnivalized reality" (8).

Danow is careful to avoid suggesting a model of synthesis that would, as Gerald Martin has described, tend toward "certain simplifications, [and act as] an ideological stratagem to collapse many different kinds of writing, and many different political perspectives, into *one single*, usually escapist, concept" (my italics, 102). A facile synthesis is anathema to magical realism, which is essentially the recapitulation of the assimilation of a "dualistic world," where

> such an ambivalent phrase itself may refer to the actual world, the literary world, or a carnivalesque depiction of the one (the actual) refracted through the prism of the other (literary), [and where] the conclusive sense of a duality that affords something greater than singularity is (in each case) ultimately achieved. (Danow, 41)

That something, as expressed by Bakhtin, is "the fusion of the past and future in the single act of the death of the one and the birth of another" (435-36). In fact, Danow's tenacious loyalty to the dualities implicit in magical realism leads him to the conclusion that, in spite of the usefulness of Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, rather than suggesting a unifying synthesis, the carnivalesque (which can be, in Danow's work, freely interchanged with the magically real) can best be defined:

> . . . in deservedly paradoxical, oxymoronic fashion, [as] 'secular blasphemy.' A contradiction in terms to be sure, that phrase is

> meant to suggest the range of the all-encompassing expression that gives focus to this study: an irresolvable paradox that is seemingly universal and archetypal, that subverts an established value system in order to institute one of its own, that corrupts language and behavioral codes in the work of creating new ones seemingly designed exclusively to displace old ones, and that superimposes one paradox upon another until the original remains forever hidden, undisturbed, and unseen. (63-4)

If one element of a dialectic pair is so obliterated that it disappears, the result can be called domination, but it cannot be called synthesis.

Martin also maintains a dualistic interpretation of <u>One Hundred Years of Solitude</u>, and other works of Latin American magical realism. He reports that "dualisms . . . of every kind, . . . while explicable in terms of Latin Americas' colonial experience, are frequently the bane of its literature and criticism" (100). Tobin concurs that literary criticism of Latin American magical realism has been marked by the "resistance to an entropic heterogeneity that leaks out order through an inscription tangential to its own declamations of thesis and antithesis" (217). Martin observes that critics such as Julio Ortega, Jose Miguel Oviedo, and Ernst Volkening have sought to force a synthesis and a sense of artistic unity on important texts by insisting on elevating the conflicts they contain to the level of universal myth. Insisting on a mythical meaning of these novels' tales of struggle and conflict, at the expense of failing to interpret them in the concrete social context in which they were written, constitutes, for Martin, a serious misreading of the texts. He cautions that "no misreading could be more serious for Latin American literary history than the 'mythreading' of its most

celebrated work, One Hundred Years of Solitude" (113). For Martin, "the most convincing interpretations of the novel[s'] apparent dualism have come from critics with a sociological approach" (102).

A thwarted impulse toward the synthesis of duality can similarly be deciphered from Garcia Marquez's Nobel Prize acceptance speech. In "The Solitude of Latin America (Nobela Lectura)," Garcia Marquez conjoined his remarks about building a "minor utopia" that would "bring light to the chamber" of Latin America with the following additional observations:

> . . . in the past eleven years twenty million Latin American children have died before their second birthday. Nearly one hundred and twenty thousand have disappeared as a consequence of repression. . . . A country created from all these Latin Americans in exile or enforced emigration would have a larger population than Norway. (208-9)

Conniff remarks that Garcia Marquez went "on and on, as if he were trying to combat a plague of amnesia" (167). Any hope of reconciliation between the spirit of Latin American peoples and the engines of suppression that have repudiated their legitimacy for centuries -- and many critics, Danow among them, see Latin American magical realism as essentially hopeful, presenting "essentially the bright side of human experience; the wide range of man's potential combined with a corresponding, even greater potentiality that exists in the extended world of nature" (7) -- is rendered problematical by the magnitude of the disparities that a history of Latin America includes.

A widespread fallacy about the Spanish "conquistadors" of Latin America is that they conquered the native civilizations. While the horrible stories of their

pitiless enslavement of the "Indians" they "discovered" are largely true, what is even more true is that the Spanish encountered cultures that had already been conquered. Magnificent civilizations with cities of gold, pyramids much larger than those of Egypt, complex and accurate calendars and highly developed religions, were already in a state of decay and ruin. Why these civilizations, whose populations, according to Earl Shorris, had dwindled to about ten percent of their previous glory, had been in a state of pitiful decline for about three centuries when the Spanish arrived is one of the great mysteries of pre-columbian history (21). Perhaps the great explorers, whose names children memorize in grade school, were simply the first ones who discovered the New World and made it back to Europe to report. Perhaps the seeds of European decadence, in *Kon Tiki* fashion, had been leaking abroad during preceding centuries and had taken root in the New World and done their damage, despoiling what they were unable to appropriate. How else is it understandable that "the landing of Columbus and the destruction of the Indians of the Caribbean were entirely expected" (21)? A theory of pre-columbian contact between Central America and Europe might help to explain how an idol representing one of the gods had been able to predict that the Indians "would see in their country a clothed people who were to rule over them, and slay them, and they would die of hunger" (21).

Whether this theory is true or not, the Spanish conquistadors arrived at a time when an injection of new life was badly needed in what was to become Latin America. Europeans brought a new gene pool, a liquid and lively language, a religion of love and forgiveness, and labor saving technologies. And while blankets infected with small pox were indeed disseminated to

shivering Indians, the explorers themselves were not uniformly evil. It is difficult to conceive of the bravery it must have taken for Columbus and his countrymen to set sail into the uncertain while Leonardo, from the safety of an Old World scaffold, was painting the Last Supper. Still, the history of Latin America has been one of exploitation and repudiation. Conquerors came and plundered the gold, leaving behind poverty and destitution. The process was repeated with the plundering of silver, leading Garcia Marquez to observe that "If you don't fear God, fear him through the metals" (36).

The Church and the Bible: Duality in the Name of Unity

The little gold that remained in Central America was used to gild the statuary and even the walls of Roman Catholic churches, and the ponderous and intimately appealing authority of the Church was used to perpetuate many of the dualities outlined above. The pattern of foreign exploitation of resources, both material and human, has been repeated in banana republics, coconut plantations, stoop-crop truck farms, and electronic sweat shops. Foreign exploitation has been enforced by brutal dictatorships and, if the Catholic church has not openly facilitated the exploitation, it has served as a palliative, offering cosmological justification for suffering, and suggesting that precious *pesos* spent on votive candles offer the most practical avenue to a better life.

References to the Bible run throughout magical realism. Indeed, most of the characters in Latin American fiction carry Biblical names. Martin finds it particularly significant that the last of the Buendia line is named Aureliano Babilonia (107). Lois Parkinson Zamora observes that "like Revelation, Cien Anos de Soledad sums up the Bible" (51). The genre itself is anticipated in the

prose of the Bible. To lend a definitive degree of posterity and precedent to the coupling of reportorial exposition and absolutely incredible "facts," consider the following:

> 21 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.
>
> 22 And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.
>
> 23 And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. . . .
>
> 26 And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.
>
> 27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.
>
> 28 And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.
>
> 29 But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. (Exodus, 15.21-29)

This passage in Exodus is over two thousand years old, yet its tone is remarkably similar to the matter of fact description by Gabriel Garcia Marquez of Remedios the Beauty ascending directly to heaven before the eyes of her family (242):

> . . . Fernanda felt a delicate wind of light pull the sheets out of her hands and open them up wide. Amaranta felt a mysterious trembling in the lace on her petticoats and she tried to grasp the sheet so that she would not fall down at the instant in which Remedios the Beauty began to rise. Ursula, almost blind at the time, was the only person who was sufficiently calm to identify the nature of that determined wind and she left the sheets to the mercy of the light as she watched Remedios the Beauty waving good-bye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her, abandoning with her the environment of beetles and dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o'clock in the afternoon came to an end, and they were lost forever with her in the upper atmosphere where not even the highest-flying birds of memory could reach her. (242-3)

What makes the ascension of Remedios the Beauty significantly different from the Passover of the Jews is a blindness to the miracle that is more miraculous than the miracle itself. Fernanda's most significant and abiding recollection of the incident concerns the loss of a set of sheets: "No sooner had Remedios the Beauty ascended into heaven in body and soul than the inconsiderate Fernanda was going about mumbling to herself because her sheets had been carried off" (256). Despite the differences in perspective

between Garcia Marquez's miracles and those of the Bible, he is careful to acknowledge his source and at one point writes, "'If they believe it in the Bible, . . . I don't see why they shouldn't believe it from me'" (305).

The complicity of the Roman Catholic church in the social and political suppression and oppression of Latin American peoples is a huge, provocative, and volatile subject that merits more space than is permitted in this discussion. Latinos have embraced the Catholic faith with a fervency unparalleled in the history of the world, practically amending the holy trinity to affect the recognition of Mother Mary, not only as the mother of Jesus, but as the mother of God. This fervency can be witnessed from the pews of St. Mary of the Angels near Milwaukee, North, and Damen, where one can admire magnificent murals in the dome that recall Leonardo's Last Supper. The same fervency can be felt in every cathedral throughout Latin America -- in many places, seven days a week. One can hear the cadences of reverence in the words of Hispanic mothers as well as in the street slang of the impious. But in spite of the support provided by the worship of Mother Mary, the inability of the traditional Latin American matriarchically guided family to effectively provide leadership is evidenced in Ursula Buendia's inability to prevent the downfall of the family. The utter rejection of the institution of matriarchal control in the family is, according the Donna Olendorf, the central theme of Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate (125).

Catholicism is so thoroughly yet ambivalently imbricated in the multi-textured fabric of Latin American life that Garcia Marquez observes that its convoluted ties permeate all ideologies like a cynosure eclectic: ". . . the defenders of the faith of Christ destroy the church and the Masons order it

rebuilt" (137). "'How strange men are,'" observes Amaranta Buendia. "'They spend their lives fighting against priests and then give prayer books as gifts'" (166). An absurd overstatement of the relationship of Catholic doctrine to "genetic solitude" is provided by Garcia Marquez's narrator in a revelation experienced by Aureliano Jose (who is in love with his Aunt Amaranta):

> That was how he suffered in exile, . . . until he heard some old man tell the tale of the man who had married his aunt, who was also his cousin, and whose son ended up being his own grandfather.[19]
>
> 'Can a person marry his own aunt?' he asked, startled.
>
> 'He not only can do that,' a soldier answered him, 'but we're fighting this war against the priests so that a person can marry his own mother.'
>
> . . . Aureliano Jose promised to go to Rome, he promised to go across Europe on his knees to kiss the sandals of the Pontiff just so that she would lower her drawbridge. (153)

Resignation, Resilience, and Racial Survival

Even if magical realism were able to offer a satisfactory synthesis of the dualities at war in the Latin American experience, it is doubtful that Latin American authors would be satisfied with such satisfaction. They seem more willing to conclude that "Bad luck doesn't have any chinks in it" and that "I was born a son of a bitch and I'm going to die a son of a bitch" (Garcia Marquez, 131). "'Bastard,'" Ursula shouts at Arcadio when his sudden appointment as community commander affords him the opportunity to vent pent resentment in

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[19] Compare this absurd construction with Stephen Dedalus's "Shakespeare argument" in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of Ulysses.

the form of official decrees, political persecution, and summary executions.

Latin American resentment is deep seated and profoundly justified. Latin American magical realists seem most interested in obviating a synthesis by reinforcing contradictory dualities and representing them to be as inviolable as genes on a chromosome. The theme of genetic accountability and consequence pervades the family histories of these Latin American texts. As mentioned, on a biological level, there are only two possibilities open to juxtaposed gene pools: The two races can honestly intermix -- but the impossibility of harmonious assimilation is a major theme of the marriage-for-love versus marriage-for-respectability conflict in The House of the Spirits and Like Water for Chocolate -- and when the mixture does occur, the resultant mestizos -- bastards -- are, by definition, rejected; or, the races can remain solitary and self-impregnating with the disastrous consequences evidence in One Hundred Years of Solitude, both in the pig tailed children of the Buendias' and in the ruined shambles of Fernanda del Carpio's "stuck-up highland" family (126). Williamson characterizes Fernanda as "an arch-conservative prude whose exalted fantasy-life of aristocratic distinction is a grotesquely exaggerated version of Ursula's preoccupation with the legitimacy of the family" (54).

"Shot-gun" Synthesis and Apocalyptic Closure

Metaphorically, there is one other possible resolution of duality suggested by the texts, and this is the mutually destructive conflagration of apocalypse. Conniff observes that these novels' "apocalyptic closure is not only credible but also anticlimactic. Apocalypse is merely the darkest side of

'magical realism,' in which the 'magic' and the 'realism' are most completely fused, in which the most unimaginable event is the most inevitable" (178). At the end of One Hundred Years of Solitude, a "biblical hurricane . . . exiles" Macondo "from the memory of men" (383). The House of the Spirits ends with the city in the flames of a hopelessly unsuccessful revolution in which the atrocities of the left have merely been exchanged for those of the right (401). Like Water for Chocolate ends with the entire De la Garza estate of three hectares being smothered in the flames of Tita's monumental embroidered bedspread (244-5).

Mixing is the subject of all three works. It is why Like Water for Chocolate is a cookbook. But the ingredients refuse to wed. As Tita and Nacha attempt to put together Chabela Wedding Cake, "the batter wouldn't thicken because Tita kept crying" (30). As inviolable as genes, the dualistic ingredients obdurately resist synthesis. In the social and political context, the right refuses to merge with the left. In a cultural and anthropological sense, the Old World has been imperfectly assimilated by the New, and vise versa. In the literary context of Latin American magical realism, the "magical" and the "real" simply do not blend well together as descriptors for the same phenomena.

When the incipient dualities present in the Latin American experience are forcefully combined by a clumsy alchemist, they yield "a thick and pestilential syrup which [is] more like common caramel than valuable gold" (Garcia-Marquez, 7). The "precious inheritance [of Latin America is] reduced to a large piece of burnt hog cracklings . . . firmly stuck to the bottom of the [melting] pot" (8). What little gold is left, when finally recovered, looks, to the children of Central America like it looks to Jose Arcadio Buendia's oldest son:

> Showing it all around, [Jose Arcadio Buendia] ended up in front of his older son, who during the past few days had barely put in an appearance in the laboratory. He put the dry and yellowish mass in front of his eyes and asked him: 'What does it look like to you?' Jose Arcadio answered sincerely:
>
> 'Dog shit.' (29)

Add a little more pressure and heat to the mixture and the dualities with which Latin American magical realism is principally concerned explode in apocalypse.

Donald Shaw argues that "everything ultimately rests on one's interpretation of the apocalyptic conclusion [of the novels]" (319). Williamson offers a complex analysis which admits multiple interpretations when he observes that

> in the last sentence of One Hundred Years the duality of the novel is made explicit by an unprecedented authorial intrusion. Macondo is described as 'the city of mirrors (or of mirages)'. This parenthetical alternative cracks the surface of the 'speaking mirror' to reveal the underlying choice between illusion and reality; it invites the reader to question the validity of Melquiades's prophecy and to repudiate the apocalyptic ending inscribed in the discourse as nothing more than a pernicious mirage created by those characters like Aureliano Babilonia who have condemned themselves to magical realism and for whom there is, in consequence, no second chance of salvation. By implication, therefore, there may exist a second chance for other natives of

> Macondo (like Gabriel Marquez and his friends) who have chosen to leave and who have survived the destructive vortex of incest. On this reading, One Hundred Years of Solitude ends, if not exactly on a note of optimism, at least with the sense of relief felt after waking from a nightmare. (62)

Agustin Cueva echoes Williamson's cautiously optimistic interpretation of apocalyptic closure. He suggests that Garcia Marquez "is not seeking to put forward an irrationalist philosophy but merely to recreate a representation of a world that he knows is over and done with" (67). This interpretation admits the possibility of new beginnings rather than emphasizing destruction and finality. Such an interpretation, however, ultimately begs the question of duality versus synthesis, for the new beginning, which Martin sees in the concrete terms of the emergence of the third world, and which Palencia-Roth identifies as the "third stage" in the inner process of colonialism, constitutes another turn of the wheel in which the new beginners are very much in the same boat with Jose Arcadio Buendia as he sets off to found Macondo -- a boat which is haunted, not only by the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar, but also by that of Christopher Columbus.

The suggestion of the possibility of rebirth -- of a new beginning arising from the ashes of apocalypse -- is only ambivalently indicated by our primary texts. In the case of The House of the Spirits and Like Water for Chocolate, the biological survival of the narrators is made possible only when they physically flee the dauntingly dualistic context of their homelands. Their expatriation invokes a whole new round of separation and duality. In the case of One Hundred Years of Solitude, Zamora observes that, within the extended family history which constitutes the novel, a "rebirth [simply] fails to occur" (52). The

novel ends with the "last [of the line] . . . being eaten by the ants" (420).

The symbol of the circle which dominates the literature of Latin American magical realism is a symbol which on its surface suggests unity and wholeness. Yet the black holes of space -- cosmic metaphors for the antithesis of existence -- are three dimensionally circular -- spherical. And the circle -- round as a terminal period -- toward which the apocalyptic closures of many Latin American magical realist texts tend, is a circle of fire.

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