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# A New Definition of Magic Realism: An Analysis of Three Novels as Examples of Magic Realism in a Postcolonial Diaspora

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To my twin sister, who chose math as her major so she wouldn't have to deal with papers  
like this. Sorry.

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## ABSTRACT

In the world of literature, magic realism has yet to find its place as an established genre or style. The following paper posits that magic realism stems from marginalized writers in a postcolonial diaspora, attempting to make sense of their world without the influence of Western gaze. Gabriel García Márquez in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie in his novel *Midnight's Children*, and Toni Morrison in her novel *Paradise* use similar elements of magic realism in order to establish a grounding mythology for their cultures. These three novels can demonstrate the direction of fiction that uses magic realism: one where the marginalized overturn the characteristics of the dominant discourse and take their place in the world of writing.

## Chapter 1: The foundations and definition of Magic Realism

*“Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude”* (“Gabriel García Márquez—Nobel Lecture”).

These are the words of the much beloved author Gabriel García Márquez in his Nobel Prize lecture titled “The Solitude of Latin America.” His novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) had an effect so far reaching that to this day, some of the world’s best novelists are modeling their works after his. But Gabriel García Márquez is also known for another reason: he was one of the frontrunners of magical realism and the first to popularize it in the global consciousness. Whether magical realism is a trend isolated to Latin America (as many critics argue) or a completely new style, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has been widely acknowledged as the premier novel of magic realism. But Gabriel García Márquez insists he was only attempting to write reality as he knew it.

Since its introduction into the world of surreal art and subsequent use by Latin American author Jorge Luis Borges, the phrase “magic realism” has been used somewhat arbitrarily in the literary world. It is derived from a mixture of terms and usually applied to supernatural or mythic literature coming from the embattled countries of Latin America. College professors use the term to describe works of literature, critics apply it to numerous works, and young fiction writers often classify their own works under the umbrella of “magic realism.” But what is magic realism? Is it a genre? A style? A trend that will soon



fade? Starting with the late Gabriel García Márquez's breakthrough novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, "surrealism" which had originally only applied to art the likes of which Salvador Dali created, suddenly became "magic realism" and applied to nearly every literary experience that involved the supernatural mixed with the real. Critics have tried to qualify magic realism in order to establish it as a genre, but they often fail miserably in identifying the specific causes of magic realism in writing.

Many literary critics have attempted to define magic realism, but have often focused exclusively on a few very similar works in order to synthesize a description of magical realism's elements. Often, the definition of magic realism swings between the two extremes of postmodern surrealism and simple fantasy. However, magic realism does not solidly fit into either of these genres, in part because magic realist novels are completely realistic at the same time that they are completely fantastic. It is Maria Bortolussi who synthesizes one of the best definitions of magic realism in her essay "Towards a Revised Theory of Magic Realism." Before her writing, many authors simply ignored how closely their definitions of magic realism resembled the common definition of either fantasy or the surreal characteristics of postmodernism. Bortolussi is one of the first to specify that "[i]n all classical magic realist narratives of Latin America, there is a notorious lack of any such single cause of the magic or unifying logic underlying all the magical events" (358). In short, magic realism holds no rational logic, but the supernatural is still viewed as normal.

While fantasy genre novels, along with the genre of horror, often treat the fantastic as a normal occurrence, there is an underlying logic to the fantastic elements. Vampires must drink blood to live, magic spells have rules, and werewolves only become monsters

upon the rise of the full moon. Fantasy novels also often work with familiar elements and the elements of the supernatural that are nearly universal, such as vampires or werewolves. Many fantasy novels are set in a different world entirely, so the reader is able to suspend disbelief in the supernatural and follow the story logically (“Fantasy Fiction”). In magic realism, there is no unifying logic. There might be a swarm of butterflies always surrounding a person or a plague of insomnia that infects a town like any normal illness. The odd thing about magic realism is that there is no “magic” in the fantasy sense, nor is there any “true” realism. Instead, there is only the fantastic substituting for the real in a search for the truth. In a similar manner, while many critics have classified authors and novels as “postmodern absurd” and “magic realist” interchangeably, Theo L. D’haen writes that magic realism in fact is against the primary trends and discourse as magic realist authors write “excentrically, then, or from the margins” (195). Authors are able to do this

by first appropriating the techniques of the ‘centr’-al line and then using these, not as in the case of these central movements, “realistically” that is, to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world correcting so called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this “reality” depends upon. (D’haen, 195)

This statement is vitally important because D’haen separates the general genre of postmodernism with its tendency towards the absurd from magic realism with the reshaping of both reality and the perception of reality. Thus, magic realism is separate, neither a genre nor a trend, because it is so firmly against the logical dominant discourse, the literary canon of the time.

Even today, there is little room for marginalized writers to write without conforming to an ideal of the other. Celebrated authors within the canon, such as Rudyard Kipling, made their living off of “colonial novels” where their Otherization of colonized culture as exotic was seen as normal. In a world that is increasingly connected, marginalized cultures are still seen as exotic by the Westernized world, and therefore, the Westernized literary canon. Magic realism, while often popular, does not fit into any genre or trend because it is written by the marginalized for the marginalized as a way of expressing postcolonial experience.

Therefore, in speaking of magic realism in the literary sense, many critics and authors fail to analyze the writing in the way it was intended because they are attempting to establish magic realism as a part of the Western literary canon it is so firmly against. Readers and critics of magic realist novels must establish a definition in order to come to an understanding of the future of literary discourse. The use of magic realism and its deviation from the Western literary canon establishes a way of writing that lends itself to writers outside of the dominant discourse who are marginalized by society. Therefore, many of the writers of magic realism exist in diasporas or fall under the theory of postcolonialism because they are writers that struggle against the dominant discourse. Perhaps the best explanation of magic realism is found in the writing of Salman Rushdie, an Indian postcolonial magic realist author whose works have had a great effect on literary discourse. He writes that magic realism deals with “‘half-made’ societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new” (*Imaginary Homelands* 301-02). Perhaps a new

definition of magic realism can be formed, arguing that magic realism stems from writers in a postcolonial diaspora scrambling to make sense of a culture riddled with holes and gaps.

## Chapter 2: Creating a new understanding of magic realism: writing in a postcolonial diaspora

The three novels, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, widely acknowledged as the pioneering novel of magic realism, *Midnight's Children* a groundbreaking Indian novel by Salman Rushdie, and finally, *Paradise*, a novel written by the African American author Toni Morrison are excellent examples of magic realism in a postcolonial diaspora. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* follows the lives of the Buendía family, from the founding of the town Macondo to the inevitable apocalyptic destruction of Macondo and the Buendías. *Midnight's Children* follows Saleem, a child born at midnight on the day of India's independence and whose fate is irrevocably tied to the state of India. *Paradise* follows the people of Ruby, Oklahoma and focuses on the eventual massacre of an all-woman convent. Each of these novels is larger than life, following a town or a country from beginning to end in the manner of mythology. They are all similar in their elements of magic realism, but introduce elements specific to the purpose of the novel. These novels met with both popular and critical reception despite using magical realism, a style readers were unfamiliar with and critics had often dismissed as being applicable only to Latin American authors.

### Definition of Post-Colonialism

To understand these novels and their relation to each other today, postcolonialism and the connection between cultural identity and literature must be understood.

Postcolonialism (often associated with cultural criticism) is simultaneously a style of writing

and a lens through which critics can look at certain texts (Bressler 318). Perhaps the broadest definition of postcolonialism can be found in Bressler's *Introduction to Literary Criticism*. In it he writes that postcolonialism "investigates what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accompanying ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other"(318). Thus the colonizing culture establishes itself as the dominant culture, forcing its culturally specific views on the native culture. This definition can apply to both the texts written and the applied theory and is less specific than many definitions of postcolonialism, which look more narrowly at the lingering effects of British colonization.

The broader definition of postcolonialism is most closely associated with magical realism because two out of the three texts analyzed would not technically fit into the specific definition of postcolonialism that states writing must come directly after the colonizing force has left. Salman Rushdie is the only author whose writings occurred in a specifically postcolonial era, but both Gabriel García Márquez and Toni Morrison write from the postcolonial mindset. No one person can judge when postcolonialism has ended and a new era has begun, but many would comment that the native countries of García Márquez and Morrison have historically moved past their postcolonial era. Latin America was colonized as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the United States of America became a country without the colonizing nation of England more than two hundred years ago. Perhaps the use of "cultural criticism" is more appropriate than postcolonialism because Toni Morrison does not write from a postcolonized perspective as an African-American; it has been hundreds of years since America in any way resembled colonies. However, Morrison does write from a distinctly marginalized and subordinate perspective in a period of post slavery

and segregation, fitting within the boundaries of postcolonial theory. Also, while García Márquez's home country of Colombia was colonized by the Spanish early on in its history, by the time García Márquez writes, colonization had long since ended. However, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Paradise* fall under the umbrella of postcolonialism in the broader sense, as these writers are writing as the native inhabitants of a country after the absence of a dominant culture, which is one of the key components of postcolonialism. García Márquez and Morrison are still struggling for their voices to be heard over the dominant discourse.

While postcolonialism is a style and a form of criticism, it cannot be understood without looking at the early theoretical and critical origins of postcolonialism. While authors such as Homi Bhaba and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pertain more specifically to the current subject, they cannot be understood without first looking at authors such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. Frantz Fanon's theory of postcolonialism focuses on the colonized culture and the literature that arose from these cultures in the absence of the (usually British) colonizing force. Postcolonial theory, in general, studies the literature of a culture after the colonizing force has left, in order to understand the effects of colonization on the mindset of the original culture. Critics realized that the literature arising from the colonized after colonization was distinctly different from Western literary canon, in part because its focus was on a different purpose. In his main theoretical work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon calls postcolonial writing "a literature of combat, because it molds the national consciousness" (1442). This combat is the author's attempt to create his/her own writing in the midst of the dominating culture's literary canon and to establish his/her culture's voice.

In a sense, postcolonial writers are always fighting—fighting against the dominant culture and fighting for their culture to be recognized. Once the dominant culture is no longer in charge, something must take its place and, according to Fanon, it must be the original native culture that survived.

But has it really survived? Even Fanon acknowledges that there is a “fight for national existence” and that the nation must gather “together the various indispensable elements necessary for the creation of a culture” (1444-45). As the dominating culture “leaves,” the effects of colonization on the national consciousness stay, creating a culture that is neither the original culture before colonization nor the dominant colonizing culture, but instead a hybrid of the two. Thus, the original culture must manufacture a new culture where the old and the new meet. This is a commonly accepted theory of postcolonialism.

In looking at the way the theory of postcolonialism has been applied throughout the years, some critics miss the effects of colonization entirely, because of the overuse of postcolonialist theory in describing every piece of literature written both before and after colonization. Postcolonialism was the first theory many authors would turn to in an attempt to describe any piece of colonized writing. Neil Ten Kortenaar, in discussing Rushdie’s use of magic realism in *Midnight’s Children*, dismisses the effects of colonization entirely, saying that magic realism recovers “cultural discourses dominated until now by the centralizing and suppressing impulses of an imperial culture in decline” and then becomes the “literary expression of cultural hybridity, a favourite topos of postcolonial critics” (17). Kortenaar’s writing associates magic realism with cultures in a postcolonial state while dismissing the postcolonial theory that drives it as nothing more than a “favourite topos.” Thus he



completely overlooks the necessary postcolonial realization that things can no longer be what they once were.

Theorists posit that the original nation still exists, but a new culture must rise from the leftovers of the original culture and the dominant colonial culture that have mixed together. The dominant culture has also irrevocably changed the original culture, simply by looking at the native culture from the dominant national perspective, instead of the perspective of the original culture. The postcolonial theorist Edward Said explains the effects of the dominant culture further in his criticism *Orientalism*. "In brief," he writes, "because of Orientalism [the Western view of the East] the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action" (1978). Because the West became the dominant culture to many of the Eastern or Non-Western countries due to colonization and globalization, the East and the colonized are subject to an Orientalizing gaze, a gaze that changes the non-Western culture.

Under the constraints of this dominant gaze, the subordinate culture conforms to the gaze and becomes the "Other" in the eyes of the West. Therefore, the entire colonized culture adapts to match how the dominant culture views it. Overcoming this view once the subordinate culture has conformed to it becomes the task that many postcolonial cultures must face. In conforming to the Orientalizing gaze, the non-Western culture has begun to see itself as "Other" and has lost the native, non-Western view of itself. The identity of the non-Western culture becomes based on the domination of the Western culture, and when the Western culture leaves there is nothing for the non-Western culture to base its identity on. The effects of the dominant culture are far reaching, becoming an erasing force on

cultural expression and history even after the dominant culture has withdrawn from the former colony.

The “Otherization” of subordinate cultures forces the authors to write from the margins of the literary canon. They cannot take part in the dominant Western discourse because they have been “Othered,” but after colonization, they also cannot write from a completely non-Western perspective. Instead, postcolonial authors write somewhere in the margins, as hybrids of the dominant discourse and non-Western voice.

### **Definition of Diaspora**

To intensify the inability to write from a truly original cultural perspective, many postcolonial cultures are found in diasporas, scattered from their original homelands and left without a true home or culture to write from. “Displaced” is perhaps the best synonym to describe cultural groups existing within a diaspora. Rooted in the biblical scattering and displacement of the Jewish people, the word “diaspora” has come back into popularity within the past few decades, often associated with the rise in cultural criticism (Edwards). In its truest form, a diaspora is used to describe the often forceful displacement of a people from their original homeland. Generally, this displacement is due to colonization. Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and Toni Morrison all write from their own diasporas, displaced from their original homeland by imperialist forces.

In his diaspora, Gabriel García Márquez within his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* goes so far as to create an “imaginary homeland” in his fictional town of Macondo. Though colonization had long since ended in Colombia, the effects of colonization still

lingered in the political violence and upheaval of the country. The original indigenous culture had been all but wiped out by Spanish conquest, and what was left was a mix of colonial influences and the desire for an original culture. In the political violence that followed, many Colombians were exiled from their homeland for daring to speak out against the violence that made up their existence. García Márquez mentions the violence that leads to exile in his Nobel Prize Lecture: “the country that could be formed of all the exiles and forced emigrants of Latin America would have a population larger than that of Norway.” *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a work of undeniable nostalgia for his “imaginary homeland” as Garcia attempts to show the true Colombia of both reality and his imagination.

Salman Rushdie also writes from the margins, as he explains in his critical work *Imaginary Homelands*. “I’ve been a minority group all my life,” he writes in his introduction. “A member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay, then of a ‘mohajir’—migrant—family in Pakistan, and now as a British Asian” (4). His diaspora is one of forced exile from his home country of India, leading him to create an “imaginary homeland”—that is, a homeland that exists only in the mind and that can never be reclaimed. The recent effects of colonization and the subsequent upheaval of a country that had never existed without the unifying force of colonization were the cause of the diaspora from which Rushdie writes.

Despite the fact that Morrison is far removed from a cultural displacement, she still exists within a diaspora. Due to the colonization of the New World almost 400 years ago, Morrison’s African ancestors were removed from their homelands as slaves, forced to exist within a new culture that still “Othered” them and, eventually, forced them to take part in

that culture themselves. Hers is a culture within a culture: as she writes in her critical work *Playing in the Dark*, black people are “a population that has always had a curiously intimate and unhingingly separate existence within the dominant one” (120). The African American experience has always been one of separation—separation from homeland and separation from the dominant culture on which its fate hung. In conjunction with writing from this diaspora, Morrison also writes from the margins, separate from the dominant literary discourse by virtue of her being a black woman.

### **Writing within a Postcolonial Diaspora**

In regards to the marginalized authors of postcolonial fiction, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theory of the subaltern has the most applicable critical perspective. As a critic, she is one of the first to ask the pointed question “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 2117). Antonio Gramsci was the first to define the “subaltern” as those cultures outside of the hegemony, and unable to influence the dominant culture. But Spivak is the first to look at these cultures and wonder if their submission to the dominant culture means they are truly unable to speak, because a people without their own language and culture lack voice.

Specifically, Spivak takes a Marxist and postcolonial perspective and wonders if the marginalized (in her definition, the poor and oppressed) are able to speak and be understood within the dominant culture. The marginalized groups have the uncertain task of speaking from their place of separation. They have never been a part of the dominant cultural group but sit on the fringes, scattered and displaced in a cultural diaspora. The marginalized writer then has the challenging job of writing a text that “articulates the

difficult task of rewriting its own conditions of impossibility as the conditions of its possibility” (Spivak 2119). The marginalized culture has to rewrite its own existence.

But speaking within the subaltern can be done; the authors simply have a hard task in order to make their voices heard amidst the dominant discourse. When a culture has been “Othered” and its people’s voices silenced, where do authors turn to show themselves? They cannot use the dominant culture to describe themselves because doing so would make them a part of the dominant culture. But it must also be realized that as de-colonization progresses, both the native culture and the leftovers of the dominant culture become shadows of what they once were. As the colonizing power leaves, the colonized are left with “the poverty of the people, national oppressions, and the inhibition of culture” (Fanon 1441), along with the Orientalizing gaze, all of which have come to form their culture as a whole. At the time of postcolonization, the subordinate cultures have changed, moved to the margins of a dominant culture, often while participating in their own marginalization.

In de-colonization, the dominant culture leaves with what they have borrowed from the native culture as well as what they used to fill in the spaces they created. Thus the native culture after de-colonization is left with gaps in their new culture where the dominant culture once existed. Many of the marginalized cultures simply fill in the same hierarchical spaces the dominant culture left, becoming dominant to a different subordinate group within the culture. Once again, this domination, even by the marginalized culture, creates a diaspora of another marginalized group that is exiled or pulled away from their homeland in the process of marginalization. Spivak specifically uses the example of India after colonization, where the most Westernized group simply filled in the power vacuum

the British left, exiling many Indian Muslims and continuing the caste system the British encouraged. This “exile” of many Indians forced them away from their homelands and into segregated areas where their culture was systematically destroyed. Salman Rushdie was one of the minorities, an Indian Muslim in a predominantly Hindu area.

What can be done to fill the gaps postcolonialism has left? The question remains long after the colonizing force has left, for the native culture now contains a mixture of two cultures riddled with holes and gaps. For many natives, their originating mythology has been erased, leaving them with only the dominant culture’s beliefs as a base for culture and literature alike. Thus, in magic realism, it is necessary that there is a “thematic foregrounding of those gaps, absences, and silences produced by the colonial encounter,” writes Stephen Slemon, one of the foremost recent critics to look at magic realism as an element of postcolonialism (413). Magic realism attempts to rationalize an unstable culture by filling the gaps (cultural or historical) and often standing in as basic mythology as a result. Magic realism grounds a culture that is uncertain where it stands after the colonizing power has left.

Magic realism also has the specific characteristic of remaining in the margins. Unlike postmodernism and postcolonialism in its truest sense, magic realism is not part of the literary canon but is viewed by many critics as a quaint but short-lived trend. In failing to conform to the modern literary discourse, magic realism once again turns on its head the dominating culture—in this case, the dominant discourse. Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri write in *Empire* that they fear postmodernism and postcolonialism will not endure because both continue to fight the dominance of something that—truthfully—is no longer the main

dominant force. (2621). Because postmodernism and postcolonialism are fighting against the remnants of colonial dominance, they are missing the newest form of dominance found in postcolonial cultures. According to Hardt and Negri, “A postmodern sovereignty has come to replace the modern paradigm and rule through differential hierarchies of the hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities that these theorists celebrate” (2622). Therefore, postmodernism and postcolonization, as part of the literary canon of the time, “would not challenge but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule” (Hardt and Negri 2622). Postcolonialism affirms the sovereignty of postmodernism and takes its place within the dominant discourse. Magic realism is on the margins of the main literary discourse and also falls into the margins of postcolonialism, as the majority of authors attempt to imitate the dominant discourse. Instead of fighting the dominance of colonization, authors use the fantastic as a part of the novel in order to subtly overthrow the dominant discourse and Orientalizing gaze. The fantastic follows no logical sense, nor does it tell the “truth” in the same way the dominant discourse is expected to. Magic realism stands on its own, apart from the dominant Western discourse and able to overthrow the dominant Western gaze.

As a result, magic realism arises from marginalized writers in a postcolonial diaspora attempting to overthrow the dominant discourse and make sense of a new hybrid culture full of holes and gaps in the absence of the dominant colonizing force.

### **Chapter 3: Creating a magical foundation: Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as the basis for magic realism**

Gabriel García Márquez, a Columbian native whose works directly dealt with extreme acts of violence in his home country, was one of the first authors to bring magic realism into the diaspora created by postcolonialism and violence. His novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* deals with the fictional town of Macondo and the Buendía family that inhabits it. The novel starts with José Arcadio and Ursula coming together as husband and wife and founding the city of Macondo. They have three children—Colonel Aureliano, José Arcadio, and Amaranta. As the Buendía family grows, the town grows with them, and the Buendías are at the center of everything. Their children have children as Úrsula presides over her family, watching as more Aurelianos and Josés repeat the same mistakes as those they were named after. The first Aureliano has seventeen sons—all similarly named Aureliano—because of his affairs during the war. In following the predictions of fate, they are all subsequently slaughtered. The novel continues, full of tragic deaths, strange twists of fate, and, most notably of all, fantastic events that seek no explanation. From beginning to end, generations of Buendías are haunted by an untranslatable text given to them by Melquíades, a gypsy man who introduced the first José Arcadio to wonders such as ice and magnets. As the novel closes, Amaranta Úrsula consummates a relationship with her nephew Aureliano Bablona and births a child with the tail of a pig—an act that brings to completion the original Úrsula's fear that in marrying her cousin José Arcadio, their child would be born with a pig's tail. It is at this point, when the novel has come full circle, that the untranslatable text is translated. It is revealed that Melquíades knew all along the fate



of the Buendía family: the text was “[t]he history of the family, written by Melquíades, down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time” (García Márquez 415). The novel ends with the destruction of Macondo and the Buendía family in a hurricane of an apocalyptic nature.

Very few serious writers and critics would dispute the status of García Márquez’s first novel as the “bible” for magic realism. Nearly every “magic realist” novel written since García Márquez’s small town of Macondo thrust itself upon the literary scene has borrowed elements from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Every literary movement needs its start and while it has been argued that magic realism has always been a part of the writing of certain cultures, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was the first time it had been brought to the literary world stage. Because of its influence, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* often serves as a base with which to compare other literary examples of magic realism. In examining the elements of magic realism as used by García Márquez, it is almost impossible to separate the novel from the postcolonial gaps in a diaspora it is attempting to fill. That is not to say the novel cannot stand on its own; its enormous popularity around the world attests to its lasting power and influence on writers. But the use of magic realism in the novel stems directly from the effects of postcolonialism, and thus certain elements are more directly influenced than others. As García Márquez himself said, “[T]he interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary” (“Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech”). His voice stands in for his people, the marginalized and scattered that had been without voice for so long.

### **The main elements of magic realism, as used by García Márquez.**

As Gabriel García Márquez's novel begins, readers can see from the start that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is far from the usual novel. A combination of lack of dialogue, copious use and re-use of names, and several smaller stories within the novel serve to give *One Hundred Years of Solitude* a feeling of distance. There is no specific character that is followed—no real main character at all. Thus, the novel has the feeling of several stories pushed into one book, with the Buendía family as the only common denominator. It is almost as though García Márquez is writing down a legend, putting into his own words a story that everyone knows. Perhaps the best way of describing Marquez's novel is, as Alison Fagan writes, a "speaking mirror" (46). The larger plot and the smaller stories all reflect Colombia, if not allegorically, then metaphorically. It has been fully acknowledged by many critics that the novel is not just about the fictional city of Macondo, but rather the situation of Latin America as a whole.

#### *The Everyday and the Extraordinary*

The first element of magic realism that García Márquez introduces from the beginning is that of the everyday and the extraordinary or, in other words, the "real" and the "supernatural." His novel follows everyday life for generations and, as a consequence, focuses almost completely on everyday actions and their effects. However, the inclusion of fantastic elements in conjunction with the everyday shows how ordinary the "supernatural" is for Colombians who have lived an unbelievable reality for years. The first sentence of the novel states, "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was

to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (García Márquez 1). This sentence establishes the theme for the rest of the novel: the everyday object of “ice” is far more shocking than the fantastic manner of Aureliano Buendía’s death. “The earth is round like an orange,” José Arcadio says at one point (García Márquez 4). At this point, the “whole village was convinced that José Arcadio Buendía had lost his reason” (García Márquez 5). A little while later, he announces that “Macondo is surrounded by water on all sides” (García Márquez 12). For this pronouncement, the idea of Macondo as a peninsula “prevailed for a long time” (García Márquez 12). The actually true everyday statement of the earth’s characteristic is completely rejected, and José Arcadio is looked at with suspicion. However, when he tells Macondo that they are surrounded by water, despite the fact that they can see and discover this is not true for themselves, the townspeople accept José Arcadio’s fantastic pronouncement without question.

In order to separate magic realism from ordinary fantasy, L.T. Kendig writes, “Ghosts remain unnecessary in a work whose characters can live for several hundred years, and it is real life, not the other world, that contains the ‘magic.’ Here magic is taken for granted. It is a daily phenomenon” (4). In a sense, the fantastic and magic become the everyday, and the return to the ordinary everyday is shocking to the townspeople of Macondo. It is never commented on that “Úrsula resisted growing old even when she had already lost count of her age” (García Márquez 246). Instead, it is accepted that Úrsula is very old, and she likely will not die unless she wants to. The townspeople accept the fantastic continued existence of Úrsula, despite the fact that she should have died long ago. The gypsy man Melquíades saves the town from a plague of insomnia despite the fact that he had died years earlier,

because “he really had been through death, but he had returned because he could not bear the solitude” (García Márquez 49). Melquíades is similarly accepted until he dies for the second time, after which point he can still be seen wandering about the house. He is not a ghost—he is quite dead, and has just lingered. Living is what contains magic.

The magic and the realism are both similarly indispensable, because each relies on the other in order to fully create a world within the novel. One of the more memorable moments in the novel occurs when Remedios the Beauty floats away into heaven while doing the laundry. Yet none of the characters react as though this ascent is in any way memorable. Úrsula realizes what is happening and simply watches “Remedios the Beauty waving good-bye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her” (García Márquez 236). The other witness Fernanda, “[b]urning with envy, finally accepted the miracle, and for a long time she kept on praying to God to send her back her sheets” (García Márquez 236). Despite the fact that a woman ascended into heaven, the majority of the passage focuses on the fact that she brought the laundry with her, and it was very inconvenient. García Márquez focuses on the real aspect of the fantastic, making the fantastic elements far more real and truthful than the realistic elements he hardly describes.

As the magic shows the greatest truth, the way the townspeople treat the “real” shows the truth of Latin American existence as well. Near the middle of the tale, a train comes to town, brought by Aureliano Triste. A townspeople describes the train as “[s]omething frightful, like a kitchen dragging a village behind it” (García Márquez 222). The inventions the train brings to Macondo are received with similar suspicion. When a phonograph is displayed, “from so much and such close observation they soon reached the

conclusion that it was not an enchanted mill as everyone had thought and as the matrons had said, but a mechanical trick that could not be compared with something so moving, so human, and so full of everyday truth as a band of musicians” (García Márquez 224). The “ordinary” in the reader’s mind is extraordinary and possibly magical in the minds of the townspeople. In fact, this new technology does not tell the truth, and only what originates from within Macondo is “full of everyday truth.” Meanwhile, the extraordinary happens frequently, and the town accepts that Pilar Ternera reads the past and the future in her cards, that the smell of Remedios the Beauty drives men to their deaths, and that Amaranta, upon her predicted death, will bring letters to the souls of their dead loved ones. It is the suspension of disbelief in the characters that allows the readers to accept the illogical magic realism without much thought. And it is in the fantastic that the truth is seen more clearly, thus filling in the gaps that reality is unable to fill.

In the same supernatural elements, another of the main elements of magic realism is found in illogical forgetfulness, showcasing the erasing force of domination and colonization. Part of the truthfulness is due to the fact that García Márquez’s experiences were just as illogical as those he writes about. Certainly, many events within the novel can be connected to García Márquez’s own experiences and childhood in postcolonial Colombia. The best example that can be seen in García Márquez’s life and novel is that of the banana company massacre. In his historical analysis of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Ariel Dorfman states that during the time when García Márquez was growing up, “hundreds, some estimates say thousands, of workers were being massacred by government troops in the town of Ceinaga” (57). This act was quickly covered up and

“forgotten” about as a part of the country’s history. Colombia had an intimate relationship with violence, especially violence that was senseless and often pushed to the side. As a consequence, one of the defining moments in García Márquez’s novel is the massacre of 3,000 people who went on strike in a banana factory. He describes this event succinctly in hardly more than a page, but with vivid imagery. He describes the actual shooting in one simple sentence: “They were 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” (García Márquez 306).

While this short plot point within the novel is directly related to much of the violence actually experienced, it is not what happened that matters to García Márquez: it is the “fantastic” response. In his novel, José Arcadio Segundo witnesses this massacre and, yet when he reminisces about the number of people that must have died, the first woman who helped him says, “There haven’t been any dead here.... Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo” (García Márquez 308). It is in this act of forgetting that the element of the fantastic arrives. The event has been erased, and no one acknowledges the missing people. It is as if the massacre never happened at all, and the truth is never once acknowledged. Instead, the history of the working people—even their deaths—is erased by the dominant culture of those who run the banana company. They are a colonizing force, once again holding the ability to erase both history and myth, leaving nothing but stories to stand for what was lost.

One of the first examples of the extraordinary within the novel is that of the insomnia plague. No one is able to sleep, and there “was no doubt but that the illness was transmitted by mouth” like any other ordinary illness (García Márquez 46). Despite the supernatural nature of the illness, it is treated like any other plague—it is obviously transmitted by mouth, and even a quarantine is established. The insomnia plague does not cause just a lack of sleep but also causes those affected to forget everything, including the names and uses of everyday objects. As a result, everything is labeled with a name and a use, so the townspeople remember the everyday objects around them. Just as people “forget” the banana massacre, the Buendía family often forgets their own history. In fact, much of the novel follows the phrase “those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it.” This forgetfulness has a direct link to the erasing force of colonization.

Lorna Robinson examines the cultural, historical, and literary implications of the insomnia plague in her article “Latin America and Magical Realism: The Insomnia Plague in *Cien años de soledad*.” In the cultural/ historical context, she writes that the implication within the novel is that the plague has followed Visitación, a displaced Indian woman, as well as Rebeca, a young girl who was raised as an Indian. “Visitación recognized in those [Rebeca’s] eyes the symptoms of the sickness whose threat had obliged her and her brother to exile themselves forever from an age-old kingdom where they had been prince and princess. It was the insomnia plague,” García Márquez writes (43). Rebeca is the one who falls ill first, and Visitación has already fled the same sickness. Robinson sees this plague specifically as a metaphor for the terrible things that happened to the native Indians during the time of colonization. Along with cultural attrition, disease brought by European

colonizers wiped out many of the Indians. Thus, Robinson writes, “With this evidence in mind, it is possible to read a very historical symbolism into the event of the insomnia plague. Its voracious destruction of memory and ultimately identity represents the loss of Indian culture in colonial and republican times” (178). To García Márquez and the inhabitants of Macondo, forgetfulness means a loss of identity because living in a cultural diaspora means one can never go back to how things once were. Cultural identity is mutated, changed, and often lost in the scattering of people. The fantastic forgetfulness is not so fantastic after all because it has happened time and time again. This “element” of magic realism is necessary in order to portray truth

Thus, the novel stands as a metaphor rather than allegory. The “magic” part of magic realism lends the novel distance, separating it from actual events and establishing it as mythology instead. García Márquez purposely takes real life events in which the truth is unclear and translates them into his novel in the form of a myth, in order to show what was left after colonization. He also does not attempt explanation regarding the elements of the fantastic—a common characteristic of magic realism but also a way of expressing the unexplainable that happens frequently in postcolonialism. There was no explanation for the banana massacre in García Márquez’s life; instead, it was simply lived through. Just as postcolonialism leaves gaps that the native culture must attempt to fill, so García Márquez’s work leaves gaps where explanations should reside. This characteristic is the essence of the postcolonialism in his magic realism. As Stephen Slemon writes, “Since the ground rules of these two worlds (reality and fantasy) are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the ‘other’ a



situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rendering them with gaps, absences, and silences” (409). At its heart, García Márquez’s world is neither realistic nor magical; instead, it is based on real events with magical elements. It is fictional and therefore not a “true” story in the way many readers would imagine, but the fictional nature gives it the truthful and didactic quality of myth. García Márquez’s world is in continuous tension with itself and its own truthfulness, stuck in a vague in-between because the culture he is attempting to describe has also not yet come into its own.

The ability of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* to be linked with mythology because of its realism explores the need for a grounding mythology in a postcolonial culture. Robert Echevarria links this creation of mythology as truth with the need to express postcolonial truth: “The truth-bearing document the novel imitates now is the anthropological treatise. The object of such studies is to discover the origin and source of a culture’s own version of its values, beliefs, and history through a culling and re-telling of its myths” (364). He writes this assertion based on his own thesis, which suggests that the modern novel (of which *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is his main example) is merely culture’s new way of expressing truth. During colonization, Bressler writes that there is a “dominant cultural group who determines that culture’s ideology” (198). Far too often, this dominant cultural group erases the native culture and beliefs. Therefore, when the postcolonial culture is left behind, the question is once again raised: What is truth? Finding truth in the diaspora left by the dominating/colonizing culture is harder than it seems, and it must find its origins in the beginnings of the native culture: in this case, in the originating myths that had been taken over and twisted by the dominating culture (and, in many cases, the dominating religion). In

many examples of magic realism, the novels begin with creation in an attempt to show the myth-like quality of the story.

### *Archetypes of Myth within the Novel*

As a consequence of the need to create a grounding myth for an uncertain culture, García Márquez uses distinct circular elements in order to create the novel and its stories as mythology. Perhaps the best theory to explain these circular elements within García Márquez's novel is that of Northrop Frye, whose critical works focus specifically on the development of a common mythology. Within the canonical text, Frye develops his mythic criticism in order to explain an overarching theme in all of literature and how the literary canon often creates a common mythology. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, he attempts to study archetypes with "a world of myth, an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience" (Frye 136). He looks to myth as part of a common archetype, present in all literature and used to outline the more singular archetypes of tragedy, comedy, and the like. Therefore, his archetypes of mythology can apply to all literature, bringing together the reality and the fantasy.

García Márquez's circular elements follow some of Frye's specific mythology archetypes while creating cycles related to the novel. García Márquez is writing a postcolonial history that applies to all of Colombia, and, in a culture that has lost its common mythology to the erasing force of colonization, the repetitive cyclical nature of mythology fulfills the absence in culture. Because of this loss, García Márquez utilizes cycles

to create a complete mythology. Along with following the lines of many creation stories from the beginning to the apocalypse, García Márquez's novel also travels among Northrop Frye's mythical archetypes in order to create a working myth for his people. The cycles of birth and death, the cycles of seasons, are just as important to Frye's work as they are to García Márquez's. Frye begins explaining his archetypal theory of myth as four phases, the first being "the dawn, spring and birth phase" (1311). At the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* García Márquez writes, "[t]he world was so recent that many things lacked names"(1). This is the birth phase for García Márquez because it is the beginning of his fictional town of Macondo as it is founded by the Buendía family and begins to grow. It introduces Jose Arcadio Buendía (the first of many with similar names) and Úrsula as the "subordinate characters: the father and the mother" (Frye 1311). They are the father and mother of the entire cast of characters to come.

It is in this first chapter that García Márquez also introduces Melquíades, an old gypsy man who gives the Buendía family pages and pages of an untranslatable work. As the book continues, generations upon generations of Buendías try to translate this text, with no success. At the end of the novel, Aureliano is finally able to translate it because he realizes that "Melquíades had not put events in the order of man's conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant" (García Márquez 415). In this case, there is a text within the text that stands for the specific mythology of the Buendía family. However, the text is originally untranslatable to them, symbolizing the blindness of those who do not understand the need for mythology and therefore continually repeat their mistakes.

According to Frye's archetypes, next is the "zenith, summer, and marriage or triumph phase" (1311). Perhaps the best example of how García Márquez uses mythology to benefit his magic realism can be found in the marriage phase, when Aureliano Segundo takes Petra Cotes as his concubine. After their union, "All he had to do was to take Petra Cotes to his breeding grounds and have her ride across his land in order to have every animal marked with his brand succumb to the irremediable plague of proliferation" (García Márquez 190). This is a fantastic exaggeration of the summer phase, with fertility literally abounding everywhere. This fertility exists for a good portion of the novel, as the land abounds with food and the town grows.

However, soon after comes the advent of industrialization, with Aureliano Triste's arrival on a train, leading to the fall phase of mythology. Following summer is the fall phase, where "myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero" abound (Frye 1312). This fall comes in the death of the hero introduced in the first sentence of the novel: Colonel Aureliano Buendía. His death is an ominous omen of the erasing power of history, for, as he declines, "[h]e tried to keep on thinking about the circus, but he could no longer find the memory" (García Márquez 267). In this case, death is not the primary portion of the fall phase: it is the loss of memory. From this point on, similar to the beginning of the novel, characters often lose their memories of important or violent events. Industrialization also becomes an erasing force similar to colonization, with the massacre of workers within the banana factory perpetrated by the owner of the factory and other industrialists. This act, of course, leads to even more forgetfulness. The death of

Mauricio Babilonia, the lover of Meme, adds to the fall phase, as his death leaves a fatherless son with no knowledge of his past, whose actions bring destruction.

This mythological cycle cannot end without a complete erasing in order to bring about rebirth. This is the “winter” phase where “myths of floods and the return of chaos” are written (Frye 1312). The ending comes with chaos—the house begins to return to the land, ants devour the backyard, and Amaranta Úrsula, instead of growing fertile in her pregnancy, decays and dies giving birth to her child: a child with a pig’s tail. The novel ends on the predictions of the beginning.. These actions must come to completion and end with an apocalypse because, according to Russian critic Eleazar Meletinsky in his *Poetics of Myth*, “The cyclical concept of time requires a cyclical view of history and mythification of historical processes” (200). In accordance with the cyclical nature and Frye’s cycles, there must be an apocalyptic ending because “the Golden Age follows on the heels of the epoch of primordial chaos, but the subsequent breaking of taboo or the committing of a particular sin causes the fall from grace, which can be expressed as a return to the conditions of chaos, moral degradation, or destructive wars, or by the advent of natural cataclysms like floods or droughts” (Meletinsky 201). The destruction of Macondo begins as Aureliano realizes the words of Melquíades as a family history of the Buendías. As García Márquez writes,

Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he knew only too well... for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of

men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments (416-17).

Macondo is destroyed in a “biblical” hurricane, dissolving once again into chaos and forgetfulness—and at the same time, rejecting the prospect of another rebirth because “races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth” (García Márquez 417).

### *Mythology in postcolonial culture*

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* does not simply follow one cycle; instead, it is composed of hundreds of smaller cycles as history repeats itself again and again. Halfway through the novel, Úrsula, the matriarch of the Buendía family (and perhaps one of the more “ordinary” members), “confirmed her impression that time was going in a circle” (García Márquez 221). Long before this point, many readers, observant or otherwise, would have already received this impression in the oddly mystical repetition of character names and characteristics. There are twenty-two members of the Buendía family named “Aureliano”—partially because Colonel Aureliano had seventeen sons named after him. There are variations of the name Remedios, José Arcadio, and each incarnation shares almost the same characteristics of his or her ancestors. As the novel continues, “Every member of the family, without realizing it, repeated the same path every day, the same actions, and almost repeated the same words at the same hour” (García Márquez 247).

History becomes so repetitive that Aureliano Babilonia, the last Aureliano of the Buendía family, has his memories confused with those of the first Aureliano. He wanders

the street calling for Colonel Aureliano's friends, all of whom are long dead. As the novel concludes, the story is once again brought back to the untranslatable text Melquíades left at the beginning of the novel. Aureliano, with the knowledge of dozens of other Aurelianos, finally understands it, as he realizes that Melquíades' text arranges the events of the Buendía family so that they all exist in one repetitive instant. In the cyclical nature of mythological time, ordinary time and history are not of importance. Instead, the focus is on the repetition and the idea that the Buendía family is caught repeating themselves, in part because they have forgotten their own history. Aureliano Bablona never truly knew his own history and does not realize until he reads Melquíades' text that he is the nephew of Amaranta Úrsula, with whom he has had a child. Many of the men of the family forget the madness of José Arcadio Buendía and how he locked himself in the room in an attempt to translate Melquíades' text. Thus, his sons and grandsons repeat the same actions, locking themselves in a room full of ghosts, whose literal existence is unimportant, in an attempt to translate something they do not yet have the ability to understand.

### **Filling in the gaps**

As García Márquez carefully crafts the world of Macondo by using magic realism in order to create mythology, the elements of magic realism fill in the gaps left by postcolonialism and the scattering of Colombians due to violence. Kendig writes about García Márquez's creation of Macondo that "the place where we come from, magically, mythically, is the source of our identity, of our reality, and, of course, of our magic. Not just the earth, but a particular part of the earth, is our source. The vagaries of war and politics cannot erase this connection to place" (19). García Márquez creates Macondo, a place

where the fantastic happens routinely and its people treat the ordinary with more fear and suspicion than the fantastic, to show his home. Colombia was, at the time, a country intimately connected with extreme violence and irrational actions. Thus, the only way to describe the reality of postcolonial existence is to use the fantastic.

Both the fantastic and the real serve distinct purposes within the novel, mixing together in order to fill the spaces left behind in the diaspora of violence. The specific elements of magic realism fulfill the cultural need for literature written by the marginalized for the marginalized. As Maria Bortolussi writes,

Rather than represent any marginalized group with the intention of validating a 'magical' perspective of the world, magic realist authors maintain a prudential distance with respect to both center and margin, challenging accepted notions of reality that emerge from both, and showing, if anything, that all partake of a more universal, archetypal myth-making function of the human mind. (364).

While magic realism arises specifically to fill in the gaps left in a postcolonial scattering of culture, the success of magic realism is that it can stand in for all of humanity. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was not written just for Latin America, but rather for all those who search for a grounding mythology in order to understand their cultures.



## Chapter 4: Salman Rushdie's writing in a diaspora

In the years after the huge success of García Márquez, postcolonial Indian writer Salman Rushdie was creating several highly unique and award-winning written masterpieces of his own. When Salman Rushdie was born and began writing in his native country of India, he was writing from an era of turmoil. India and Pakistan had been declared independent from Great Britain, but how can a people that had been colonized for years suddenly become what they had once been? Colonization had left a vacuum, a dissonance between the old culture and the culture forced upon them where the original culture tried to find middle ground. Diaspora was also created, as many natives of India left voluntarily or were exiled forcibly due to the violence of the postcolonial government. It was in this era that Rushdie turned to the writing of magic realism in order to make some sense of the diaspora in which he was living.

Rushdie took Spivak's question of the subaltern's ability to speak a step further by asking, "Does India exist?" (*Imaginary Homelands* 26). In a time when India was unified only by its colonization, as soon as India became independent, it quite possibly ceased to exist as a unified country. This unification was Rushdie's focus in many of his early writings: creating a novel for postcolonial India that accurately described its experiences as a culture striving towards hybridity. At the time of his writing, violence between specific religious and ethnic groups had become the reality of postcolonialism in much of India, but Rushdie still spoke of India as a great whole in his writings. "My India," Rushdie writes in 1987, "has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: the ideas to which the ideologies of the

communalists are diametrically opposed” (Rushdie *Imaginary Homelands* 32). India still grasped at hybridity in order to make sense of its postcolonial nature, despite the violence that overtook it. In the era of decolonization, India was left with many sub-cultures and religions that were no longer bound by a common dominant culture. Often these cultures and religions fought one another, causing upheaval and displacement. Salman Rushdie’s writings grew specifically in a Muslim diaspora and in the tumultuous internal violence of the era. Much like García Márquez, Rushdie’s writing arose from the experience of routine violence becoming normal—becoming the new real.

While Rushdie was a postcolonial writer, he acknowledged the postcolonial nature of his country and, subsequently, his writings. Unlike many authors whose written works were viewed as postcolonial after the fact, Rushdie specifically looked at other postcolonial authors and literary critics as influences on his writing. He wrote from a country in the midst of the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism, and because he knew the theory behind his writing, he could arguably express what he believed postcolonialism was in a clear fictional way. When he turned to magic realism in order to express India’s existence as a postcolonial culture, it was because magic realism “expresses a genuinely ‘Third World’ consciousness” (*Imaginary Homelands* 301). Many of his influences were literary critics whose works on exile and identity resonated with the Indian writer, and he was not afraid to admit it.

Specifically, he found the postcolonial and Palestinian writer Edward Said as one who most closely knew and was able to express the experience of a postcolonial people. In his essay “On Palestinian Identity: A Conversation with Edward Said” within his book

*Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie writes, “I find one passage particularly valuable, as it connects with many things I have been thinking about. ‘Our truest reality,’ he [Said] writes, ‘is expressed in the way we cross over from one place to another. We are migrants and perhaps hybrids...’”(171). Rushdie identifies with Said’s qualification of a subordinate culture, partially because Said was a Palestinian frequently threatened by Israeli people and their allies, just as Rushdie was frequently threatened for his views. Edward Said, in describing his experience as a Palestinian intellectual, says that he was “treated like a diplomat of terrorism” by many people because of the constant fighting between Palestinians and Israelis (“On Palestinian Identity” 173). Yet Said never had any type of vendetta against Israelis. But as a Palestinian, his concepts of home and identity were fiercely defended in his writing because so many Palestinians had been forced from their homes in the creation of the country of Israel.

Said himself existed as an exile in the diaspora of Palestine after the creation of Israel, because he wrote about his homeland while living in the United States. Salman Rushdie identified with Said because both existed within “imaginary homelands,” that is, countries and cultures that existed more on an intellectual level than a “real” one. Rushdie was also treated with suspicion as a foreigner and a Muslim (though he has often professed he does not follow religion, he still came from a Muslim family), and the political nature of much of his fiction encouraged suspicion. In fact, he is one of the best examples of authors persecuted for their writings. As the world watched, a fatwa was issued against Rushdie in 1989 for his novel *Satanic Verses*. The Imam, or Muslim leader, issued an edict that sentenced Rushdie to death for blasphemy against Islam and the Koran (“Ayatollah”). This

was the start of a literal exile for Rushdie, who was forced into hiding in Great Britain. One could say Rushdie welcomed controversy over his works, if only for the dialogue it would prompt. But this specifically political type of dialogue, to Rushdie, was one of his only options in a world that constantly dismissed postcolonial writing, just as it had dismissed the effects of colonization.

In his interview with Said, Rushdie asks the question that Edward Said posed from the beginning: “Do you exist? And if so, what proof do you have?” (“Imaginary Homelands” 174). Rushdie asks this question of Said because he is uniquely able to understand Rushdie’s issue with identity and culture as well. As a Palestinian removed from his country to make room for the new country of Israel, Said found himself lingering in a diaspora, part of a culture that could no longer ground itself. “In Edward’s view,” Rushdie writes, “the broken or discontinuous nature of Palestinian experience entails that classic rules about form or structure cannot be true to that experience; rather, it is necessary to work through a kind of chaos or unstable form that will accurately express its essential instability” (*Imaginary Homelands* 168). This “unstable form” that rises up against the dominant discourse and classic form is magic realism because its essential nature dismisses the dominant discourse and Western canon completely. Just as the “existence” of Palestine as a culture is constantly chaotic and shifting—and tinged with the question “Is this really Palestine, after so much has been lost?” similar questions arose as Rushdie asked the question again and again: is this really India, when India was never a country before colonization? When so many subcultures had been displaced or exiled? What has it become?

As Said wrote his postcolonial theory of the Other and Rushdie followed with his fiction writing, the writing of each unstable time period inevitably has the same essential instability. It cannot conform to the tactics of ordinary novels in order to prove a point: instead, it must follow the culture from which it originates. In this case, the culture is in constant flux between existence and collapse, riddled with holes and gaps from what the dominating culture has left. The “cultural obliteration” has created a new “national reality” (Fanon 1440). It is this new reality that Rushdie expresses in his Booker Prize winning novel *Midnight’s Children* as he uses magic realism to overthrow the dominant discourse and to tie India together, filling in the diaspora with the fantastic and covering the holes and gaps with a grounding mythology. Like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Midnight’s Children* speaks for a culture. However, in Rushdie’s writing, his focus is specifically postcolonial and specifically focused on India and its future.

**Borrowing from a great: Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* as it relates to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.**

As Salman Rushdie’s much celebrated novel *Midnight’s Children* begins, the similarities between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the fictionalized story of India is almost too obviously apparent. Rushdie idolized García Márquez and purposely modeled many of his novels after the man’s works. In describing García Márquez’s works, Rushdie fully admits that magic realism is the only style that can demonstrate a genuine Third world “consciousness” without viewing the Third World as the Other (*Imaginary Homelands* 301). Unlike most of the Western literary canon, magic realism is the “true” voice of the Third World. He then explores the concept in depth: “it [magic realism] deals with what Naipaul

has called ‘half-made’ societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are somehow more garish and extreme” (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 302). It is clear from the first sentence that *Midnight’s Children* is a magic realist novel; however, in the elements that Rushdie’s novel shares with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it becomes clear why Rushdie used magic realism. Rushdie, much like García Márquez, is turning to magic realism in response to the degradation of his culture and the need to write from a marginalized space. India’s history is far more confusing than the history books would write—there was still debate about whether India was a country or not long after it had gained “independence.”

Rushdie turned to magic realism for its ability to uniquely express the Third World’s consciousness. As such, Rushdie specifically modeled *Midnight’s Children* after García Márquez’s “bible” of magic realism. His admiration of García Márquez led him to write an entire chapter of criticism on him, stating, “Macondo exists. That is its magic” (*Imaginary Homelands* 302). From beginning to end, his book deliberately echoes *One Hundred Years of Solitude* while at the same time demanding many differences because of the specific subject matter. However, he agrees with García Márquez when he writes about the “damage to reality” wrought in the political upheaval after decolonization: “The only truth is that you are being lied to all the time” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 301). Rushdie shares many of García Márquez’s elements of magic realism, like the cyclical nature and the apocalyptic vision of the future. Rushdie uses magic realism because “realism, as opposed to tragedy, allegory, or epic, is harder to sustain where identity has been denied and must be reasserted” (ten Kortenaar, 769). Magic realism expresses both the marginalized discourse and the truth of

these cultural experiences, while establishing an identity for a people who are still searching for their own existence.

Rushdie's novel starts with a singular narrator Saleem recounting the extraordinary events of his life although Saleem is not actually born until the end of Book One. The novel follows the uncomfortable effects of hybridization, the uncertainty of India's future, and the results of the violence within the country—all through Saleem, who, because of the day of his birth, is physically tied to the country. He was born at midnight on the day of India's independence, and, thus, his life is a "mirror" of India. He is tied telepathically to the other Midnight Children, all of whom were born at midnight on the day of India's independence and given magical abilities. Some can see the future, others can enter dreams, and even more have abilities that are closer to god-like than natural. Similar to the Buendías, whose neverending cycles guide Macondo, Saleem's stands in for India's repetitions among the Midnight's Children. To many, this would seem an interesting way of exploring India's history through the allegory of a man. However, there is no allegory to be found in the magic realist style instead magical elements stand in for a collective mythology of India's many peoples.

### **Rushdie's Elements of Magic Realism**

Unlike García Márquez, Rushdie's magical realist writing has a specific type of discourse to overturn: the colonial novels that had arisen from the British colonization of India. Nearly all of the novels written about India had been written either by Indians during the time of colonization, or by the colonizers themselves. The writings then came from a

distinctly “white” perspective and were affected by the Western gaze. Magic realism provides Rushdie with the ability to subvert the colonial novel by showing postcolonialism as viewed and written by the Other. He is also able to overturn colonial discourse by establishing a mythology for the new hybrid culture that arose post-colonization. Thus the elements of the fantastic are introduced as the Other’s way of describing its experience as a postcolonial culture. Theo D’haen, in studying magic realism and its relation to the dominant discourse, writes, “Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* both invokes and subverts the typically English tradition of the colonial novel.... At variance with this tradition, in Rushdie’s novel the focus lies with the Indians themselves, and with their views of their country and society. From this perspective, the exotic becomes something the West has projected upon India” (198). Once again referring to Said’s defining concept of the “Otherization” of the East, D’haen uses Rushdie as an example of magic realism subverting the main discourse—in this example, the main discourse being the canonical novels of Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster. Because the “exotic” is simply routine, magic realism displaces the Otherization of the Indian people. In order to displace the dominant colonizing force, *Midnight’s Children* uses magic realism to change roles.

#### *The Everyday and the Extraordinary*

As the novel begins, the fantastic becomes a signature element in the novel by standing in for history that is frequently written over. Saleem himself is one of the biggest examples of the supernatural within the novel because he, like the other children born at midnight on the day of India’s independence, is “endowed with features, talents or faculties which can only be described as miraculous” (Rushdie 224). The midnight’s children all have



strange and different mystical abilities; for example, there was a “pair of twin sisters who were already legend...because they both possessed the ability of making every man who saw them fall hopelessly and often suicidally in love with them”(Rushdie 225). This element is very similar to the oddly magical ability of Remedios the Beauty, who drove several men to their deaths in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Like García Márquez’s work, these magical abilities are attributed to the children born at midnight without further explanation; however, unlike García Márquez’s text, Rushdie’s novel logically explores the effects of these abilities. The fact that the midnight’s children end up telepathically connected adds to the effects of these abilities on the midnight’s children, their families, and the country of India.

Another shared element with García Márquez in Rushdie’s novel is the forgetfulness and loss of history that come with decolonization, expressed in supernatural erasing forces. As Saleem grows, “what constitutes history is frequently obliterated in the process, and it is here, in the ambivalence of its margins, that Rushdie locates his novel,” R.S. Krishnan asserts in his article “History as Trope and Atrophying History in *Midnight’s Children*”(117). As in the case of García Márquez, Rushdie is writing from an uncertain place where history has been written over by the dominant discourse and erased by the violence and desire for hybridity in a country that never technically existed before colonization. People began to forget their heritage, and the midnight’s children gradually begin to lose their supernatural abilities. As the novel starts its final chapter, Saleem writes that many “had mislaid their powers of retention, so that now they had become incapable of judgment, having forgotten everything to which they could compare anything that happened” (Rushdie 512). Near the

end of life for Saleem, and quite possibly India, forgetfulness is rampant. The past is no longer effective as a reminder of the effects of repeating history.

Thus, history becomes fiction, nothing more than tales told to children in an effort to preserve cultural truth. R.S. Krishnan writes “Rushdie portrays the history of the putative postcolonial promise of the newly emergent independent India through the prism of its ‘mythical’ past by historicizing his fiction and fictionalizing his history”(122). The “fiction” of mythology is truer than realism of India as a country, because this mythology is shared.

### *Novel as Myth*

It is not just the use of the fantastic, however, that overturns the dominant colonial discourse. The mythological nature of magic realism asserts itself in the elements of the fantastic. Eleazar Meletinsky writes in *The Poetics of Myth* that mythology falls into two categories, and “one defines myth as a fantastic representation of the world” (158). In using magical realism and following the mythological cycles embedded within magic realism, established by Frye, and used by García Márquez, Rushdie “poses an ideological, postcolonial opposition to that linear, imperialist version of history which represses and distorts India’s own sense of its history” (Merivale 331).

It is fiction—mythology to be precise—that is the truth of Rushdie’s novel. History has already proven itself unable to be trusted because it is so often erased due to internal and governmental violence between subcultures. Whether India is a truly hybrid culture or not, each Indian subculture has its own mythology that has been hybridized into India culture as a whole. Like García Márquez, Rushdie must create a new myth, one that grounds

the Indian culture while mixing the subcultures and dominant cultures together. Thus, he follows the cyclical nature of mythology, as outlined by Northrop Frye's archetypes. Similar to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, his novel opens with a singular character at the beginning moment of a culturally specific place. In García Márquez's novel, he starts with a flashback to the beginning of the city of Macondo, a town so insular it operates as its own world. Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* begins with the narrator recounting the day of his birth where "at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I [Saleem] tumbled forth into the world" (3). Rushdie's "creation myth" begins with the start of India itself, a free country intermingled with the remnants of colonialism and its subcultures. This is Frye's birth phase, as the story begins (literally) with the birth of the narrator and India simultaneously. The first line of the novel starts, "I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time" (Rushdie 3). This is the beginning of Saleem and India, and, because they began at the same time, Saleem's destiny is mythically entwined with India's.

Similar to Frye's archetypes, *Midnight's Children* follows cycles of birth and rebirth throughout the novel. However, unlike García Márquez, Rushdie does not focus as much on the repetitive nature of history as he does on the specific events of India's history. Here is the largest difference between *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children*: while Macondo is fictional and thus can stand in for Colombia, Latin America, or even humanity as a whole, India is a very specific place. Rushdie's novel is constrained by the history it follows while it is given freedom through magic realism. Krishnan says it best in "History as Trope and Atrophying History in *Midnight's Children*" when he writes,

“Rushdie portrays India’s history in terms of the metaphors, metonymy, and irony that constitute Saleem’s recasting of it from the perspective of his own life—not as the traditionally mythologized version contained in Indian history books but as distortions, disjunctions, and venality that pervade the postindependence body politic to which Saleem bears witness and of which he is a victim” (115).

Saleem stands in for the mythological Indian gods—whether it be the Hindu, Christian, or Muslim version—and therefore stands in for all of India. Because he was born on the exact stroke of midnight, he was given the most terrifying and godlike gift of all: “the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men” (Rushdie 229). In describing his own birth and the birth of one thousand and one children born at midnight on the day of India’s independence, Saleem exclaims it was “as though history, arriving at a point of the highest significance and promise, had chosen to sow, in that instant, the seeds of a future which would genuinely differ from anything the world had seen up to that time” (Rushdie 224). Saleem is the “new god” for the different, decolonized future of India that still hearkens back to the past—at least, that is the hope. That hope of a new future ebbs and fades as the novel progresses, with the realizations of corruption, separation, isolation, and decline.

Despite Saleem’s destiny, he always stands apart from his fellows. His isolation from the other midnight’s children and the “regular” children exemplifies India’s isolation in the grips of colonization. Through the mystic telepathic connection the children have, one can see the differences in Indian culture because each child exemplifies a small part of India. “Children,” Saleem comments, “however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-view of adults began to take over their minds, I found children

from Maharashtra loathing Gujaratis..." (Rushdie 292). He continues, "[I]n this way the Midnight Children's Conference fulfilled the prophecy of the Prime Minister and became, in truth, a mirror of the nation" (Rushdie 292). The quarrels of India became the quarrels of the children who represented India, despite the fact that they were more alike than they were different. Their fictional and magical history is the history of India as it fights within itself and begins to decline.

Thus begins the fall phase of Frye's mythic archetypes, as the Midnight Children begin to fight within themselves, and Saleem goes in for an operation to clear his sinuses, severing his connection to the Midnight Children. There were "revelations, and the closing of a mind; and exile, and four-years-after return; suspicions growing, dissension breeding, departures in twenties and tens... until: silence" (Rushdie 348). The midnight children were already declining in keeping with the fall phase, and the ordinary operation to clear the sinuses of an abnormally large nose erased Saleem's magical abilities as if they had never existed. This is the "dissolution" phase, of both India and the children of midnight, shown in the gradual decline of Saleem.

This decline, of course, lends itself to the eventual apocalyptic annihilation of Saleem in order for the novel to look forward to rebirth. Rushdie's novel ends with the death phase, similarly to García Márquez's apocalyptic ending to Macondo. Saleem's apocalypse is a flood of people. In an ending eerily similar to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Saleem writes, "Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust" (533). In comparison, García Márquez writes about Aureliano Babliona, who "already understood that he would

never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wipe out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men..." (416). As García Márquez continues writing on the effects on generations, so does Rushdie: Saleem continues that "they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died" (553). Each novel shares the inevitable ending that will continue for eternity, because the Buendías are condemned to one hundred years of solitude, and will not receive a second chance on earth (García Márquez 417). Rushdie finishes his last sentence in the same way: "it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both master and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace" (533).

Just as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, there is an apocalypse of biblical proportions, with the ending of India shown in Saleem's vision of his own death by trampling. Chaos reigns here, too, but unlike García Márquez, this annihilation still leaves the possibility of rebirth open. Though the children of this midnight are unable to live or die in peace, there is the possibility of another midnight and a new beginning and birth phase, because of the cyclical nature of mythology.

Rushdie therefore successfully creates a mythology according to Frye's archetypes. However, he also successfully creates a unifying myth for a country that, until decolonization, never really existed. India was a mix of cultures, a hybrid of religions and hierarchies. It is in this aspect that Rushdie's novel differs from the traditionally Latin

American definition of magic realism outlined by García Márquez. Rushdie's "hybridity" expounded upon by Homi Bhaba and others, is not just hybridity between the once dominant culture and the subordinate: instead, it is a forced hybridity between all of the smaller subcultures within India. Rushdie pondered this new Indian reality in his criticism *Imaginary Homelands*: "And then, at midnight," he writes, "the thing that had never existed was suddenly 'free.' But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand?" (27). Just as Saleem is the common denominator of all the midnight's children, he also stands for India as a whole as he is physically connected to India. Saleem is the common ground for a hierarchically divided India. Thus, he becomes god-like while being the "everyman" who stands mythically giant for an entire culture (Meletinsky, 339).

### **Filling in the Gaps**

Salman Rushdie wrote his magic realist novel in order to overthrow the dominant discourse regarding India and to describe the Indian experience in a way that would fill in the gaps left by postcolonialism and unify a country that was only "unified" as a colony. He gives voice to a people who never had a distinct voice under colonization, allowing the people to speak from within their diasporas. *Midnight's Children* intermingles the fantastic/magical and the ordinary in order to describe the postcolonial experience, while at the same time creating a grounding mythology for a scattered culture. Yet, it must also be remembered that India today is still in the grips of violence in its search for identity. Rushdie crafts a Saleem and his abilities as a magician, because "the magicians were people whose hold on reality was absolute; they gripped it so powerfully that they could bend it every which way in the service of their arts, but they never forgot what it was" (399). Yet, Saleem

and the other midnight's children slowly lose their abilities, forgetting who and what they are and subscribing to the reality in front of them rather than the reality of their magic. There was a lingering fear, the "fear of coming-to-nothing-after-all" and that "the purpose of the five hundred and eighty-one lay in the destruction; that they had come, in order to come to nothing" (Rushdie 348). At the time of Rushdie's writing, there was still a valid fear that the fight for true Indian hybridity would come to nothing. There is still a caste system, a dominant culture and religion that is creating a culture for themselves and Othering the subcultures. There will always be holes and gaps unable to be filled in India, until the day it is truly free.



## Chapter 5: Starting anew: Toni Morrison as a black writer filling her diaspora

Toni Morrison, although widely acknowledged as a magic realist author, does not quite fit in with the postcolonial Third World nature expressed by Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie. She lives in the U.S, a country that cast aside colonialism hundreds of years ago and is hardly postcolonial in the common definition of the word. But Toni Morrison is an African-American author, and her experiences regarding a cultural diaspora are found in the mixture of the African and the American by which she defines herself. In Toni Morrison's magic realism, one can see the future of magic realist writing as a revolt against the dominant discourse. In the world today, very few cultures are still seen as postcolonial. The new trend of postmodern literature also takes the focus away from postcolonialism by pondering larger existential questions rather than focusing on the perspective of the marginalized. But by using magic realism, Toni Morrison is able to write from a distinctly marginalized perspective as part of a black culture. This marginalized culture is defined by people that had been taken from their African homes and forced to conform to the dominant culture, and who are constantly stereotyped and "Otherized" by the dominant culture that, truthfully, still exists. However, despite her specific marginalization, Toni Morrison's audience is universal.

Morrison speaks of this Otherization of the black people in her book of criticism, *Playing in the Dark* when she writes, "[T]he imaginative and historical terrain upon which early American writers journeyed is in large measure shaped by the presence of the racial other" (46). In American history, the dominant white culture has shaped and been shaped

by Otherizing the subordinate black culture. In fact, according to Morrison, in postcolonial America, the dominant white culture turned to blacks as the other in order to define themselves as a people separate from Great Britain. Morrison's entire book of literary criticism focuses on the black influence on white literature despite the dominant white culture's attempts to avoid hybridization. At the same time, black African American culture formed its own niche in the margins of the dominant white American society, from Negro spirituals to the Harlem Renaissance to the works of Toni Morrison herself. And like the works of García Márquez and Rushdie, a defining characteristic of magic realism in Morrison's novels is the common use of the unimaginable.

Toni Morrison's novels focus on the black perspective in a world that is almost not understandable because of the loss of African culture and the pressure to take part in American culture. However, Toni Morrison takes her novels a step forward, and inserts the fantastic elements of magic realism in order to create a "new homeland" for African Americans. At the same time, she writes from a twice-marginalized perspective, as both an African American and a woman. She writes in a culture "where those who discuss and write about it seem not to know black women exist or even to consider the possibility that we might be somewhere writing or saying something that should be listened to, or producing art that should be seen, heard, approached with intellectual seriousness" (bell hooks 2511). This statement, made by bell hooks, a black woman critic, declares in "Postmodern Blackness" that the black culture needs to take its place in postmodernism and overthrow the dominant white male discourse. Her biggest point of contention is that "[i]t has become necessary to find new avenues to transmit the messages of black liberation struggle, new

ways to talk about racism and other politics of domination” (2511). Toni Morrison’s novels find a new way to artistically speak of the reality of black existence and domination in using magic realism.

Postmodernism and the focus on the Other can only do so much—there needs to be a way to express the effects of Otherization on black culture while overthrowing the dominant discourse and establishing black writing as its own force. In the mixing of the real and the fantastic within her works, Toni Morrison establishes the reality of the marginalized black existence while creating a voice that is not dependent on the dominant white discourse. At the same time, along the vein of Garcia Marquez and Rushdie, Morrison creates a mythological history for a scattered people: a culture in a diaspora. Keith E. Byerman, while not using the phrase “magic realism” expresses Morrison’s style in his article “Beyond Realism: The Fictions of Toni Morrison” when he writes, “The rational telling of extreme events forces a radical reconsideration of commonly held assumptions... she dramatizes the destructive power implicit in the control of various symbolic systems” (55). This “extreme” nature of Morrison’s writing shines through in the shocking actions of her characters, and the habit of many of her characters to appear after death. Using the “extreme” or, in the case of magic realism, the fantastic, Morrison creates “quest tales in which key characters search for the hidden sign capable of giving them strength and/or identity” (Byerman 56). The search for identity, a common theme in postcolonial works, takes on mythical proportions in Morrison’s writings. Thus, Morrison’s works become mythology, establishing themselves apart from the white literary canon as a common

grounding myth for the variety of African peoples that were displaced and found themselves under the nebulous banner of “African American.”

Like Rushdie, Morrison must create a unifying myth for a culture that never existed precolonization and is thus forced into uncomfortable hybridity. By creating this myth and exposing the fantastic elements and violence of black existence, she is establishing a homeland for the marginalized black culture within white America. And like García Márquez, Morrison must write of the enormous violence experienced by her people in a way that does not attempt to rationalize the erasing of African culture and the treatment of black people as slaves. Morrison’s fiction is postcolonial and post-slavery, based on the collective African American memory of subjugation and violence, as well as the loss of African culture.

### **Morrison’s Main Elements of Magic Realism**

While most critics highlight Morrison’s novel *Beloved* as her main magic realist novel, many of her novels hold the same elements of magic realism used in different ways. *Paradise*, a novel published in 1997, contains elements of magic realism and mythology, all firmly grounded in a specific place, similar to Garcia Marquez’s Macondo and Rushdie’s India. It is in *Paradise* that Toni Morrison, in using magic realism, is able to create a mythology for African Americans and Americans in general. *Paradise*, in spite of its name, is a novel filled with strange violence, isolation, and separation. It begins with the massacre of women dwelling within the “Convent,” an old Catholic schoolhouse that has become a place for women who have “lost their way” (Morrison 9). The men of the nearby all-black town of

Ruby, an offshoot of the once great town of Haven, have decided that the women are at fault for all of their problems and the destruction of their own private paradise. The novel is told through alternating viewpoints, following the women as the collectively marginalized group and the men as the patriarchal society determined to destroy the women. As the novel reaches its conclusion through flashbacks and retellings, it is realized that the bodies of these massacred women are gone, disappeared as if they had survived the massacre. The novel ends with the women visiting family and friends, as the dead speaking and walking in order to finish what they had started.

### *The Everyday and the Extraordinary*

As a black American magic realist novel written by a woman, Morrison's novel is notably different from other postcolonial magic realist novels and perhaps hints towards the future of magic realism as a style of writing that can overthrow the dominant discourse. Her novel is shocking and does not follow the usual telling of a story. Instead, it opens on the extremely violent scene of a massacre—outlining the inevitable ending from the beginning. "They shoot the white girl first," Morrison writes as the first sentence of the novel; "with the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other" (3). The novel starts with the feelings of doom, displacement, and isolation that García Márquez and Rushdie's novels end with. The nearby town had faded already, as the agriculture collapsed and people moved away, and this disaster is partially what led to the massacre.

However, Morrison still shares many elements of her use of magic realism with García Márquez and Rushdie, including but not limited to the extraordinary treated as everyday, the concept of death as impermanent or nonexistent, and the rewriting of history creating a need for stories. Morrison's narrative uses magic realism, like García Márquez and Rushdie, to draw attention to the strange characteristics of a marginalized society while creating myth for those existing in a diaspora. This "extreme" element is seen from the beginning, with senseless violence as the first and central act within the novel.

But almost immediately, there is an element of magic realism. As the massacre is described, "one of them, the youngest, looks back, forcing himself to see how the dream he is in might go. The shot woman, lying uncomfortably on marble, waves her fingers at him" (Morrison 4). The massacre is given the quality of a dream, of the unreal. This is the fantastic: in Ruby and in the surrounding areas, the dead are spoken of as if they still live, with the women wandering about as apparitions near the end of the novel. Pallas is seen near the end of the novel, "one hand on the knapsack bottom, the other carrying a sword" (Morrison 311). In fact, similar to García Márquez, death is often dismissed entirely. In Ruby "nobody has ever died" narrates Patricia, one of the nine viewpoints given in the novel. Patricia continues, narrating, "Please note I said *in* Ruby and they are real proud about that believing they are blessed and all because after 1953 anybody who died did it in Europe or Korea or someplace outside this town" (Morrison 199). This supernatural dismissal of death reaches its end as the novel comes to its conclusion. They treat the lack of death as the everyday, ignoring that it is extraordinary.

Meanwhile, the extraordinary aspects of Ruby's everyday existence are glossed over, treated as normal and taking the place of the everyday. The men of the "8-rock" families—those that founded Ruby—often "take over" the women in their families, leaving a trail of children conceived in incest behind them. Patricia realizes that the men might "ask a friend or distant relative if he could take over a young girl who had no prospects" in order to keep the purity of the 8-rock bloodlines (Morrison 196). There is nothing out of the ordinary with these actions according to the people of the town. Rather, the extraordinary, according to the townspeople, happens when women live by themselves in an area outside of town. This is their reality—one of ordinary subjugation leading to extraordinary happenings.

The women who were massacred were believed to have supernatural satanic abilities by the men of the town of Ruby, leading to their deaths in order for the men's "paradise" to exist. The women were specifically targeted, in part because of the cultural belief in the supernatural abilities of women. Their garden grows—almost supernaturally, in the minds of many, with an abundance of peppers at its heyday-- while the men of the town blame their bad experiences and infidelities on the women (Morrison 242). The men "assert themselves as the heirs of a legend of male dominance, ostracizing outsiders who do not belong to their genealogy and controlling marriages and the lives of women. Their elitism is epitomized in their surprise attack on the women sheltered in the Convent, whose independence becomes a threat to the male leaders" (Mori 57)

But death is not simply nonexistent within the town limits—it is also purposely forgotten, and history is re-written around it. Lone, one of the surviving women, "became unhinged by the way the story was being retold; how people were changing it to make

themselves look good” (Morrison 297). The massacre is rewritten to fit the dominant discourse of the men. The bodies of the women disappear completely, this extraordinary act signifying the erasing dominant force of men. When Roger Best races to the site of the massacre after the men return, he searches for the bodies, to find only “a sheet and a folded raincoat the only sign that a body had been there” (Morrison 292). This extraordinary disappearance is the only way to explain this senseless act of violence. This is the common thread of magic realism: using the supernatural in order to show what never should have been forgotten, but what was inevitably erased by the dominant force—whether that be imperialism, colonization, or patriarchal society.

### *Novel as Myth*

It can be difficult to see where *Paradise* fits into Northrop Frye’s mythological archetypes. According to his theory, and following the examples of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight’s Children*, *Paradise* should begin with birth or rebirth, at the beginning within the spring phase. It is here, however, that Morrison’s storytelling differs from Rushdie and García Márquez. Rather than telling her story through cycles in chronological cyclical time, as García Márquez does, or framing the story through a narrator like Rushdie, Morrison tells the story of *Paradise* in pieces. These pieces eventually form a cyclical whole, but are not told in their chronological order. However, while *Paradise* as myth seems oddly out of order by beginning with the inevitable apocalyptic ending, there is still the start of a culture within the novel, a space that demands its own mythology. It is the founding of Haven, Ruby, and the Convent that shows the need for mythology in the same



manner that the founding of Macondo and the beginning of India demand to be mythologized.

Haven is a town founded by black people for only black people almost immediately after the ending of slavery. Morrison outlines the beginnings of Haven carefully within the first chapter: the men who found it do so because they are “denied and guarded against” and thus they are “becoming stiffer, prouder with each misfortune” (Morrison 14). Haven was founded in isolation by isolated people who had already been rejected and formed their own society, rejecting all others. However, this “haven” eventually rejects its own people, the land refusing to give food anymore. “Freedmen who stood tall in 1889 dropped to their knees in 1934 and were stomach-crawling by 1948,” one of the men thinks to himself (Morrison 5). The proud founders of the town, however, refuse to give up and found the town of Ruby, copying nearly every part of Haven, in a new location. In a deliberate echo of Genesis, the men who found Haven wander, and by “juxtaposing the story of Genesis with the history of Haven and Ruby, these heirs authenticate the accounts of their ancestors’ wandering to find their Canaan by equating themselves with the chosen people” write Aoi Mori in her article on the marginalized in *Paradise* (58). However, it is the Convent that is important. Originally a Catholic school for Native American girls, it becomes the only actual haven in the novel as a place for the marginalized women to turn to. This is the birth phase, the beginnings of a specific black mythology and a women’s mythology.

Unlike many novels, the summer phase does not occupy the main portion of the novel. Instead, the summer phases of Haven/Ruby and the Convent are mentioned only briefly, through flashback. The summer phase is only viewed in hindsight, as the men realize

moving to Ruby changes things: “fertility shriveled, even while the bounty grew” (Morrison 193). The fertile summer phase of the convent is shown in Consolata’s late awakening as a woman and her quick affair with one of the men in the town. Even their meeting is in a time of fertility in the land: “All he wanted was some black peppers. He was twenty-nine. She was thirty-nine. And she lost her mind. Completely” (Morrison 228). But as their affair ends, so does the Convent, as the nuns are forced to leave because of a lack of students to teach.

It is within the fall phase that the main actions of the novel exist. The massacre of the women within the Convent happens because “outrages that had been accumulating all along took shape as evidence... the proof they had been collecting since the terrible discovery in the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women” (Morrison 11). The fall phase is the inevitable decline and death of the hero/story, and the myth is reaching its inevitable conclusion of complete annihilation. In *Paradise*, Ruby’s “decline” is blamed on the women in the Convent, rather than the townspeople’s own actions. “Four damaged infants born into one family” is not blamed on what readers later realize is a tradition of incest, but instead blamed on women who hardly ever step foot into town (Morrison 11).

The novel ends with the conclusion of its apocalyptic beginning along with a glimpse of the endless cycle of the future, symbolized in waves. In this future, there is “[a]nother ship, perhaps, but different, heading to port, crew and passengers, lost and saved, atremble, for they have been disconsolate for some time. Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise” (Morrison

318). The paradise that the founders of Haven and Ruby attempted to create was exclusive, only meant to be paradise for certain people—in their case, black men. The paradise that the men of Ruby attempted to create fails because of their Otherization of the women in the Convent in an attempt to understand themselves. They could not fully accept their own Otherization as black men when they were so focused on turning their gaze to women as the Other. The men of the town became the dominant gaze, never able to speak their own discourse because they joined the dominant discourse instead. They annihilate the myth of the women in an attempt to continue their own myth, and, in their annihilation, even the bodies of the women disappear as if they had never been. In the same sense, Haven and Ruby are annihilated as well, making room for possible new birth. This new birth can be seen in the garden of the Convent, the garden that was the livelihood for many of the women. When Anna comes to the Convent after the massacre in an attempt to find the women's bodies, she instead sees a juxtaposition of "blossom and death," in the Convent garden (Morrison 305). In Anna's view, the garden has become a "mix of neglect and unconquerable growth" (Morrison 305). The garden has been annihilated by chaos, but it is also still growing. In fact, its growth is unconquerable. Aoi Mori writes that although the garden is "chaotic and devastated, it suggests rebirth and the creation of a new generation, hinting at the possibility of resurrection and hope" (73). Unlike García Márquez and even unlike Rushdie, Morrison's novel ends on a hopeful note, despite the massacre of the women.

Using Northrop Frye's archetypes, it can be seen that Morrison's novel stands in for mythology. In using elements of the extreme and magic realism, Morrison creates her own

brand of mythology, separate from García Márquez and Rushdie. Cynthia Davis, in “Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison’s Fiction” writes, “Morrison’s use of mythic structure, more and more overtly as her work develops, is central” (23). This mythic structure is shown by “the heroic quest for identity achieved by conquest in and of the outer world,” which “embodies the human need to transcendence and self-definition; at the same time, the mythic sense of fate and necessity corresponds to the experience of facticity, both as irrevocable consequence and as concrete condition for choice”(23). Morrison’s mythology fulfills the need for self-definition in a culture that is defined by its existence within another culture. This is not just mythology, but rather, mythology that signifies the quest for an identity separate from Otherization and the dominant white culture. In their minds, the people of Haven and Ruby could not come into their identity with the Convent existing as a primary example of the Other, and a mark on their “paradise.”

### **Filling in the Gaps**

Many of Morrison’s novels are based on specific characters, and the focus on characterization drives much of the plot. In this respect, although *Paradise* is grounded in a specific town, it is the characters that give readers a glimpse into the lives of the marginalized. In the town of Ruby, the men descended from the founders run the town, and the women are left to keep house. Those who go against this system of marginalization, such as the women within the Convent who are “detritus: throwaway people” because of their escape from the men of the town, are exiled (4). The women do not live in the town—they live “Out There” on the margins of Ruby, marginalized both mentally and physically (Morrison 11).

The fantastic elements of the novel relate almost exclusively to the women within the novel, thereby establishing the women as Morrison's method of filling in the gaps left by a dominant white culture. By specifically using women as the supernatural elements of her grounding mythology, Morrison, like Rushdie, establishes the marginalized as the cultural unifier.

In the context of the story, because the men want to blame Ruby's decline on something, the women are the ones that are attributed with the magical abilities that bring Ruby down. However, Morrison also writes that throughout the novel, it is the women who actually have these magical abilities, similar to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Consolata, or "Connie," one of the first women within the Convent, has the ability of "in-sight" and can see and step into others' dreams, much like Saleem can in Rushdie's novel. Connie is taken aback by her ability, because she believes that, as a woman, her abilities are not a blessing, but witchcraft. She is "half cursed, half blessed. He [God] had burned the green away and replaced it with pure sight that damned her if she used it" (Morrison 248). Because it is specifically women who have these abilities, they are "[b]odacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary" (Morrison 18). In a world where a woman is relegated to a position where she is either the original sinner or the first saint, those women who are different, who do not fall in with society's expectations, are automatically Eves. However, Connie's abilities have led her to be able to heal others, an action commonly seen as divine, even if she dismisses her abilities. In her position as the Other, she sees her abilities as a "curse" even she is "blessed" with the ability to heal.

Because the supernatural elements of magic realism in the novel relate almost exclusively to the women, the women are further pushed into the position of the Other. At the same time, the women's perspectives make up the novel. The women's place within the Convent separates them physically from the men of Ruby and a town that is so founded on exclusivity that incest is encouraged. Despite the fact that the men of Ruby are black, they easily stand in for the dominating force so many black people labored under for years. The men of Ruby see themselves as the chosen people, able to make decisions— and commit executions— in the name of God.

The women are marginalized, Othered, and ultimately massacred by the men of a black culture that had been marginalized and Othered for most of its existence. These men try to free themselves from the dominant cultural gaze by forming their own dominant culture gaze, but ultimately they become a part of the dominant discourse, and their voices cannot be heard. However, the marginalized women are the ones who have voices that exist beyond the grave. As a black woman, Toni Morrison uses this "magic" to allow her voice to be heard, even in her marginalization. The supernatural elements in relation to the women of the novel allow Morrison to fill in the gaps left by a dominant white culture, while at the same time, writing from the perspective of the marginalized. However, her novel *Paradise* also leaves readers with a warning: when the subaltern attempts to speak using the dominant culture's voice, it will ultimately become a part of the dominant culture and lose its own voice completely.

## Chapter 6: Turning to magic realism as a new movement

Magic realism is more than a trend isolated among Latin American authors like Jorge Luis Borges. Instead, it is a vibrant and real way of literary expression, prevailing against the dominant discourse in order to truly express postcolonialism. From García Márquez's bible of magic realism, to Salman Rushdie's imitation of García Márquez in order to explain India, to Toni Morrison's iteration of magic realism in order to describe blackness in America, magic realism exists as discourse made for the marginalized. It expresses the strange reality of postcolonial cultures attempting to free themselves from the constraints of Otherization of the dominant discourse, showing reality as they experience it: fantastic. And magic realism successfully overthrows the dominant discourse, not really fitting in with any other style or genre, and even going against many of the trends of postcolonialism in order to rise from the margins of postcolonial society and look to the future of hybrid cultures.

All three authors use magic realism in their own unique ways. García Márquez uses magic realism in order to establish a grounding mythology for a people unsettled by violence. In juxtaposing the everyday and the extraordinary, the real and the fantastic, he is able to accurately express the existence of the marginalized living within the Third World in a way that all audiences can understand. Rushdie creates a hybrid world, establishing identity for a culture surrounded by violence but also divided from the inside. Rushdie's use of magic realism accurately expresses and unifies the many subcultures that make up India. And, finally, Toni Morrison uses magic realism as a way to express the existence of the marginalized within the dominant culture, using the extreme and the ordinary to show the

dichotomy of the existence of the marginalized. All of these authors write outside of the dominant discourse, establishing a voice for the subaltern.

In short, magic realism is quite possibly the alternative for marginalized and scattered writers everywhere. As the world grows more connected, and as the era of postcolonization fades, writers in hybrid cultures must find new ways to express their truths and find meaning in a hybrid existence. In a distinctly postmodern world, where the lack of truth is often celebrated, there is still a need for identity, especially cultural identity. Magic realism is derived from a postcolonial diaspora in order to create cultural identity in a postcolonial world where people are still marginalized, even as divisions between cultures grow increasingly blurred. Magic realism combines mythology and fantastic storytelling into novel format, creating a new version of the novel as a medium through which stories are told.

The voices of the Third World and the marginalized have been gaining more strength with the ability to turn to a style of writing that fully expresses their unbelievable reality while establishing their cultural identity within the world. Toni Morrison's works are taught in schools across America, and her novels are unique, with a specific voice that calls out to the marginalized and shows those who participate in the dominant discourse the true reality of black existence. Salman Rushdie recently published his twelfth novel, titled *Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*. Its title is simply another way of saying "A Thousand and One Nights"—hearkening back to the mythical and legendary past of India and showing the magical realist nature of the novel. And Gabriel García Márquez died almost two years ago as one of the most celebrated authors in history, credited with being



one of the first to popularize magic realism in the hearts and minds of readers. He was so influential in his home country of Colombia that three days of mourning were ordered by the Colombian president after his death (Leopold). Each of these authors is, undeniably, the voice of his or her people, a voice that can stand for every marginalized generation.

Magic realism does not just help shape the cultures of those living within postcolonial diasporas but also helps create cultural identity. It is more than a genre or style, and the scope of magic realism is epic because it does more than express a culture—it is a culture's voice. Magic realism fills the gaps left in a postcolonial diaspora while opening up a fantastic future, one where authors of novels can find their unique voice in mixing together the elements of magic realism. Magic realism is not constrained by the dominant discourse, nor does it fit into any specific genre: instead, its expression traverses boundaries. Using magic realism, writers can go beyond the scope of the novel, with their fantastic experiences arising directly from cultures. García Márquez's novel has scope far beyond that of an ordinary book. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is something that Colombians are fiercely proud of, because it is Colombia's novel, their bible, and the book that describes their existence better than all else. Rushdie did more than establish a novel for a turbulent country: he gave Indians new ways to define themselves, and new ways to write. Morrison was able to break free of what was expected of her as a black woman author and show the truth of marginalization and inspire other authors.

The writings of these authors have moved beyond the label of magic realism, instead becoming integral parts of the cultures they described. Magic realism is not just a new way of looking at literature, but a new way of shaping cultural reality itself. In postcolonial

cultures where the fantastic happens routinely, magic realism does not just show reality: it is reality. And it is mythology, a base that brings together hybrid postcolonial cultures where people still struggle through diasporas. Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and Toni Morrison all successfully created their own magic realist narratives for their cultures and opened the door for future marginalized writers to express themselves. It may be that writers in the future will look to Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, and Toni Morrison as the first writers taking part in a new discourse. In the future, it is quite possible that writers of magic realism will no longer be marginalized voices calling out among the dominant discourse: instead, they will have a voice and discourse of their own, firmly established in magic realism. The stories of those in marginalized cultures have already begun to be told and establish reform, from García Márquez's novel being established as the novel of Colombia to Toni Morrison's voice inspiring black women writers everywhere.

As the world becomes more accessible, and more stories are told, there is still unimaginable violence that must be revisited and retold in a way that shows the truth of reality for those who live through the violence. Even today, refugees fleeing the unbelievable violence in Syria struggle to make homes away from home, as their home country of Syria becomes an "imaginary homeland." It no longer exists the way it once did: instead, it exists only in the memories of those who are now living through unimaginable violence within their home country. Two years from now, five years from now, ten years from now, how will Syrian authors begin to describe the strange existence in which they live? How will they describe the terrible violence that has become cultural memory, and how can they preserve their culture under the influence of a new, dominant culture that

they must conform with? If they begin to create new homes away from home, Syria will become another “imaginary homeland” and, inevitably, people will attempt to write about it in the only way they know how: through the equally “extreme” and “fantastic” elements of magic realism. Though García Márquez speaks of Colombia, his words are just as applicable here: “Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable” (“Nobel Lecture”).

Writers and readers alike must continue to look towards the future. Eventually, the era of postcolonialism will come to an end, but there will always be marginalized writers struggling to express themselves amidst the dominant discourse. These writers have the chance to shape culture and to change the world as they see it, from a world where the dominant cultural groups are the only ones able to speak, to a world where the marginalized have a fantastic voice of their own. Writing is a necessary expression of culture, and magic realism is the necessary expression of marginalized cultures that have been consistently unable to express themselves.

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