Two: Ethnographic Surrealism and the New World Baroque

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Exegesis Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines the moments in which the differences between cultures create new systems of meaning, the moments in which people reinvent themselves and their values, and in which a new language or expression is created. James Clifford calls these moments "Ethnographic Surrealism", particularly when ethnography provides a critical distance from one's own culture in order to subvert its assumptions. The creative part of this thesis may be seen as a work of ethnographic surrealism, because it places its main characters, a North American family, on a commune in an isolated mountain in Colombia where their cultural assumptions are denaturalised. Their endeavour is what Mary Louise Pratt called an "anti-conquest". Instead of wishing to convert others, they wish to be converted by the local tribe. The family is unaware that they survey others with "imperial eyes".

This exegesis focuses specifically on the New World Baroque, an exuberant and inclusive style appropriate to a mestizo culture. It first discusses the Latin American neo-baroque, later expanding the category to certain North American works. Then it looks at the genre of magical realism as a subcategory of the neo-baroque. It uses Clifford's conception of Ethnographic Surrealism's juncture between cultures and the notion of a magical realist clash of paradigms to examine fiction about the Other, in particular *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier (the story of an anti-conquest) and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Garcia Marquez. It examines moments of ethnographically surrealist collage in which images of the culturally familiar and the strange are juxtaposed. Then it discusses North American works which contain an inclusive baroque spirit: the work of Henry Miller and the invented worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin. Ethnographic surrealism shares with the neo-baroque a sense of inclusiveness, proliferation, expansiveness and syncretism.

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Ethnographic Surrealism in the New World Baroque

Introductory Sections:

1.1 Introduction

My exegesis will examine the moments in literature in which the differences between cultures create new systems of meaning, the moments in which people reinvent themselves and their values and in which new language or artistic expression is created. James Clifford calls these moments 'Ethnographic Surrealism,' particularly when ethnography provides a critical distance from one's own culture in order to subvert its assumptions. 'Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses questions at the boundaries of civilizations, classes, races and genders' (Clifford 121).

I consider the creative part of this thesis to be a work of ethnographic surrealism, because it places its main characters, a North American family, on a commune in an isolated mountain in Colombia where their cultural assumptions are denaturalised. I consider their endeavour to be what Mary Louise Pratt called an 'anti-conquest' (Pratt, 39). Instead of wishing to convert others, they wish to be converted by the local tribe and are unaware that they survey others with 'imperial eyes'. I consider my creative work to be an ethnographic novel, because it is based on my experiences living among Colombian hippie and artistic counter-cultures. However, the events are entirely fictional.

Any cross cultural encounter in literature has the potential to denaturalise the reader's assumptions, regardless of the ethnic background of the writer or whom she considers to be 'Other' and whether or not she has left her homeland.

I will focus specifically on the New World baroque, as defined by Alejo Carpentier: an exuberant and inclusive style appropriate to a mestizo

culture: 'The American Baroque develops along with…the awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a criollo; and the criollo spirit is itself the baroque spirit' (Faris and Zamora eds. 100). It is a literature rife with encounters between grammars, between views of the world. I will henceforth use George Steiner's definition of grammar as: 'the organization of perception, reflection and experience, the nerve structure of consciousness when it communicates with itself and with others' (6). It is from such conversations that literature is born in general. However, I have chosen the New World Baroque because these conversations are heightened by its multicultural context, particularly because of the dramatic differences between three main cultures with three dramatically different world-views: European, African, and indigenous. I give special attention to the neo-baroque, the flowering of New World Baroque literature that followed Carpentier's seminal essays (particularly *On the Marvellous Real in Latin America* of 1949) that redefined Latin American literature and gave it a new identity. Ethnographic surrealism shares with the neo-baroque a sense of inclusiveness, proliferation, expansiveness and syncretism.

I will first discuss the Latin American neo-baroque, later expanding the category to certain North American works. Then I will look at the genre of magical realism as a subcategory of the neo-baroque and of postmodernism. I think it is no surprise that Latin America made the genre famous. Its hybrid space is particularly inclusive of dramatically different views; the scientific and mythic coexist with ease, as do invented and real places. I will discuss its role in postcolonial literature, making the argument that it has now expanded out of its traditional postcolonial bounds into recent first-world literature making it now a truly international genre. And as I will further clarify below, I see the moments in which magical realist narratives shift from realist to magical as a shift between world-views, often between Enlightenment Rationality and the mythical. It is at the moments where paradigms clash that the narrative comes to life in surprising ways. I will use Clifford's conception of Ethnographic Surrealism's juncture between cultures

and the notion of a magical realist clash of paradigms to examine fiction about the Other, in particular the seminal work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez.

I will argue for the inclusion of some North American work under the rubric of New World Baroque. Usually, only Faulkner's work is included. He was an important influence on García Márquez who saw his trip to Faulkner's old stomping grounds as a type of pilgrimage. Mexican author Carlos Fuentes called Faulkner's style Baroque. He attributed this largely to Faulkner's Mississippian context which he felt was similar to Latin America, sharing an exploitative plantation history and mix of European and African cultures.

> In North American literature, only Faulkner stands apart from that enclosed world of optimism and success and offers us a vision shared by both the United States and Latin America: the image of defeat, separation, doubt: the image of tragedy….Defeat, misery, insecurity and historical excess can only be recounted in a language that preserves immediate evidence, an instrument capable of including everything, because in a world where nothing is known for certain everything must be preserved….The Baroque, language of abundance, is also the language of insufficiency. Only those who possess nothing can include everything. The *horror vacui* of the Baroque is not gratuitous—it is because the vacuum exists that nothing is certain. The verbal abundance of Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* or of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* represents a desperate invocation of language to fill the absences left by the banishment of reason and faith. In this way post-Renaissance Baroque art began to fill the abyss left by the Copernican revolution. (Fuentes, "The Baroque Culture of the New World"195)

The work of García Márquez was written in this spirit, having been composed during the tragedy of Colombia's civil war. In a country where so much was being destroyed, wiped clean, he creates a town in which everything is included. In Macondo, the setting of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* nothing is thrown away except perhaps the victims of the banana

plantation massacre. Dead relatives live on in ghostly form alongside gypsy alchemy.

Far from the brutal history of slavery of Mississippi and the inherent syncretism of plantation society, I contend that the work of Henry Miller also contains an unwittingly Baroque spirit. It is also syncretic; it is a mixture of European influences and of avant-garde and mainstream literary influences. In chapter three, I will discuss Miller's baroque elements, surrealistic moments so specific and personal in detail as to have a magical realist quality.

Just as the European Surrealist movement had a unique influence in Latin America, contributing to the flowering of a unique neo-baroque style and identity, I think that North American literature also had a unique way of responding to this movement. Automatism evolved into the spontaneous writing of the Beats, a much more personal style and psychology. In all of the above literature, cultures are layered upon each other. I expand the definition of culture in this section to include 'counterculture.' This is of particular interest since it is central to my novel. Any counterculture's conversation with mainstream culture gives birth to new forms, much in the same way that the mixing of European, Indigenous and African cultures gave birth to the Latin American Neo-baroque. Carpentier coined the phrase the 'baroque spirit,' and I will explain why I think the work of Miller had a Baroque spirit, in spite of its distinct origins from Latin American literature. I will discuss the work of Henry Miller in exile as ethnographic surrealist works that give one an outside perspective on North America.

Then I will discuss the work of Ursula Le Guin as containing a baroque spirit for three reasons: its indigenous influences and multicultural nature—even if such cultures are invented, her at times excessive language and style and finally her use of allegory, a common storytelling form of the Baroque.

My own novel is about a family of North Americans who goes to live in an intentional community in an isolated corner of the Sierra Nevada de

Santa Marta in Colombia. They hope to create an ecologically sustainable, egalitarian society that will someday be an example to others as a way to live after what they believe is an impending global ecological collapse.

Utopian literature, that which describes real or imagined utopian communities, can be described as works of ethnographic surrealism since they give the reader a counterpoint to his or her own society. I hope that my novel achieves this. Ursula Le Guin said that fantasy fiction is 'self-referential.' It entails the creation of a self-contained reality that may not hold up outside the bounds of the story.

Because my novel is about an intentional community founded on utopian ideals, I also read utopian novels. Carlos Fuentes thought that America itself was a utopia in the minds of Europeans (*La Nueva Novela* 60). When a colony is newly founded, the settlers often envision it as a potential utopia. I will discuss several different types of utopian novels, each utopian in a different way. *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier is about an urban musician going deep into a jungle, a place he considers to be Edenic. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is about an invented town, *Macondo,* built from the ground up. When it was founded, 'things were so new that to indicate them, you had to point' (García Márquez 3). It is not idyllic, but it is utopian in the sense that it is purposely built, intentional. And *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin is about an anarchist colony on a moon whose people were revolutionaries on their own planet.

I chose these novels not only because they share a utopian element with my novel, but because the baroque and utopian visions are powered by a drive to radically invent and both create visions whose aim is to 'reconstruct meaningful relations among the parts' (Zamora 134). The baroque allows unbridled creativity, high and lowbrow alike, the gaudy, the unseemly and the sublime. It piles on images in order to make sense of them. The utopian spirit has more of a tendency to sweep away crowded, cluttered corners. It is driven by an impulse to cleanse. This has been seen in the genocide of totalitarian regimes such as the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and

in United States foreign policy, or indeed the settlement of North America and Australia. Nevertheless, I think these two tendencies, towards the baroque and utopian, are deeply intertwined in this literature.

The Many Faces of Realism

Having set my novel in a village that does not exist; I needed to create a self-referential world. I explored speculative fiction and magical realism to see how they rendered the improbable or impossible plausible. I discovered that all of these types of novels share a radical self-referential quality. As Le Guin says of fantasy:

> There is no agreement to pretend that its story happened, might have happened, or might ever happen. Its invention is radical. With the informed consent of the reader, fantasy deliberately violates plausibility in the sense of congruence with the world outside the story…. What constitutes plausibility in fantasy is the coherence of the story, its consistent self-reference. (Le Guin ursulakleguin.com)

So where do we draw the line between realism and other forms such as fantasy? As Pam Morris said in her book *Realism,* 'I shall define literary realism as any writing that is based upon an implicit or explicit assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing' (Morris 19). I would say that all texts communicate about a reality beyond the writing, whether or not the author so intended. Interestingly the distinction here lies in the author's intention. Do all non-realist writers really believe it is not possible to communicate about a reality outside the text? As I will discuss below, it seems unlikely that all writers of fantasy and surrealism share this belief.

But first, what is the relationship between the text and the world in classic realism? According to Morris the common critique that realism is merely a copy of life instead of being critically engaged with it lies on a false foundation. She argues that, although many believe the realist novel is merely

an attempt at verisimilitude, in actual fact it is not possible to create an accurate facsimile of our world. Words are inherently representative. Even photography entails careful 'selection and arrangement' by the artist (Morris 25). Therefore realism must necessarily be a rendering of life *modified* by the subjectivity of the author. As Ford Madox Ford said of Dickens and Thackeray: 'They [their works] are simply records, that from time to time attain the height of renderings, of life *transfused* by the light of their writer's temperaments as *modified* by their vicissitudes' (Ford 811) [My emphasis].

Pam Morris contends that the critique that classic realism unquestioningly reproduces the grand narratives of the Enlightenment also lies on false foundations. Though the grand narratives of the Enlightenment are found in classic realism, they are found in most other forms as well. She also points out that perhaps the problem lies in the reader's lack of ability to grasp the subtext. '[I]t may or may not be realist narratives *per se* that can be categorized as imposing closed unitary meaning. What may be at stake is the way we chose to read any piece of writing' (Morris 47). She asserts that Realism was iconoclastic in its time, and it achieved some of the critical goals of postmodernism. 'For Lukasz the defining achievement of classic realism was the organic perception of the human being as the location of multiple, often contradictory social forces' (Morris 88). In fact many realist texts have aims that I would define as ethnographically surreal. They 'draw attention to underlying epistemological assumptions that shape our perception of social reality, de-naturalising these structures so that they become visible to us and we are able to think beyond their limits' (Morris 106). It is quite common for realism to include competing value systems much like magical realist texts, though the method for presenting said views is distinct. For example, one value system may be held by one character and the opposite by another.

At any rate my choice of texts that stretch the bounds of realism was not intended to be a critique of classic realism but an exploration of genre so as to expand my options as a writer. While a critique of the grand narratives

of classic realism is common in academia, (Morris 150) this is not the case in the teaching of Creative Writing. There classic realism is the dominant form. I wanted to make sure that I wasn't writing a classic realist text simply because I had fallen into this norm. I wanted to make a conscious choice. Though much of my novel is invented, it was important to adhere to realism for the same reason that Morris defends the form. She gives the example of police brutality in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things,* pointing out that the description needed to be accurate to be socially useful as a witness.

> Gordimer claims it is the pressure of reality that the writer struggles to bear witness to that imposes the form of the work…. Realism as a form is witness to that juncture between the experiential and representational…. What is at stake is the possibility of community and the potential to make new worlds. This is the inherent utopianism of realism as art form. (Morris 287-8)

People need to first become informed of such injustices if they are to take action against them.

As I will discuss later, I chose to write an ethnographic novel because I agree that literature can serve an important role as witness. However, if this were the only purpose of literature and it had no emotional, spiritual or philosophical purpose, then journalism would be a much more appropriate choice. Realism is not the only form that can achieve this purpose. However, I think that it is the simplest, most direct approach. In the hands of a novice like myself, it may be the most effective approach. But as we will see later, other forms have been used to make important statements about our world that are no less clear. In fact these other forms might allow more space for the shadow side of such violent events to show itself. Marquez invented details while remaining true to the essence of the event. In the end, fiction is always an invention. Each text provides the basis for its own 'truth'.

At times magical realism and science fiction serve the important utopian social function that Morris sees in realism—providing a commentary

on the actual world as it is lived, by very different means. Speculative fiction serves as a kind of witness peering through the looking glass, a commentary on our world approached indirectly, capable of showing us the dark side of the subconscious or a potential trajectory for the current course of events.

I disagree with Maggie Ann Bowers who said in her book *Magic(al) Realism* that science fiction is set in a world 'different from any known reality' (Bowers 48). However, some 'science fiction' novels are set in worlds quite similar to our own. Take 1984 for example, though one may not call it a 'science fiction', it is set in an imagined 'future' world. This was clearly an allegory about totalitarianism in the twentieth century. It reflected what Orwell saw as the terrifying possibilities within totalitarianism in our world, not a hypothetical utopia or another planet. This is why I consider magical realism and science fiction to be branches of realism.

But how far can one stretch the bounds of realism? Where is the line between these many genres within realism, and surrealism and fantasy? Todorov insisted that fantasy narratives depend on the reader's faltering belief in the fantastic reality presented and that fantasy can be distinguished from magical realism in this way, because in the latter the reader does not hesitate 'between natural and supernatural explanations of events' (Bowers 44). I think this is an overstatement. The reader knows that something has shifted when people fly or songs turn into silk scarves. I agree with Le Guin that fantasy's invention is radical, that it presents, in part at least, a world or a reality that is a radical departure from ours (Le Guin, "Plausibility Revisited" ursulakleguin.com) but that ultimately such fantastic worlds are reflections on the society and the historical period in which the author lived. Nevertheless Todorov is right that in magical realism there is a smoother transition between the magical and everyday than in fantasy. In magical realism fantastic events are told in a matter of fact tone, whereas in fantasy the writer purposely allows such transitions to be jarring. Indeed the contrast is crucial for the sense of drama; Little Whinging cannot be Hogwarts. If

indeed fantasy does provide commentary on our world, then the line between the genres of realism and fantasy are blurred. As Morris suggests,

> However, my definition of realism as performative and based on a consensual contract with the reader that communication about a non-textual reality is possible and can equally apply…to parts of texts that otherwise foreground textuality or fantasy. (Morris 288)

Surrealism, on the other hand, has less in common with realism in spite of the fact that realist authors may use surrealist methods or include surrealist moments in their fiction.

Fantasy and the branches of latter-day realism differ from surrealism in several ways. First, they lack the emphasis on the subconscious as the primary source of material. While the subconscious is active in the writing of realism and all creative writing, the difference is in the way that this material is shaped; in surrealism the subconscious is mined for purposes of psychological exploration, not artistic purposes alone. I do not wish to conflate surrealism and magical realism. However, they have in common an occasional rupture with the laws of physics. Surrealism has self-conscious aims to explore the subconscious for its own sake, regardless of literature. According to Breton, surrealism is 'pure psychic automism by means of which we mean to propose to express either verbally or in writing what really goes on in the mind' (Quinn 328). Magical realism does not share these self-conscious aims.

Secondly, even fantasy narratives must stick to a relatively logical sense of chronology. And none of the abovementioned forms use illogical juxtapositions as liberally as surrealist pieces. I agree with Bowers that fantasy does not form part of surrealism (Bowers 48).

Utopian fiction also departs from classic realism, because it is full of what Benjamin called wish images; it has the vision to look beyond society as it now functions to how it might be. All fiction is written in the optative tense;

it poses the question, 'what if?'. In utopian fiction this fact is particularly obvious.

> The "collective wish images" are nothing else but this. Sparked by the new, from which they "maintain their impulse," they envision its revolutionary potential by conjuring up archaic images of the collective "wish" for social utopia. (Buck-Morss 116)

Even when utopian fiction is dystopian, this is the case. Dystopia is utopia applied with mathematical precision; it is utopia gone wrong.

1.2 The Baroque Spirit

When Latin America was first colonised, the dominant artistic style in Spain was the Baroque. This style was brought to Latin America in the sixteenth century where it endured until the end of the eighteenth century, after having died out in Europe in the seventeenth where it had endured longer than in the rest of Europe. I think it is appropriate that the Baroque lived on in mestizo Latin America; its inclusive nature left room for the expansiveness of the American continent. Think of a Baroque Catholic church crowded with saints, without any empty surfaces. They call this typically 'baroque fear of emptiness', *horror vacui*. Then imagine an Aztec temple full of the carvings of gods. These two styles merged in Mexican art and architecture. And its equivalent was born in literature.

The director Pedro Almodovar is from the area of Spain called la Mancha, where the novel *Don Quixote*, by Baroque master Miguel de Cervantes, was set. Almodovar believes that empty spaces such as the plains of la Mancha give rise to baroque forms of expression even today:

> Many artists from la Mancha are basically baroque, and very imaginative. I think that's because the landscape surrounding the town where I was born is totally flat, without trees, houses, variation. So it's an almost abstract landscape. It drives you

crazy. I think that artists in fact, place on top of that landscape like a surrealist background all of the ghosts of characters we want to work with, because the landscape is empty. There's only earth and horizon that's directly connected to the sky. (Interview, *Volver* Special Features 2006)

Allegory was commonly used in Baroque literature. Lois Parkinson Zamora believes this is because Baroque artists were struggling to come to terms with the scientific worldview and the Protestant Reformation:

> The constant addition of new parts to world maps was more than enough to undermine existing relations of geographical parts to the global whole, not to mention the astronomical discoveries that undermined the existing conception of the cosmic whole, and the Protestant Reformation that undermined the theological whole. Parts, suddenly separated from their systems, become visible and problematic; fragmentation threatens to overwhelm integration, and artifice is privileged because nature, it seems, needs help. So Baroque artists engage strategies of illusionism and indirection (allegory, emblematic, and iconographic systems) to reconstruct meaningful relations among the parts. (Zamora 134)

Just as baroque styles allowed artists to come to terms with new ways of conceiving the world in the sixteenth century, the neo-baroque gave Latin American artists the new freedom of expression they needed to cope with the cataclysmic social changes of the twentieth century. As Susan Buck-Morss says in her reading of Walter Benjamin, each age has its own 'mode of perception' that 'changes with humanity's entire mode of existence' (Buck-Morss 117). I believe that each literary form I discuss here is grounded in the mode of perception of the author, and thus their era and society, making a connection between language, perception and 'the real'.

Alejo Carpentier coined the term 'New World Baroque' to describe what he saw as a resurgence of a 'baroque spirit' in certain types of Twentieth Century Latin American literature, such as magical realism and other forms that freely use hyperbole and excess. He thus strengthened Latin

America's literary identity, helping to free it of its colonial insecurities. It no longer needed to look towards Paris for inspiration:

> Carpentier recognizes the Baroque in its historical, colonizing function, but he also insists that the Baroque cannot be limited to a single historical period or place; rather, it is a collective spirit, a culture's way of being, which is characterized by dynamic structures and polycentric perspectives capable of recognizing and including difference. For Carpentier, a kinetic energy of Baroque space accommodates the interactions of American histories and cultures, as does its dynamic impulse to expand and displace. (Zamora xvii)

The writer Jose Lezama Lima insisted that Carpentier had generalised the phrase so as to render it meaningless (Kaup and Zamora eds. xvii). Lezama Lima was Cuban, and his novel *Paradiso* encompassed all the paradoxes of colonial transference from the old world. Though he felt Carpentier's conception was too general, his work was nevertheless included under its rubric by the critics. While it may be true that Carpentier was stretching beyond previous definitions for his own purposes, I believe that his new definition was appropriate in the context of Latin American literature.

The Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos reminds us that the Baroque was originally a colonizing repressive force, exclusive instead of inclusive (Kaup and Zamora eds. 19). But this is only part of the story. During colonization, baroque styles were plastered over indigenous ones, sometimes quite literally, but on other occasions they were forced to include them. Perhaps it is ironic that Carpentier uses a term denoting the dominant style of the colonial period for his postcolonial goals in order to affirm Latin America's unique literature.

Realism based on a rationalistic way of perceiving reality, and a Freudian way of understanding the psyche, has become the dominant literature. Frederic Jameson called this, 'the gradual reification of realism in late capitalism' (*Political Unconscious* 104).

The Baroque has been an alternative to rationalism since its advent.

For two hundred years the Baroque has been considered irrational and reactionary when compared to the "Enlightenment" that followed it, but by the 1920s, Enlightenment rationalism had itself become oppressive and, in some cases, totalitarian. The seventeenth-century Baroque had subverted classical norms of reason and order, and now again, in the early twentieth century, it seemed possible that the Baroque might counter the sterile structures of Hegelian historicism and instrumental reason. In Latin America, the Baroque again seemed to offer structures large enough to encompass its multiple histories, cultures and discourses, including that of the indigenista movements developing in the continent at that time. (Zamora 287)

Now one could say that the neo-baroque was a response to modernity but one that was distinct from that of Europe at the time:

In fact, the early rediscovery of the Baroque resembles European avant-garde movements in several ways: in its aesthetics of defamiliarization, its artifice and counterrealism, but not in any "countermodern" political or social agenda. (Zamora 288)

The early neo-baroque literature of Carpentier's day was not a response to a totalizing capitalism as were European avant-garde movements. It is no wonder that he called it the neo-baroque, avoiding the suffix 'post'. It was not yet postmodern, though some latter day neo-baroque Latin American magical realism could now be included under the rubric postmodern. At the time in parts of Latin America such as the Orinoco, where he set his novel *The Lost Steps* that I will later discuss, capitalism and even modernity had scarcely arrived. So this unique form of Latin American avant-garde took on qualities distinct from the European avant-garde at the time, while sharing its tendencies towards experimentation and the surreal. It necessarily had to include the many voices, linguistic forms and world-views of its mestizo multicultural societies.

The North American Baroque

Lois Parkinson Zamora asserts that the Baroque never occurred in North America:

> Baroque forms flourished in Catholic New Spain in ways they never did in Protestant New England; we have only to think of the blank walls of colonial churches in New England, the Nationalist classicism in Washington DC, and the sleek modernism of twentieth-century internationalism, to recognize that the Baroque is foreign to U.S. cultural history. Nor did indigenous traditions interact with imported European forms in Anglo America as they did in Latin America, where they created transculturated forms of expression that encode the particularities of New World contexts. (Zamora xv-xvii)

Given that much of North America was never in fact colonised by England, there are of course a few architectural exceptions to the protestant architecture Zamora describes, for example: St. Mary's Assumption Church in New Orleans, the Cathedral of St. Vibiana in Los Angeles—though built later in 1876, and the Mission San Xavier del Bac in Tuscon. Also, Northern Europe did experience the Baroque, albeit with more austere architectural styles than those found in Spain. The population of the United States is now only one-fifth of Anglo descent, and is one of the most diverse populations in the world. If we take Carpentier's modern definition of the neo-baroque as a style with infinite capacities for inclusion and heterogeneity, I believe that this spirit has not been completely drowned out by a Puritan austerity. I will discuss North American magical realism and the work of Henry Miller and Ursula Le Guin as work that I believe is imbued with a baroque spirit.

Chapter One

2.1 Magical Realism and the Neo-baroque

'The exception is rooted in the rule. As a matter of fact, in literature the exception is the rule' Isaac Bashevis Singer (Singer vii).

Alejo Carpentier, who wrote the seminal magical realist work *The Reign of this World*, worked in surrealist circles in Paris. He returned to Cuba to write this work after concluding that everyday life in Latin America was more 'marvellous' than the imagination of the Parisian avant-garde. In subsequent essays he coined both the phrases *New World Baroque* and the *marvellous real* or as it is often translated into English, *magical realism*. Magical realism, according to the *Collins Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is characterised by 'seeing everyday life as if for the first time' (Quinn, 195). I consider Latin American magical realism to be a type of New World Baroque writing:

> In our view, Magical Realism may be considered a neo-baroque flowering of the historical New World Baroque, a continuation of the impulse to engage cultural heterogeneities in form and content. Alejo Carpentier's conflation of the Baroque and *lo real maravilloso* in an essay of 1975 is not without justification. (Kaup and Zamora eds. 14)

Gabriel García Márquez, much like Carpentier before him, believed that in magical realism it was the reality of Latin American life that merely appears to be magical to the outsider. In other words, what some Latin Americans may consider to be normal, such as civil war, can be seen as magical when defamiliarised:

> I dare to think that it is this outsized reality, and not just its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of letters. A reality not of paper,

but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths….Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of *unbridled reality* [my emphasis], we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude. (García Márquez, "The Crux of our Solitude" 18*)*

In other words, Marquez's work comes from a specific time and place, out of a specific lived experience. To say it is not based on reality, one must first define reality in a particular way; defining its reality as Other, one places it at the margins. As Gerald Martin said in his essay "On Magical and Social Realism in García Márquez ":

> [W]hatever contemporary reality may be, it is determined and defined by the metropolitan centres of culture in and, above all now, the United States. As Marx and Engel's noted, "The ruling idea of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class…" Latin America can therefore be viewed, by definition, as a home of irreality, where people are larger or smaller than life. (Caldwell and McQuirk eds.)

Some of the passages that seem surreal to the outsider in Marquez's work, like the account of the massacre in the banana plantation in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that I will discuss later, are much closer to actual events than they at first appear. It is merely because they are alien and unfamiliar to the reader that they seem magical. As James Clifford says of the surrealists:

> [The surrealists] attitude, while comparable to that of the fieldworker who strives to render the unfamiliar comprehensible, tended to work in the reverse sense, making the familiar strange. The contrast is in fact generated by a continuous play of the familiar and strange of which ethnography and surrealism are two elements. (Clifford 121)

Magical realism, and indeed Baroque work, shares with surrealism this play of the familiar and the strange, commonly by interweaving the quotidian and the mythical.

Timothy Brennan asserts that Clifford stretches the definition of surrealism too far by applying it to ethnography (Brennan 18).

> Clifford, for example, has so expanded the definition of surrealism, so fully qualified it for his purposes as a 'utopian construct,' an 'attitude' that constitutes no actual movement or 'stable tradition,' that his treatment of individuals becomes 'foreshortened…in an attempt to disengage its ethnographic dimension. (Brennan 277-8)

But I would say that he has some historical basis for doing so. The surrealists of the twenties had close contact with anthropologists of the *Institut de Ethnologie* including Marcel Mauss (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 122*)*. They mixed African and European images; for example in one photo an African mask was placed next to a European woman's image, juxtaposing the familiar and the strange. This was intended to produce a similar kind of defamiliarisation as the juxtaposition of a cup and saucer with fur, transforming the familiar into the strange. One might say that if this is the parallel, then they were conflating the foreign with the absurd in a strange twist on Orientalism. Whether this is true or not, another Orientalist parallel was explicitly made by Breton. Breton was a proponent of the blatantly racist idea that non-Western cultures shared the innocence of the insane, 'opposing the rational mind to the culture of the Other' (Conley and Taminaux eds. 4). In spite of this, the practice of ethnographically surreal juxtaposition was intended to function as a cultural leveling; by making Western and non-Western objects equal, they wished to critique colonialism.

While this aim at first appears to contradict the inherent racism of conflating the primitive and the insane, perhaps the intention was to take Western culture down a peg, not to lift the 'primitive' up in people's estimation. Apparently analysis had advanced by the thirties to the point that

these ethnographic surrealist practices were then viewed as a type of colonial appropriation, as they would be now (Conley and Taminaux eds. 18). Nevertheless, by intentionally juxtaposing the familiar and the strange, they were ahead of their time for we now live in a world in which the culturally familiar and the strange are found on every street corner of a major city. '[I]n most ethnographies, moments are produced in which distinct cultural realities are cut from their contexts and forced into jarring proximity. (Clifford *Predicament of Culture* 146)' The kind of jarring culture clash that was once the privilege of the anthropologist in the field is now found daily in the modern megalopolis.

Ethnography and the ethnographic novel are inherently surreal for they place the ethnographer in strange surroundings and have her interpret the strange in familiar terms for a Western readership; contact with another cultural framework forces the ethnographer to question the boundaries one's own culture draws around 'reality'.

The method of collage as the juxtaposition of the familiar and strange is the center of narrative tension in any ethnography. This can also be found in cross-cultural literature and in fact, all literature. Since every culture is hybrid and each character has her own combination of cultural influences, indeed her own culture and voice, all literature can be seen as cross-cultural literature. Also, in order to have narrative tension, a narrative must be surprising. The tension inherent in the ethnographic surrealist college can be found throughout literature where the familiar erupts into the strange.

Clifford used the example of the surrealist journal *Documents,*

> The journal's basic method is juxtaposition—fortuitous or ironic collage. The proper arrangement of cultural symbols in constantly placed in doubt. High art is combined with hideously enlarged arrangements of big toes; folk crafts; Fantomas (a popular mystery series) covers; Hollywood sets, African, Melanesian, pre-Columbian, and French Carnival masks; accounts of music hall performances; descriptions of music hall performances; descriptions of the Paris slaughterhouses. *Documents* poses, for the culture of the modern city, the problem facing any

organizer of an ethnographic museum: What belongs with what? (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 132)

Just as I see the modern city as rife with such juxtapositions, Clifford thought that anthropological fieldwork was a sort of living collage. He gave the example of Trobriand cricket.

> The gentleman's game, brought by British missionaries…has been taken over and made new. Now it is ludic warfare, extravagant sexual display, political competition and alliance, parody….The film takes us into the staged swirl of brightly painted, feathered bodies, balls and bats. In the midst of this chair sits the umpire, calmly influencing the game with magic spells. He is chewing betel nut, which he shares out from a stash held on his lap. It is a bright blue plastic bag. It is beautiful.
>
> Perhaps an acquaintance with ethnographic surrealism can help us see the blue plastic Adidas bag as part of the same kind of inventive cultural process as the African-looking masks that in 1907 suddenly appeared attached to the pink bodies of Demoiselles d'Avignon. (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 148)

This example from ethnography is just as beautiful and surreal as the art of the surrealists. Such moments of collage are commonly found in cross-cultural literature.

For example, in *The Angel of Galilea* by Laura Restrepo, a journalist is sent to investigate claims that an angel lives in a slum of Bogota. All elements of the novel besides the angel stay within the bounds of the scientifically explainable. On a roof in Bogota we find a collage of an image of a journalist taking notes alongside an angel, an enlightenment rational world-view clashing with the religious. A break from the mundane into the marvellous is a break between one world-view and another.

> [Magical realism] refers to the occurrence of supernatural, or anything that is contrary to our conventional view of reality [it is] not divorced from reality either, [and] the presence of the supernatural is often attributed to the primitive or 'magical' Indian mentality, which coexists with European rationality. Floyd Merrel explains

that 'magical realism stems from the conflict between two pictures of the world'. (Chanady 16)

Latin American magical realism is often spoken of in terms of the meeting of the European and Indigenous; it forms its own sort of cultural collage. Though the classic example is a clash between a scientific view and the mythic or religious, any clash of paradigms can potentially create a surprising effect in narrative. Further, when clashes between cultures create magical realist moments in narrative, this is really a clash between grammars—or what Steiner calls types of 'organization of perception' (6). Steiner specifically defines grammar as 'the organization of perception, reflection and experience, the nerve structure of consciousness when it communicates with itself and with others' (6). In this way, magical realism takes the role of the novel as Bakhtin saw it one step further, as the site of a 'diversity of social speech types in which a battle takes place' (Slemon 9).

Likewise, Walter Benjamin's view of history, with its combination of dialectical materialism and Messianic time, is akin to causality in a magical realist narrative. In Benjamin's view, history catapults forward in an economic and historically determined way until messianic time intervenes, or to oversimplify, subjectivity intervenes in objective economic and political historical processes, throwing a wrench in the works of history with unexpected effects. He combined close study of the Kabbalah and of dialectical materialism. The Messiah, or the revolution, may come at any time. One cannot predict it from knowledge of economic and historical processes:

> Once the Messianic promise is not a myth but historically "actual," in the sense that it is realizable from this point on, time can be said to exist in two registers: as secular history…and revolutionary "now–time"…— just as "[f]or the Jews […] every second was the narrow portal through which the Messiah was able to enter." These time registers do not follow one another sequentially in the new era; they overlap….(Buck-Morss 242)

In Judaism, the Messiah can cut through linear time; in magical realism, there is a rupture from the linear rational narrative and a move into the mythical, though this may be momentary.

So magical realism's clash of paradigms and Clifford's ethnographic surrealism, with its juncture between cultures, are overlapping but not identical forms.

Magical Realism and Hybrid Spaces

One way in which magical realism represents clashing paradigms is by juxtaposing worlds, often a real and a fantastic place, such as Macondo and Villa de Leyva in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or the Beginning Place and suburbia in *The Beginning Place* by Ursula Le Guin. In his essay, "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centres," Theo D'haen calls this 'hybrid space'. '[I]n magical realism, space is hybrid (opposite and conflicting properties exist)' (Faris 220).

One way to create such hybrid space is to establish what Wendy Faris calls a 'sacred enclosure,' such as Saleem's pickle factory in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* within an otherwise ordinary setting, and then to:

> […]allow these sacred spaces to leak their magical narrative waters over the rest of the text and the world it describes. Magical realism not only reorients our habits of time and space but our sense of identity as well: with over five hundred children of midnight talking through his head, is Saleem himself anymore? (Faris 174)

In this example from *Midnight's Children*, most of the text refers to events which are entirely possible and do not stretch the laws of physics, yet they are told in such a way that they are imbued with the magic of the midnight of India's independence. Take, for example, the way in which the doctor, Saleem's father, examines a woman. As his father is obliged by Muslim religion to look at her piece by piece through a hole in the sheet, the reader

encounters Saleem's future wife as if by magic, partly because one is alien to the culture in question. If one were a strict Muslim, this would seem quite natural. In this case, Rushdie is using the common technique of defamiliarisation by describing everyday things as if they were unusual to create the illusion of magic. But it is also his subjectivity that creates this effect. He allows you to view the world through Dr. Aziz's fragmented postcolonial vision.

The hybrid space and multiple clashing grammars of magical realism could also be described by using Roland Barthes' term 'stereographic space': 'the space of an intertextual *enchainment* in which one text, or a sliver of a text associates itself with, pulls into its own textual space, some other text, or textual shard. In literature, one space can contain other spaces' (Faris 226). When one considers its openness to multiple clashing subjectivities, it is fitting that it flourished in multicultural Latin America and became a common outlet for post-colonial writers.

In search of inspiration for my own novel, I read two novels in which this 'stereographic space' is mapped out to allow particularly dissonant grammars to be integrated seamlessly into a whole: *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier, and the seminal work of magical realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez.

2.2 The Lost Steps

The Lost Steps tells the story of an unnamed Cuban musician residing in New York who goes to the Venezuelan jungle to gather instruments for a museum. He falls in love with a local woman and decides never to return.

In my own novel, the main characters make a similar journey. They discover who they are, not by 'going native' but by situating themselves in relation to their own culture. If one never leaves one's own culture, it is impossible to see it clearly. Its rules appear to be the natural order of things. So in order to gain perspective, my characters have to leave home. Likewise,

in *The Lost Steps,* the protagonist reflects on the evils of New York while in the jungle, only this is complicated by the fact that he is a Cuban exile to whom New York is foreign. He is not the typical European neo-colonialist.

According to Leo Cabranes Grant in his essay "The Fold of Difference: Performing Baroque and Neo-baroque Mexican Identities," the exoticised Other was a common subject for Baroque literature: 'Baroque exoticism generally took the form of views of strange and remote regions, both real and imaginary' (Kaup and Zamora eds. 476). So *The Lost Steps* fits within such a Baroque tradition. While the work is not strictly magical realist, it is full of the marvellous real, the magic of daily life.

Though the laws of physics are never broken, it has no magical elements, the novel is written in the same style with the same attention to detail as Carpentier's seminal magical realist work, *The Kingdom of the World.* Though not a magical land, the jungle functions as if it is a kind of sacred enclosure. He portrays it as occupying another time. It is here that he places all that is 'exotic' to the protagonist. So despite its lack of magic, I feel it can be discussed alongside traditionally magical realist texts as a part of the genre that the author himself named.

Time Travel in *The Lost Steps*

The Lost Steps is an exploration of layers of time, much like a visit to the Guadalupe cathedral in Mexico City—built on top of an Aztec temple with remaining layers now dug out of the adjacent plaza for tourists to see. In this way, he is in keeping with the Baroque spirit. 'Carpentier's espiritu barroco is also an experiential field that facilitates the interactions of cultural spaces belonging to different orders of time' (Zamora, 127).

Carpentier believed that, in actual fact, one can leave one's own time. While it is insulting to imply that those who live with less modern technology are behind, and thus 'backward,' anyone who has travelled to countries where technological modes invented in different centuries coexist, where oxcarts

and mobile phones, Persian wheels and scooters mingle, cannot avoid the feeling that different centuries overlap. This novel was written fifty years ago, so I think it was even more reasonable at that time to say as Carpentier did, '[T]hey lie who say man cannot escape his epoch. The Stone Age, like the Middle Ages, is still within our reach' (Carpentier, 278). Indeed, in Orinoco region of the fifties, technologically speaking, the journey from New York to the jungle of Venezuela is a journey in time.

Benjamin took the surrealist method of montage and applied it to history creating a theory of the conceptualization of time in images. He was developing the concept of the dialectical image in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project* when he died. Therefore he did not provide a systematic definition. His theory of history and its crystallization into the dialectical image is too complex for the scope of this paper. However here is a glimpse:

> In what way is it possible to conjoin a heightened graphicness [Anschaulichkeit] to the realization of Marxist method? The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage into history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moments the crystal of the total event. (Arcades, 461; n2, 6)

What is useful here for the analysis of ethnographically surreal texts such as *The Lost Steps* is that fragments of antithetical images that represent the past, present or future in the social imagination may be juxtaposed and that by juxtaposing these elements one gets a better picture of 'the total event'.

The Lost Steps is full of imagery of the imagined past along with imagery from the imagined present, New York theatre and dirt floored huts, New York taxicabs and a slow boat down the Orinoco, classical music composed in the jungle. Thus the novel as a whole forms a kind of dialectical image, an ethnographically surrealist collage. If Carpentier had not first shown us the protagonist's artsy life with his wife in New York, the reader could not understand his struggles with his music composition or with his

new lover in the jungle. And one understands the jungle better by seeing what it is not—the metropolis, thereby gaining perspective on 'the total event.'

The protagonist, much like the characters of my own novel, does not have significant interactions with the local indigenous tribes. Therefore, he barely encounters those who live in an utterly different way. He mingles instead with frontier people and adventurers. Mestizo in every way, they occupy the space between the jungle tribes and the city folk. Likewise in my own novel, the characters go to a remote village to live in a different technological mode, but they live among Colombian city people who are transplanted there. Like Carpentier's frontier folk, they are liminal figures. In neither novel do the characters adopt a totally new cultural identity in the end. Where two ecosystems meet at what is called an ecotone or "edge", a third ecosystem appears. Likewise when two languages, cultures or literary forms meet, new ones are created. Both my novel and *The Lost Steps* were set in an ecological ecotone as well as a cultural one.

Timothy Brennan says in the introduction to *The Lost Steps*, 'To be authentic meant learning whom one was…' (Carpentier x). That is, the man learns who he has always been in the first place, a musician first and foremost. In the end he discovers he cannot stay in the jungle, because he feels compelled to dedicate himself to his art. He cannot be other than who he is, a musician. He must return to the city begrudgingly. In the process of the journey he has gained perspective on New York; I read the work as ethnographic surrealism.

Carpentier makes the distinction between a journey in time and a change of self to allow for the personal transformation of the protagonist without falling into the trap of presenting an authentic primordial Self that one must return to by going native. This is akin to Breton's association between the primitive and the insane (Conley and Taminaux eds. 4).

The author maps out a voyage through both time and space, as he views the two as inextricably connected. As one travels down the river, one

travels into a different era. Therefore, it is as much an example of stereographic time as stereographic space.

Conquests and Anti-conquests

The protagonist looks upon his new lover, the mestiza Rosario, with what Mary Louise Pratt calls an 'imperial gaze', even though, instead of colonizing, he wants to be transformed by those he meets. Pratt calls this an 'anti-conquest' (Pratt 39). She argues:

> The strategies of representation by which the European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony...The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the "seeing man" whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess. And often this person appropriates the identities of those he sees to redefine the self. (Siegel 31)

The protagonist does not expect his lover to have many thoughts of her own or objections to his suggestions. While he looks upon both his New York wife and mistress as self-absorbed and pretentious, he doesn't think of his new lover as having any significant independent life at all:

> I told all this to Rosario, who accepted my plan with joyous docility, as she would always accept the will of the man whom she received as her man…a woman who was all woman and nothing but woman…that a whole and complete woman, without complications, would always be within the reach of my desire… (Carpentier 198-9)

He doesn't seem to know or care what this woman thinks. They seem to hardly speak to each other.

In contrast, he treats the local men with considerably more respect. I found one passage in which he looked down on some men, but these weren't the men he had befriended. They were impoverished indigenous men with whom he had only had brief contact:

That night I was taught a profound lesson by men whom I did not consider men; by those very beings who gave me a sense of my own superiority, and who, in turn, held themselves superior to the slavering old men who gnawed bones left by the dogs. (Carpentier 216)

This racism is expressed in a self-conscious way. It may be that of the character and not the author. On the other hand, in Carpentier's portrayal of Rosario, the author does not seem to question his character's sexism at all.

Nevertheless, his protagonist's relationship to the place is not simply imperialistic. This is further complicated by the fact that the protagonist is a fellow Latin American, though a bourgeois Cuban artist of European descent. The Westerner in this narrative isn't quite Western, or not simply so.

It is not always clear who is Western. The 'West' is a complex shifting web of power relations, and the East has empires of its own. In this globalised world, the lines are sometimes blurred between the imperial and the colonial object. As Grewal Inderpal paraphrases Clifford, 'The "West" in the postcolonial moment is a site of on-going power and contestation of centrality and dispersal' (Inderpal 6). This is not to say that power is now spread across the social fabric in a homogenous way but that, with greater mobility between racial, ethnic, class and gender boundaries, new theories on 'imperial eyes' need to be devised. While there are still ubiquitous classic imperial relations such as the presence of the U.S. in many countries, simultaneously there is an empire that is looking back. Imperial eyes may look in many directions.

One cannot say that the protagonist is not truly transformed by the experience. But when it comes to music, he is open-minded; he returns with a new theory of its origins and a new approach to composition. As far as women are concerned, he seems to learn little; he seems blind to women as full-fledged human beings on any continent both before and after his trip. He has far more disdain for his wife, whom he views as a cold career woman, and his New York mistress, whom he sees as falsely artistic, than he does for

Rosario. Perhaps this is because she seems less threatening at first. Interestingly, Rosario refuses to marry him. She says it is not in a woman's interest to marry legally, since it prevents her from leaving freely if she must. Thus, she fails to be as submissive as he expected her to be. By the time he returns to the jungle to find her, she has found someone else. Though he fails to notice, she looks back at him with her own piercing gaze. The protagonist could have been transformed more deeply by this experience. The woman whom he expected to be supplicant and willing brutally rejects him. Perhaps it is because Carpentier himself, seeing the world through his imperial eyes, could not imagine that the Rosarios of the world have more agency than he assumed.

Lois Parkinson Zamora posits the idea that such relations should not be looked at simply in terms of oppression and resistance but that, even in the context of colonialism, relationships are infinitely more complex. One cannot reduce the relationship between a coloniser and colonised to an imperial gaze and a resistant, subversive gaze. There are moments when such a relationship is turned on its head; the oppressed person becomes dominant, if only for a moment. For example, Carpentier's protagonist has structural power, but Rosario's sexual power overpowers this at times. And there are moments that transcend such determinations completely, where these two people look upon each other nakedly as simply two human beings. As Zamora and Kaup said:

> My metaphor of the inordinate eye is intended as an alternative to the gaze so widely invoked in both feminist and postcolonial criticism to signal the appropriation of the other by visual means. For example, the cultural critic Homi Bhabha writes of "the structured gaze of power whose objectivity is authority": the colonized subject, according to Bhabha, returns this structured gaze through mimicry, thus effecting a "strategic reversal of the process of domination…that turns the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power." Bhabha's model is attractive because it points to the resistance of colonized subjects, but he does not concern himself with cultural specifics. Nor does he allow for a reciprocal relation in which the colonized does not mimic the colonizer. The resistance that Bhabha envisions is binary and closed, moving between oppressor and oppressed without

the transformative tensions or syncretic energies that characterize the New World Baroque, and without recognizing that both cultures are inevitably affected by the exchange. (Kaup and Zamora eds. xxiii)

When the narrative encounters his native lover, Carpentier turns the traditional balance of power between man and woman on its head, at least momentarily, in spite of the extreme sexism of the narrator. Rosario looks at her lover with Zamora's 'inordinate eye,' subverting the relationship he intends to impose. The protagonist is inept in the jungle, while Rosario is in her element. There it doesn't matter that he is a respected composer. There he isn't even much of a man since he lacks basic survival skills, out in the jungle far from the metropolitan source of his privilege, he also lacks power.

In my own novel, the parents start out and end as North Americans. The tribe they want to study largely rejects them, but they are nevertheless transformed by their journey. Although the characters in my novel are unwitting neo-colonialists, they are not capable of carrying out their anti-conquest, because the native tribe doesn't pay them the time of day. The tribe, like Rosario, resists their 'imperial gaze.' They attempt to engage in cultural appropriation but are only minimally successful.

When one comes from an imperial country, as do my characters, acquiring the traits of another culture is viewed as appropriation, yet if an immigrant to the United States like Carpentier's protagonist for example, does the same, this is called assimilation. This is so because of the power differential between the individuals involved; in the one case, the traveller chooses to explore an exotic locale, and in the latter, the person is usually forced out of his or her country by war or economic necessity. Nevertheless, these are paired processes, even if their motivations and effects are distinct.

In spite of the fact that one can never completely shed one's own culture, it is remarkable how much one can change if immersed in an utterly alien culture. So even though the old idea of going native is naïve, this doesn't mean that one cannot step out of one's own culture at all, for a time, to an extent. While it is generally accepted that immigrants go through such

transformations, travellers, or those who have the privilege to wilfully move to another culture, are not generally considered to have such flexibility. This is because such people have historically been colonial agents, missionaries and colonial bureaucrats; it has been their purpose to convert and transform, not to be transformed. But is there not potential for personal transformation in the neo-colonial latter day traveller, even if he or she is misguided? As Edward Said said:

> To ignore or otherwise discount the overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals, the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized coexisted and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives and histories is to miss what is essential about the world in the past century. (Said xxii)

It is common for analysis to be limited to a dichotomy between the traditional colonial project and 'going native' (Mary Louise Pratt's anti-conquest), but aren't they two sides of the same coin? And aren't there many possibilities in between?

Underneath the assertion that immigrants can transform themselves utterly but not Westerners, there is an assumption of the utter dominance of western culture. We take its primacy for granted to such an extent that we can't imagine that anyone could ever escape it. Carpentier problematizes this assumption by choosing a protagonist whose very existence subverts the easy categories of coloniser and colonised; he is Cuban and a New Yorker. Likewise, in my novel the majority of the villagers are from Colombia, though of privileged and non-Native background so they do not fit the typical profile of a colonist. The de-facto leader of the community is a woman, not the typical patriarchal figure. Also, the North American mother is a *mestiza* while some of the Colombians, such as the community's founder Teresa, are of un-mixed European extraction. And though the North Americans are privileged because of their passports, they were both born into working-class families. Meanwhile all of the non-Kogi Colombian characters were born into

privilege. Each is privileged in its own way, and lacking in privilege in others. Each is placed at the border of the other. They are marginal to each other; marginality is not always related to a centre or not simply so. Nevertheless, as in Carpentier's novel, none of these individual variations negate the basic nature of their "anti-conquest".

2.3 One Hundred Years of Solitude: Unbridled Reality

Violence and the Marvellous Real

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* hyperbole and irony are temporarily put aside for the telling of the story of the banana plantation massacre. It is told in a straightforward journalistic tone, for it is already farfetched, though based on actual events. As Michael Taussig, an anthropologist who writes on Colombia and its seemingly surrealist war said, '[B]y means of judicious "quoting" of the real, one is simultaneously intimate and shocked by it' (Taussig 6). Afterwards, the forgetting of the story is told in an exaggerated way that is nevertheless true to the substance of actual events:

> The woman reassured him with a pitying look. "There haven't been any dead here," she said. "Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo." In the three kitchens where José Arcadio Segundo stopped before reaching home they told him the same thing: "There weren't any dead." (García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 313-4)

It seems surreal that everyone would deny that the massacre had happened, but this kind of Orwellian revisionist history is common in any country and rampant in Colombia. In fact, the memory of the actual massacre was suppressed to the extent that the García Márquez family doctor went insane with despair over it (Bloom ed., *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 20). With the downpour that follows the massacre, it's as if memory is washed away. The rains drag on, and the narrative moves from the seemingly reportorial to the

magical real without breaking the rules of nature. García Márquez said that though this is based on the Cienaga massacre, he made up the number of dead. And now, his invented number is quoted as the official number of dead. 'I suspect that half of our history is made in this fashion…Sooner or later people believe writers rather than the government' (Cardwell and McQuirk eds. 26). In *The Kingdom of this World* by Alejo Carpentier, a foundational magical realist text, violence is also part of the marvellous real. The extreme oppression of the newly independent Henri-Cristophe regime, and the severity of the violence which resisted it, are difficult for one to imagine. And the way Carpentier describes some of the events is similar in tone to his accounts of magical events, with a similar attention to detail. The slaves breaking open casks and drinking the master's brandy with abandon and the way war messages are sent by drum beat from hill to hill are just a couple of examples of how events can be historical and yet marvellous.

In García Márquez 's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the townspeople refuse to believe that two men are really out to kill Santiago Nassar. Here we see García Márquez' critique of the silence surrounding the war. They didn't warn Santiago, because they couldn't accept that his life was really in danger; they went on with their business as on any other day, so, of course, he was killed in the end. As Michael Taussig suggests, such an event simply didn't fit with their conception of reality (Taussig 10). The facts of war seem surreal, for they are totally out of the context of what those in peaceful countries consider normal life; they seem impossible, unreal:

> The "dirty war"…Of course the point of such a war, of the phrasing of such a war, which is also called by some national commentators a war of silencing, is that the General [Landazabal] says it is "said to be" going on which means, in political and operational terms, *that it is and it isn't*—in just the same way as the abnormal is normal and orderly is orderly. (Taussig 21) [My emphasis]

The facts of war are denied by those who experience them, not only for reasons of political expediency, but because they are difficult for those who

must live with them to accept emotionally. This is similar to the way in which the characters in my own novel refuse to deeply examine the warning signs of encroaching violence. Denial is an act of separating oneself from reality that could be seen as creating a surreal state of consciousness.

How can one write about the political responsibly while so obviously distorting the 'truth'? While it is a very different approach from that of the social realists, it is no less politically engaged; it can be used to serve as 'witness' just as effectively. Tony Kushner, author of the magical realist play *Angels in America,* said, 'Maybe it's because I'm Jewish. Maybe it's because I'm gay. But I feel that all the different fields of inquiry meet in Politics' (Kushner *Bill Moyer's News hour).* Magical realism may not be the most obvious choice for a play on AIDS in New York City in the eighties. Social realism is more popular among politically engaged writers in English speaking countries. But when one further reflects upon the emotional effect that this epidemic had on the gay community, how wildly outside of their expectations it had been, how surreal it seemed, the choice is obvious.

To conjure up a magical reality in literature, one has to first decide for oneself what reality is. One has to not only decide where one stands philosophically and theologically, but one also has to decide on the facts before distorting them. García Márquez had his own version of the events of the massacre clear in his head before he could decide how to represent the event in story form. He had no need to exaggerate the massacre in order to heighten the narrative. The actual events were already as extraordinary as his wildest inventions.

The aim of a good work of fiction is to create a real psychological experience in the mind of the reader. As Steiner says, '[The text] engraves the fiction in the wax tablet or copper plate of the respondent psyche. Something very physical is occurring' (Steiner 159). Perhaps this ability on the part of the author to create this dream-like psychic experience should be the only criterion used to distinguish whether or not a narrative is considered to be 'real.'

Magical Macondo

As I mentioned earlier, George Steiner spoke of grammar as 'the articulate organization of perception' (6). While he extended his definition of grammar beyond its everyday use, he did not mean this metaphorically. Sometimes he was literally speaking of grammar. Take for example, his discussion of the future, optative and subjunctive tenses:

> It is only man, so far as we can conceive, who has the means of altering his world by resort to "if" clauses….It seems to me that this fantastic, this formally incommensurable "grammatology of verb-futures, of subjunctives and optatives proved indispensible to the survival, to the evolution of the language animal…. (Steiner 6)

He further stated that '"shall," "will" and "if," circling in intricate fields of semantic force around a hidden centre or nucleus of potentiality, are the pass-words to hope' (Steiner 7). And without these tenses, this 'nucleus of potentiality', there could be no writing of fiction. While magical realism is a genre which allows for more space for a clash of grammars, it is a rare work of fiction that actually invents its own grammars. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is one of these rare original works. García Márquez speaks his own language. He does not merely juxtapose the scientific and mythical world-views like many novels of the genre, he creates a truly unique world, the village of Macondo.

The English language is a result of a literal clash of grammars. In the ninth century when the Vikings arrived in England, they spoke to the local folk in Old Norse. Anglo-Saxon, and Old Norse had similar nouns but very different declensions on those nouns. In order to understand each other, they stopped using different grammars. This is how English lost the cases that Modern German still has today (Geipel 121).

Some languages are agglutinative, adding one word to the other, like German. The new word is more than just a combination of the two words; it is a kind of verbal ecotone. When two ecosystems meet at an edge, the third ecosystem which springs forth is more than just a hybrid of the two original systems; it has its own unique patterns and qualities. Verbs are transformed into nouns, for instance. And in any language a noun may be made into a verb, at least in slang. How a language divides noun from verb delineates the distinction between active and inert in the 'nerve structure of consciousness' (Steiner, 6). Good fiction is constantly making these sorts of transformations. Like Melquiades the gypsy in *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* a good writer is an alchemist. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the lifeless body of Remedios the Beauty takes flight. An intimate object takes action; a noun is made into a verb.

One Hundred Years of Solitude breaks the rules of physics far less often than it at first appears. Much of the narrative is so far fetched and is told in such an exaggerated way that one tends to feel transported into the realm of the magical even when no such thing has occurred. Take the following description:

> When the giant opened it, the chest let out a chilly breath of air. Inside it there was just an enormous transparent block with countless internal needles, which broke up the light of the setting stars into stars with many colours. (García Márquez*, One Hundred Years of Solitude* 22)

In actual fact this is a description of ice, and there was no giant at all, just Melquiades the gypsy and his wares:

> Taken aback, yet knowing that his sons expected an immediate explanation, José Arcadio Buendía dared to murmur, "It's the biggest diamond in the world."
> "No," the gypsy corrected him, "it's ice". (García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 23)

Edwin Williamson takes the fact that García Márquez uses José Arcadio's naïveté to defamiliarise the ice and create the effect of magic and concludes that this wink to the reader is meant to extend to the rest of the text. That is, from José Arcadio's point of view, this ice is like diamonds, but the reader is meant to know better. The narrator is not implying that they are diamonds. Therefore later, when Remedios the Beauty's corpse is revived and flies to heaven or José Arcadio's ghost lives under the tree in the courtyard, we are meant to understand that this is only true from the point of view of the narrator, and the author himself is winking to us, expecting us to know that such things never occurred (Williamson 46).

I disagree. First of all, not all of the characters are meant to be as naïve as José Arcadio, except Remedios the Beauty. If one takes out the many cases where the laws of physics are broken, all the appearances of ghosts for instance, then much is lost in the story. The ghost of José Arcadio has much to say and do during his many years living under the tree in the courtyard. Of course, the many magical events in the novel didn't actually occur, just as very little in the novel actually occurred, except perhaps the massacre. But within the context of the novel, they are real and they happened. Therefore, I don't think one can dismiss all the novel's instances of magical realism as examples of defamiliarisation in a story told by naïve characters.

In his essay *Insomnia and Memory,* Michael Bell says that García Márquez tells the story at the level of the family's repressed selves (45). I would take this reading a step further. It is as if the insomnia plague never ended. When one has insomnia, dream and waking states intermingle. This account may be told in the point of view of repressed selves released through their insomnia into a permanent twilight where magic is real and reality is magical.

García Márquez uses an omniscient narrator. It is the voice of someone who has observed the Buendía clan over the generations. It reminds me of Faulkner's voice in the short story, *A Rose for Emily* which is told from the point of view of the whole village. It is the authority of this constant voice

that holds together the hybrid, stereographic spaces of the narrative. If it were to waver in doubt for an instant, the entire narrative would fall apart, but it never does. As Grace Kim says in her essay "Nothing Interesting Has Happened to Me: The Works of Gabriel García Márquez," 'It is only the authority of the properly invested narrator who may carry the full burden of Ursula's generations' (Bloom ed., *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 56). I agree with Gerald Martin that his 'style… comprises the infrastructure of his novels' (Cardwell and McQuirk eds. 15). This style, though ornate, is imbued with the objectivity of his journalistic training, but it was his grandmother who first taught him to tell a story this way. He said she told of the most farfetched events with a 'brick-face.' He has tried to emulate this deadpan storytelling voice in his work (Cardwell and McQuirk eds. 18).

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, many characteristics repeat themselves throughout the generations, and the names of the characters are also repeated. This conception of the Self is a traditional one; it implies continuity throughout the generations, a connection to history and to one's descendants. Though Macondo has only existed for three generations, the Buendía clan's sense of identity is dynastic and traditional. This is in stark contrast to a postmodern fragmented or alienated self. If there is a protagonist in the novel, it is the entire Buendía clan. A Buendía knows where he or she fits in society.

I would like to briefly compare the early-twentieth century traditional rural identity of the Buendías to the late twentieth century urban identity of the narrator of the Japanese novel *The Box Man* by Kobo Abe. In it there are box men, homeless men who walk around with large boxes over their heads; inside, they keep all their belongings. At night they settle down to sleep inside the box, under a bridge or another hidden place. People ignore the box men to such an extent that they can shoplift with impunity. One box man has the same identity as any other; indeed, our protagonist becomes curious about a box man and takes over his box and his things. Then he slowly begins to

feel that he has become that person. Soon he also becomes invisible to normal people. Notice the neutral and detached voice of the first few lines:

> This is the record of a box man. I am beginning this account in a box. A cardboard box just reaches to my hips when I put it over my head. That is to say that at this juncture the box man is me. A box man, in this box, is recording the chronicle of a box man. (Abe 3)

This identity interchangeability is quite distinct from that of the Buendías. While they are linked by family ties, the box man is cut off from his origins.

The lack of such anonymity in García Márquez's skilful use of the omniscient voice, standing above all events while never failing to infuse each line with feeling, creates the magic of this most lauded work of magical realism.

A Self-Referential Novel

In the writing of fantasy (or fantastic settings), one is creating an enclosed world (or two) that has different rules from the outside world, so in order for the narrative to be plausible, one must never break these rules. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a self-referential text. One way in which García Márquez achieves this is by making the Aurelianos (the collective protagonist of the story) largely unaware of the outside world, though, as I said above, they are not so naïve that every instance of magic can be chalked up to their fanciful distortions. This naïveté is a filter through which the world is viewed; it drives the voice. This naïveté makes the following proclamation seem perfectly natural: "'Things have a life of their own," the gypsy proclaimed with a harsh accent, "It is simply a matter of waking up their souls"' (Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 3). As Stephen Minta says in his book *Gabriel García Márquez: Writer of Colombia*:

They are blissfully unaware of historical reality and know nothing of the world, which has determined their destiny. Their only thoughts or memories are about things, which relate to the structure of the novel; which is therefore the very fabric of their perceived social history. This explains the exoticism, for them, of things that to us are quite normal. (Minta 170)

We find out in the last lines of the novel that the text Aureliano is reading is in fact the book we are also reading as it tells of his demise:

Then he skipped again to anticipate the predictions and ascertain the circumstances of his death. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forevermore, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude rarely have a second opportunity on earth. (García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 422)

Here we discover that Melquiades is the writer of the text we are reading:

Everything was known, before it happened, by the sacred, utopian, mythic, foundational divination of Melquiades, but nothing will be known if Melquiades doesn't consign it through writing. Like Cervantes, Marquez establishes the borders of reality within a book and the borders of a book within reality. (Fuentes, "The Baroque Culture of the New World" 62)

Like Marquez I wanted to create a self-referential world in *Cloud Village,* but, as in his novel, it was important that this invented world reflected back upon our own.

Though Marquez's masterpiece reads like a house of mirrors with everything referring to something else within it and even the names of the characters echo each other, I would agree with Harold Bloom that, though steeped in myth, the book itself is not mythical. 'No misreading could be more serious for Latin American literary history than the "mythreading" of its

most celebrated work, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*' (Bloom ed., *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 103). I think this is probable, given that García Márquez himself disliked fantasy:

> Fantasy, in the sense of pure and simple Walt Disney style invention without any basis in reality, is the most loathsome thing of all…the difference between [literature] and [fantasy] is the same as between a human being and a ventriloquist's dummy. (Marquez and Mendoza 13)

Just because García Márquez used elements of fantasy, does not mean one should read the text as such. If one reads his autobiography *Living to Tell the Tale*, much is recognizable from his work, especially from his novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*. The 'unbridled reality' of the text is, not only because he is describing a country with a long civil war, but also because he draws upon his childhood. Due to the relative lack of modern technology in Colombia at the time, the village of Macondo in this novel seems to be set much further in the past than the 1930s. I believe this novel was written in the way he found most appropriate to describe the reality of the period of his childhood, amidst the upheavals of Colombian life and politics. It was a brilliant distortion, far more truthful than any journalistic account.

Just because it is self-referential does not mean that its space is unified. Instead, as is typical of its genre, its space is hybrid, its grammars multiple, and within it we find scientific and mythical views, actual and fantastic locales and actual events juxtaposed with flights of fancy.

Thus, I have found that both *The Lost Steps* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* contain that spark that all great literature must have, that which arises when one grammar or 'articulate organization of perception' clashes with another (Steiner, 6). In the former, this clash is a clash between cultures. At various points in the novel, the narrative creates a clash between coloniser and colonised, the bourgeois and the peasant, white and mestizo, male and female and two Latin American points of view (one urban and one rural).

In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the cultural clashes between Hispanic, gypsy and African are played out in a clash between physics and metaphysics, science and myth. Steiner says that different works propose different borders between the 'empirical and the imaginary:'

> Does the "un-real"…exercise a metaphysical and psychological vengeance on the claims to reality of the everyday?[….] In what ways, if any, is Sherlock Holmes' house number either unreal or non-existent? Different metaphysics, different theories of nomination and cognition give different answers. They propose differing borders between the empirical and imaginary, between verifiable objectivity and the free play of the subjective. (Steiner 101)

Magical realism as a genre allows for wide-open spaces within which such borders can be drawn. If García Márquez had been hemmed in by the restrictions of realism, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would have mapped out the landscape of rural Colombia in a very different way. Without the flying ghosts of African mythology and the travelling gypsy salesman Melquiades, the alchemy of grammars in which noun was turned to verb and a corpse leapt into flight, would never have been created. The boundaries between Spanish, Indigenous and African cultures and therefore metaphysical beliefs could never have been blurred in such a unique way. In magical Macondo, within the context of this self-referential book, flying ghosts are perhaps more believable than the civil war, a war that continues, in a new form, in present-day Colombia.

Chapter Two: The North American Baroque Spirit

3.1 North American Magical Realism

Magical realism is considered to be a site of resistance for culturally oppressed groups, because it gives space for non-Western perspectives which challenge Enlightenment Rationality. As Edmund Smith said of Asturias' *Men of Maize*, 'Indigenous resistance is not only with arms but with myths by which they preserve their concept of the world' (Smith 101). Therefore, U.S. scholars are resistant to using the term magical realism for their own literature, because 'it has been the most privileged centre of all our post-war world' (Faris 201). There are nevertheless ample examples of North American magical realism. *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko and *Reservation Blues* by Sherman Alexie are all accepted as easily part of this category, because they are written by people of colour. Magical realism, originating in Latin America, has been associated with syncretism and myth and seen as an appropriate genre for telling the stories of the oppressed, as colonized peoples necessarily participate in two cultures and are therefore familiar with disparate worldviews (Faris 285). But there are exceptions. Though he is Native American and writes magical realism, Sherman Alexie doesn't use Native American myth as inspiration for his magical moments; at times, like Marquez, he uses the absurdity of a violent past.

There are also many examples of North American magical realism by North Americans of European descent: for example, *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner, some of Le Guin's short stories, and the French-Canadian *Life of Pi*. Kushner belongs to two oppressed groups; he is Jewish and gay, but to say that either of these things had to do with his choice of genre in this piece would be absurd. He does use myth, but this is no case of appropriating indigenous myth. Instead, he draws upon Judeo-Christian and Mormon millennial thought. Le Guin is strongly influenced by Native American myth,

but she has also read widely of imaginary places and peoples, Middle Earths and Androids. Also, the powers of her imagination are considerable.

The Quebecois Yann Martel's mildly magical realist novel *The Life of Pi* won the Booker prize. As Stephen Slemon asserts, '…Canada…is not part of the third world, a condition long thought necessary to the currency of the term [magical realism] in regard to literature' (Faris 407-8). It seems unreasonable to cling to the old idea that magical realism is exclusive to developing countries and marginalised peoples now that so many great works of the genre have emerged from the hyper-industrialized world.

Martel is an inveterate traveller. He writes about that which most Canadians would find exotic; exoticism is a common element of the genre. The beginning of *The Life of Pi* is set in the Pondicherry Zoo in Tamil Nadu. It is replete with Hindu Gods, a Bengal tiger and a zebra. Religion is a constant topic. This is another common theme of magical realism. One could say that Martel unashamedly engaged in a lot of cultural appropriation, but I am glad he did for the sake of the story. Which culture does he see as his own anyway? He was raised in Spain, Mexico, Costa Rica, Quebec and France, but significantly, not India. In the novel, an Indian immigrant in Canada tells the main story to the fictitious writer-narrator. In this way, Martel accounts for any cultural inaccuracies, since the narrator heard the story second hand. But at what point does it become superfluous to talk of an author's ethnic or autobiographical background? When can one say, this man has a vivid imagination and can tell a tall tale first and foremost? It seems that literary criticism has no place for discussion about the Muse or the mystery of its origins.

In *Distant Relations* Fuentes asserts that '[V]arious cultures are not separate but unified in dream and fantasy through history, populated by ghosts and spectres who refuse to die, and who live their afterlives through endless time in ways that reshape the present' (Faris 173). Can one say that Martel was united in dream with a universal muse, or is this tendency to

universalize (and in this case, to appropriate) part and parcel of the imperial gaze?

Stephen Slemon says that the danger of defining magical realism as an international phenomenon is that it is easy to fall into the trap of considering one culture as interchangeable with the next, without distinguishing their various cultural and political contexts.

> Critical tropes for justifying an ignorance of the local histories behind specific textual practices and for securing first world postmodernism's naturalization of—again Peter Hulme's words—that "casual unmoored international audience" which claims everything in the wide world as somehow his own. (Slemon 12)

I do not wish to fall into the trap of thinking all writers of magical realism are now part of one uniform postmodern commodity culture. In *Empire,* Hardt and Negri talk about an absence of a distinct North and South in current geopolitics. After a lecture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Hart was asked if he meant that the world was one large indistinguishable geopolitical grey mass. Was there no point of talking of a global South or North, or oppressor and oppressed classes? He said that no, quite the contrary, economically what was once the global north may exist blocks away from what was once the global south; the first and third world now occupy the same cities. The world has become no more equal or just and no more culturally similar. Its divisions have become, if anything, more complex and striated than before, not one amorphous mass (Hardt, personal communication). Wendy Faris talks of 'building magical realist rooms in the postmodern house of fiction' (Faris 175). Magical realism is inherently flexible, science and religion; European and indigenous cultures coexist. It is therefore a particularly appropriate form to grapple with such new social complexities, and new literary forms will surely appear that will be even more able to accommodate them.

Magical realism often comes out of postcolonial societies, using its syncretism and porous quality to try to cope with their often violent

contradictions, but it is becoming an increasingly common form of expression in hyper-industrialized countries as well. Japan, like the United States, has been both colonizer and colonized. How did its hyper-industrialized society become fertile ground for one of the most famous contemporary magical realist writers, Haruki Murakami? *The Wind up Bird Chronicle* explores the Japanese occupation of Manchuria during World War II and life in contemporary Tokyo. War is surreal in itself, as I have discussed earlier, but so are the lives of Murakami's robotically passive protagonists in Tokyo. How do these alienated men of late Capitalism occupy the same genre as the Buendías of Macondo?

Late capitalist high-paced life is full anxieties about nuclear war and ecological collapse, common subject matter for science fiction. Science fiction fits in such an environment, and it shares with magical realism its propensity to stretch the bounds of the possible. The facts of life in North America and other hyper-industrialized countries are often even stranger than science fiction. There is a pill that can cause a woman to not menstruate for years on end, a 'career pill'. Fish DNA has become part of plants. Meat and organs can be grown in vitro. Haruki Murakami has written both magical realism and science fiction in an attempt to grapple with the complicated truth of postmodern Japan. New and more imaginative forms of literature will need to be created in order describe life in such countries, since it already stretches the bounds of what was once thought of as possible.

In an increasingly globalised world, we can no longer separate the fiction of colonizer and colonized, especially since most fiction in postcolonial societies is written by elites with Western educations. But this is not to say magical realism from postcolonial societies is not distinct from that of Japan, Canada, Europe, Australia and the United States. These two types of societies are surreal in distinct ways; the literatures from these two types of societies must draw the 'borders between the empirical and the imaginary' in different places (Steiner 101). They must map out terrains as different as a bullet train and an abandoned galleon. This is why I set my novel in both Colombia and

California. I presented two contrasting emotional terrains, exploring the tension this created for my main characters. The identity confusion and cultural misunderstandings they experienced could only be described with multiple grammars.

3.2 Henry Miller's Baroque Spirit:

Henry Miller's work had a baroque inclusiveness. Though he rejected surrealism, he took some of its experimental tendencies and threw away those he found tiresome or frigid, like automatic writing. Because he felt the spiritual was to be found within the phenomenological, he placed an emphasis on quotidian and corporeal life. He infused the details of daily life with a spirituality that is akin to magical realism. In this following sections I will discuss how his work was not only inclusive of different cultural and literary influences, but it included parts of life, like frank sexuality for example, which had been normally excluded from literature; in fact his work was banned from English speaking countries for decades, because some found the gory details offensive. Like a baroque cathedral, his fear of empty places or *horror vacui* may have resulted in a cluttered landscape at times, but it also resulted in rich prose that never shrunk away from difficult or unusual questions.

Henry Miller and Surrealism

Both Henry Miller and Alejo Carpentier were writing in Paris during surrealism's heyday, though Miller never socialized with the Surrealists, unlike Carpentier. Miller shared Carpentier's assertion that the marvellous in the work of the surrealists was constructed, but instead of viewing the marvellous as something which primarily emanated from daily life and the culture of the ordinary man, he also saw it as originating from the Self: in

voice and vision. In his work the external and internal, the physical and the spiritual, are closely intertwined.

> When we look at the Surrealistic products of such men as Hieronymus Bosch or Grunewald or Giotto we notice two elements which are lacking in the works of the Surrealists today: guts and significance. [T]he expansion of the Self, in other words, is what truly brings about the condition of the marvellous. Knowledge is not involved, nor power. But vision. (Miller, *The Cosmological Eye* 193-4)

In Miller's work the marvellous in daily life is far more full of life than the work of the original surrealists. Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* or Andre Breton's *Nadja* do not portray their own native land with the vibrancy of Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Is this because of this 'vision' resulting from the expansion of the Self that Miller speaks of? Is it because the Self that he speaks of is not a disembodied and abstract one but a bodily Self of blood and guts and sex?

Heinrich 'Henry' Miller's first language was German, and he later learned French. So he was acutely aware of the etymology of English words. He said that he always chose a German-origin word over a French-origin one, because French words entered English vocabulary via the Normans who were the rulers of England. Therefore, French origin words tended to be legalistic and procedural, whereas the German ones tended to emanate from the body or the earth (Kaufman 115).

Miller spared no detail with his description of the bodily. Due to obscenity laws, *Tropic of Cancer* was banned in his own country until 1961. His work contained elements of the grotesque, a characteristic of Baroque work, not only because of his frank sexuality but also because of the constant festive mood of much of his work. As Bakhtin said, 'the material bodily principle in grotesque realism is offered in its all-popular festive and utopian aspect. The cosmic, social, and bodily elements are given here as an indivisible whole' (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* 19). Miller's work diverged from the traditional realist novel enough for him to invent a sub-genre, the auto-

romance as in autobiographical romance. But one could also see some of his work as a sub-type of grotesque realism.

In her book, *A Self-Made Surrealist: Ideology and Aesthetics in the Work of Henry Miller,* Blinder notes that the photos in Breton's *Nadja* were taken by the same photographer as those in Miller's *Quiet Day's in Clichy*.

> Breton's Paris was like the Brassai photos that accompanied *Nadja,* deserted fountains, unpeopled, cold and removed. Miller's Paris was more like the Brassai photos that accompanied *Quiet Days in Clichy*, 'street scenes of prostitutes', men and women kissing in cafes, warm, peopled and full of life. (Blinder 71)

I would apply this assessment to the content of the aforementioned two novels. Miller's novel is full of smells that one chokes on and scenes filled with humanity. Breton's work is much more abstract and cold. Even *Nadja*, a book about a mentally ill woman, is quite sane and contained in comparison. As Miller said: 'Very often the Surrealists give us the impression that they are insane in a very sane way, that it is "ice box-madness"… and not real madness' (Miller, *The Cosmological Eye* 180-81).

I agree with Morris (25) that the novel, ethnography, and indeed any writing is an interpretation, not a copy, of reality. But I also agree with her that though entirely accurate reportage may be impossible (and not the point of literature) and authenticity is problematic in these late-capitalist days of multiple overlapping identities, the attempt to connect one's text to the world outside the text is important. Indeed, without this connection, why would one write? According to Morris, Realism serves an important function as a witness (287-8). I would add that this is not only the case in with regards to violence, poverty and the destruction of the environment but also with in relation to the emotional suffering and joys of daily life. Grotesque realism and the grotesque realist moments in Miller give a particular insight into the latter for they include the bodily experience of life in all its exuberance and crudeness. They serve as a witness to life as it is actually lived, unsanitised.

The fact that Miller was influenced by surrealism is undeniable, even if his manifesto on the subject was scathingly critical. He does claim, however, that any resemblance between his work and theirs is merely coincidental. 'I was writing surrealistically in America before I ever heard the word' (Miller, *The Cosmological Eye* 160). He nevertheless had an obsession with the marvellous, without using the word as such. Miller loved to paint, and he took inspiration from Hieronymus Bosch's painting.

> The Oranges of Bosch's "Millennium"…exhale this dreamlike reality which constantly eludes us and which is the very substance of life…. The millennial oranges which Bosch created restore the soul; the ambiance in which he suspended them is the everlasting one of spirit become real. (Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* 29)

When Miller speaks of the marvellous, he speaks in spiritual terms, though he himself was a member of no religion. He infused this sense of the marvellous in the places he loved: Paris, Greece, Big Sur and the Fourteenth Ward of his childhood Brooklyn.

Miller criticized the surrealist method of juxtaposing seemingly unrelated objects for effect alone. He felt that the method should only be used if doing so allows one to voice one's own experience of the world, to express one's unique vision.

> The Surrealists themselves have demonstrated the possibilities of the marvellous which lie concealed in the commonplace. They have done it by juxtaposition. But the effect of these strange juxtapositions and transpositions of the most unlike things has been to freshen the vision. Nothing more. For the man who is vitally alive it would be unnecessary to rearrange the objects and conditions of the world. The vision precedes the arrangement or the rearrangement. (Miller, *The Cosmological Eye* 193)

Though he claimed a more deliberate approach than that of surrealist automatism, some of his juxtapositions were equally strange. His work is full

of bizarre lists as below. The first, from *Black Spring,* is set in frenetic New York.

> I am Chancre the crab, which moves sideways and backwards and forwards at will. I move in strange tropics and deal in high explosives, embalming fluid, jasper, myrrh, smaragd, fluted snot, and porcupines' toes (Miller, *Black Spring* 25-6).

I agree with Anaïs Nin when she calls this element of his work, 'a baroque piling on of images' (Baillet 78). One could see it as a kind of verbal surrealist collage. The following was written about a Greece imbued with peace though it was about to be overtaken with war: 'The tree brings water, fodder, cattle, produce; the tree brings shade, leisure, song, brings poets, painters, legislators, visionaries' (Jong 147). The peace and light with which he fills this entire novel may or may not have been present in Greece at the time. This was a culture of which he knew little, a country in which he only spent a few months, but the peace he spoke of was real enough to his subjective experience.

Another writing technique that Miller used to create surreal effects is that of jumping around in time without notifying the reader with traditional clues. He may be describing a scene in Brooklyn in the twenties and jump to a memory of a train in Germany in the thirties without warning. Erica Jong called this tendency of his 'spiraltime' or unconscious time (Jong 243). 'The Third of Fourth Day of Spring' in *Black Spring* begins and ends in the Place de Clichy, but travels years and continents in between. 'You thought I was at the Place de Clichy all the time, drinking an *aperitif* perhaps. As a matter of fact I was sitting at the Place de Clichy, but that was two or three years ago' (Miller, *Black Spring* 27). He follows the associations of his mind, not the chronology of events.

> I am trying to get at the inner pattern of events, trying to follow the potential being who was deflected from his course here and there, who circled around himself, so to

speak, who was becalmed for long stretches or who sank to the bottom of the sea or suddenly flew to the loftiest peaks. (Jong 238)

'At the boundaries of the grammatical, which are always being tested by poetic needs and inventive transgression, time can be negated or held in immobility…reversing time's arrow' (Steiner 74). In Steiner's terms one could say the poetic needs of Miller's work push the bounds of the grammatical.

The Colossus of Maroussi:

Henry Miller believed his greatest work to be *The Colossus of Maroussi.* While he distanced himself from surrealism as a movement, he called his works of fiction romances, as I have said above, and romanticism influenced surrealism. According to the Oxford Dictionary for Literary Terms the German Romanticists: 'stressed the creative power of the mind and allowed nature to be seen as a responsive mirror of the soul' (Baldick 339). He shares this philosophy in his discussion of Bosch's paintings which inform his vision of his home in Big Sur. '[Bosch] saw through the phenomenal world, rendered it transparent, and thus revealed its pristine aspect' (Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* 23).

The Colossus of Maroussi, *Big Sur*, and *the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* are squarely within the tradition of American transcendentalism which was also influenced by the romanticists. 'American transcendentalism…affirmed Kant's principle of intuitive knowledge not derived from the senses…while rejecting organized religion for an extremely individualistic celebration of the divinity of each person' (Baldick 339). Miller diverged from this. He thought of the senses as not only a valid source of knowledge but as an exalted one. Throughout the novel he explores the idea that the sacred is found in the physical realm, in lived moments here and now.

The Colossus of Maroussi shares with magical realism the juxtaposition of the mythical, in this case that of the ancient Greek, and the everyday, a hybrid space.

> There are two distinct worlds impinging on one another—the heroic world of daylight and the claustral world of dagger and poison…. Mycenae folds in upon itself, like a fresh-cut navel, dragging its glory down into the bowels of the earth where the bats and the lizards feed upon it gloatingly. Epidaurus is a bowl from which to drink the pure spirit: the blue of the sky is in it and the stars and the winged creatures who fly between, scattering song and melody…. There were never two worlds so closely juxtaposed and yet so antagonistic. It is Greenwich here with respect to everything that concerns the soul of man. Move a hair's breadth either way and you are in a totally different world. (Miller, *The Colossus of Maroussi* 77)

He states his view on the divinity of humanity, and the main point of the book, clearly in this sentence of *The Colossus of Maroussi.* 'From that day forth my life was dedicated to the recovery of the divinity of man' (Miller 241). In other words divinity is to be found in life itself not in the beyond. According to Paul Jahshan, Henry Miller was influenced by the Symbolist poets who 'were convinced that subtle threads exist between the material world and the spiritual one, and that the poet, with the help of words, can gain access to the realm of the beyond' (Jahshan 103).

In other works Miller describes crude sexuality and unpleasant physical details, from lice to defecation. Interestingly, Bakhtin found this connection between the bodily and the sacred in medieval grotesque realism, '[D]ebasement is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism: all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images' (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* 371). This is another way in which his work has elements of the grotesque real. Bakhtin saw classic post-Enlightenment realism as severing the body and the objects it encounters as well as the individual and the whole.

> The fact is that the new concept of realism has a different way of drawing the

boundaries between bodies and objects. It cuts the double body in two and separates the objects of grotesque and folklore realism that were merged within the body. The new concept seeks to complete each individual outside the link with the ultimate whole….. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and* his World 53)

Miller's writing sought a wholeness. It included elements of life that had been excluded from literature perhaps since Rabelais' time, at times in order to connect them to the sublime, at others to let the unpleasant details of life fester in the open sewer.

Paul Jahshan called Miller an 'expressionistic surrealist' (Jahshan 99). Miller's gift was in his seamless fusing of the ethereal with the bodily, the mystical with the grotesque. In other words he drew the boundaries between the empirical and imaginary in unique places and sometimes blurred such boundaries completely.

Miller's Voice:

The voice of Henry Miller was unique to North American literature, in his combination of intimacy, the surreal, the grotesque and the ethereal. In spite of the fact that he influenced the Beats and shared with them the sense of intimacy in his prose and a frankness about sex, it is important to remember that he was born in the nineteenth century. He lived from 1891-1980. He remained loyal to the writers who lived in the nineteenth century to a greater degree than most of his American contemporaries. This is partly because those who influenced him came from the Old World. He was from a part of Williamsburg, Brooklyn full of immigrants and was raised by German-speakers; his grandparents were from Germany. He did not attend University except for a semester at City College, so he got his education at the public library and his reading suggestions were largely from immigrants, many of whom were Russian Jews. He was a great fan of Dostoyevsky and an admirer of Emma Goldman (born in Belarus) and her anarchist philosophy (Gordon 5-7).

He spent the decade in which he did his best writing in Europe. Of his list of the hundred books that most influenced him, I only recognize eight as American, these are written by James Fennimore Cooper, Dreiser, Emerson, H. L. Mencken, Thoreau, Twain and Whitman and William H. Prescott who wrote a history of the conquest of Mexico and Peru. This list also reveals his loyalty to the writers of the nineteenth century and before. The first six titles are Classical Greek pieces (Miller, *The Books in My Life* 317-19).

Clifford sees ethnography as an assemblage of voices,

> The ethnography of collage would leave manifest the constructivist procedures of ethnographic knowledge; it would be an assemblage containing voices other than the ethnographer's, as well as examples of 'found' evidence, data not fully integrated into the work's governing interpretation. (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture* 147)

Ethnographies should attempt to include the perspective of their subjects and often include direct quotations of their speech. Though as social scientists their goal must be to keep a close relationship in their work with the culture they are studying, ethnography is not simply a recording. In an ethnographic novel, as well as in classic and grotesque realism, the relationship between a text and the world outside it is more straightforward than in speculative genres.

A novel is also an assemblage of voices other than the author's. And the voice of an individual character may evolve during the novel as the character interacts with others and is transformed by events, as in the novel *Push* by Sapphire. As the novel begins the narrator is illiterate. By the end she has learned to read. As the novel progresses, her speech becomes more grammatically correct.

According to Bakhtin, the word's origins precede the speaker by centuries; it is loaded with the intentions of others. Even neologisms are created from borrowed words. Though the word cannot be entirely one's own, neither is a speaker's voice merely an assemblage of other people's intentions. An author

does not write in a vacuum; creativity does not come directly from the muse in pure form. Nor is creativity pure appropriation. Instead it is a conversation.

> A word (or in general any sign) is interindividual. Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the 'soul' of the speaker and does not belong only to him [or her]. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one). The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is not a duet, but a trio). It is performed outside the author, and it cannot be introjected into the author.' (Emerson and Holquist eds. 121-122)

Identity and indeed all culture is a result of such a conversation between multiple subjects. '[I]dentity does not necessarily imply ontologically given and eternally determined stability or uniqueness or irreducible character or privileged status of something total and complete in and of itself' (Said 315). Identity is constantly refashioned and revised in the course of social interaction. And as Bakhtin has insisted, the seemingly solitary writing process is already peopled with others. Cross-cultural literature with its ethnographically surreal juxtapositions merely heightens the already inherent dialogism of literature. The fiction of Henry Miller also heightens this dialogism, because he was open to a wider range of influences than most writers, from the highest literature to the lowbrow and grotesque. 'I blew with every wind. I accepted every influence, good or bad' (Miller, *Henry Miller On Writing* 141).

Miller's baroque piling on of images are not arbitrary. As I mentioned earlier, he hated the very idea of impersonal arbitrariness in writing. He chose his imagery and voices from many sources. As the cathedral of Guadalupe was built on Aztec ruins intentionally fusing Aztec and Catholic myth as a way to gain converts, his diverse imagery served a purpose. He would never breach the bounds of meaning entirely. Some of his pages may look as gaudy as a baroque cathedral, but they were not written simply to glitter like a

facade. Unlike some experimental writers, he always had something to say. And though he drew upon an assemblage of voices, he never lost his own voice. As I will discuss below, what kept his work steady through 'every wind' was its strong and intimate first person voice.

Though the aforementioned influences are largely distinct from those of Miller's North American contemporaries, the element that made his writing truly unique was surrealism, though he repudiated it. While there were North American writers of the French surrealist tradition, they were largely unread and unknown. Miller can be credited with bringing experimental writing to a larger readership.

In the work of Henry Miller, the reader may be immersed in a story when the narrative suddenly jumps to a dream or reminiscence, as is common in surrealist works. Here yet again, it is the strength of his voice that holds the narrative together. Indeed, it is possible for those who love him to devour thousands of pages of his later work (often in need of editing), because to read such pages is to visit an old friend.

> There is an unparalleled intimacy, no veil between the author and reader. This intimacy was one of Miller's greatest gifts. Try to replicate it and you will see how hard it is to give up literature and have life, how self-consciousness always threatens to intrude and how, even when you get into a flow, all sorts of flotsam and jetsam come with it. (Jong 244)

It is this element of Miller's writing that was most useful to me in redrafting my novel. It showed me how I needed to bring more intimacy into the voice of the text, or 'talk to the typewriter'.

Miller's writing method is more similar to Jack Kerouac's than the automatism of the surrealists, though the two writers have very different sensibilities. Jack Kerouac coined the phrase 'spontaneous prose' for his free writing method. He didn't believe in editing, (thankfully, his editors did). Kerouac was much more prosaic, less imaginative and philosophical, though his narratives were more traditional in structure. The difference between this

approach and that of the surrealists is already inferred in their names. The word 'spontaneous' comes from the Latin *sponte* for free will. Spontaneous writing is meant to be written with a freedom of spirit, but without letting go of one's individual personality in the process. In automatism, or automatic writing, one attempts to let the subconscious come through without the filter of the personality. According to Caroline Blinder, Breton thought automatic writing, 'is made dubious, by the profound modifications of memory and personality involved' (Blinder 106). While the surrealists thought reason and even one's personality should be suspended as much as possible during automatic writing, Miller took the opposite approach, even in his most surreal passages. So it is no wonder that many surrealist writings sound more detached than Miller's writing. I agree with Blinder when she says:

> If memory and personality disrupt the automatic message, it is because the writer no longer functions effectively as a pure transmitter. When Breton uses the phrase 'motor message' as a description of the automatic process, he turns the writer into a machine. (Blinder 16)

The very idea of taking out the personality, even for a writing exercise, ran contrary to Miller's entire body of work and way of living. 'Fear, love, hate, all the varying contradictory expressions or reactions of the personality, are what compose the very warp and woof of life. You can't pull one of them out without the whole edifice crumbling' (Miller, *The Cosmological Eye* 162).

Miller had in common with the Beats who came after him, notably Kerouac and Ginsberg, a deeply personal way of speaking. Though the Beats read Miller and one could say that Miller's frank sexuality could be a precursor to Ginsberg's, I am not certain the similarity between their work is because of direct influence. Perhaps Miller was simply ahead of his time and frankness about heretofore forbidden subjects was bound to burst forth in North American post-war society. There is a North American quality to the chummy and casual intimacy of the voices of these writers. I think it is the extent to which authors emphasise the personal and the centrality of the

personality of the author that distinguishes these North American surrealist influenced works from those of the original French surrealists.

I believe that some of the work of Henry Miller can be viewed as 'ethnographic surrealism', since it gives the North American reader a counterpoint to his or her own society. Miller wrote his best work in Europe or in his first couple years after his return to the United States: *Tropic of Cancer, Tropic of Capricorn, Black Spring,* and *The Colossus of Maroussi.* His prose is enhanced by the tension between European and North American ways of seeing the world. His prose is also enhanced by the unusual combination of class influences to which he was subject; each of these I see as a separate culture. Of lower-middle class origins, he lived in poverty for much of his life only to die a rich man. The critique of the commodification of North American culture that pervades his work began in the thirties, before such a perspective was fashionable. His work entitled *The Air-conditioned Nightmare* devoted entirely to the subject was published in 1945, but it reads with a critical bite more typical of the sixties.

> It [American Society] was like a page out of a telephone book. Alphabetically, numerically, statistically, it made sense. But when you looked at it up close, when you examined the pages separately…when you examined one lone individual and what constituted him, you saw something so foul and degrading…that it was worse than looking into a volcano. (Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* 20)

Miller's decade in Europe allowed him to look at life in the U.S. from a European perspective while simultaneously retaining the insights of a native North American, but this is not the only reason I think the phrase 'ethnographic surrealism' applies to his work. Though he was less self-consciously countercultural than the Beats, he shared with them a strong critique of mainstream culture. He and his friend Alfred Perles even wrote a manifesto for a 'New Instinctivism', 'A proclamation of rebellion against the puerilities in the arts and literature, a manifesto of disgust, a gob of spit in the cuspidor of post-war conceits' (Ferguson xi).

I think that countercultural writings are inherently cross cultural, because they create grammars which clash with the nerve structure of consciousness of the mainstream, and force the average person to reconfigure her mind, at least momentarily, in order to understand them.

> When I reflect that the task which the artist implicitly sets himself is to overthrow existing values, to make of the chaos about him an order which is his own, to sow strife and ferment so that by the emotional release those who are dead may be restored to life, then it is that I run with joy to the great and imperfect ones, their confusion nourishes me, their stuttering is like divine music to my ears. (Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* 253)

So in truly transgressive work, the creative impulse is not confined to the writer; the reader must stretch her understanding and create new grammars in the process.

While my own novel is far less experimental than Miller's work, its countercultural characters embarked on a social experiment with the intention of subverting the established values of their culture. Instead of creating subversive literature, they created a community. They also chose to travel to as foreign a place as possible in order to shake themselves out of their own complacency.

Henry Miller sought to subvert that which was repressive in both French and North American societies. There was a greater divide between himself and those who hold certain conventions dear than between himself and the French; for him, the Other is not the French but the conventional person. Subversive, indeed any meaningful literature, takes place at the junctures between cultures, paradigms or grammars. The conversation that makes up literature gives birth to new forms; in this way it functions like a sexually reproductive organism. In this way Miller's work was so fertile that its baroque piling on of imagery and many contradictory voices created a landscape whose imagery was as crowded and gaudy as a baroque cathedral. At times it was as ethereal and spiritual as a place of worship and at others it

was covered in the grime of the gutter because the world he lived in contained both elements.

3.3 The Other as Alien: The Work of Ursula Le Guin

The work of Ursula Le Guin embodies the baroque spirit in three ways: its indigenous influences and multicultural nature—even if such cultures are invented, its at times excessive language and style, and finally its use of allegory, a common storytelling form of the Baroque.

Utopian literature, that which describes real or imagined utopian communities, are full of potential for ethnographically surreal juxtapositions, since they give the reader a counterpoint to his or her own society. I hope that the utopian experiment within my novel will achieve this as well by creating an imaginary community, an imaginary counterpoint to the culture of the reader. Its most absurd elements may be the most ethnographically surreal, such as the ban on shoes or technology. As is clear in the novel, my intention was not to win the reader over to a very closed village ideology but instead to open up questions.

Ursula Le Guin said that fantasy entails the creation of a self-contained reality that may not hold up outside the bounds of the story. Because I had to set my novel in a village that does not exist, I explored speculative fiction and magical realism to see how they rendered the improbable or the impossible plausible. And because my novel is about an intentional community founded on utopian ideals, I also read utopian novels. I discovered that all of these types of novels share a radical self-referential quality.

The narratives of Ursula Le Guin are often driven by the clash between cultures. In *Changing Planes*, the character Sita travels to other 'planes'. In one plane she encounters beings who rarely speak. Her guidebook of interplanary travel says:

"This nearly absolute abstinence from language makes them fascinating," notes the author. "For tourists from our culture…the Asonu are the ultimate in exotic. This proved too tempting to one visitor. Convinced that the Asonu force silence upon their children, he kidnapped an Asonu child and tried to keep her speaking so that she would reveal to him the supposed 'Secret Wisdom of the Asonu'. (Le Guin ursulakleguin.com)

Here Le Guin introduces the dynamics between tourist and native, the problematic Imperial eye, while remaining in the realm of fantasy. Le Guin's father was the famous anthropologist A.L. Kroeber, and his daughter's anthropological eye for cultural detail is on every page of her work. Here, her invented peoples have gender relations, mores, linguistic groups, grammar, and relations of authority.

Le Guin says of realism, '[It] has very different standards of plausibility [than fantasy] because it is a mirror held up to actual life' (Le Guin, ursulakleguin.com). Her worlds are quite clearly commenting on actual life, but not reproducing it. If she uses mirrors at all, they resemble those in a funhouse. For instance, one of the tribes in *Changing Planes* is genetically modified. Some of them are part corn and have long silky blonde hair. With this imaginary example, she seems to be referencing genetic modification in the contemporary world. She comments on actual life while remaining in the realm of the imaginary, whether the cloudy mirrors of realism or the fun house mirrors of fantasy.

The Dispossessed:

Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed* is set on the planet Anarres which was settled by anarchists from Urras two hundred years before. Anarres is the moon of Urras. After a revolution, the government of Urras agreed to give the rebels the moon in exchange for peace. The planet Anarres has no mammals besides humans; it only has fish. It is an arid lonely place. This has a profound effect on its inhabitants. As she writes in *The Left Hand of*

Darkness in which the inhabitants of the planet Winter suffer a similar type of solitude on a cold planet, 'It must colour your thinking, this uniqueness…to be so solitary, in so hostile a world: it must affect your entire outlook' (Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* 251).

It is forbidden to return to Urras, and no one has done so since the planet was settled. Goods are shipped in via rocket. The rocket launch is surrounded by armed guards. It is the only thing on the planet that is guarded in such a way. Private property does not exist, and all economic life is run by cooperatives. If one does not want to participate in the work detail assigned by the computer (one can work in one's field of expertise if one agrees to spend a certain number of ten day periods called decads doing manual labour), then one can go off to live alone in the wilderness. Life is peaceful on Anarres, if a bit colourless and dull.

The protagonist is the physicist Shevek. He has been corresponding with physicists on Urras for years, because their physics is vastly superior to that on isolated Anarres. It is exceedingly rare for an Anarran to have any interaction with the Urrasti whatsoever. He is only permitted to do so, because he is a leader in his field. Also, he has learned their language. He is finally allowed to take a visiting professorship at a University on Urras. This causes a great uproar among his people. They call him a traitor to Odonionism, the style of anarchism of their founder philosopher Odo. When he enters the rocket launch area to depart, people throw stones at him.

The wall around the rocket launch is meant to keep the hierarchical social structure and capitalistic economic order of Urras from contaminating Anarres. An anarchistic society lacking an army, it would be too easy to be overtaken by its colonizing and domineering neighbours. Since this is also true of Anarres, the Anarresti take precautions. 'Like all walls it was ambiguous, two faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended on which side you were on' (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* 1). The novel alternates chapters. In one Shevek is on one side of the wall, on one planet, and in the next he is on the other.

> [L]e Guin's experiment, which is based on a principle of systematic exclusion, a kind of surgical exclusion from empirical reality, something like a process of ontological attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification which we will henceforth term *world reduction*. (Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin" 279)

Like a playwright who reduces her story to that which can fit on a stage, Le Guin uses world reduction when she limits the species on Anarres and Gethen in the *Left Hand of Darkness*. The wall that Le Guin built around the rocket launch, cutting off other societies whose laws contradicted their own, is a perfect metaphor for the self-referential quality of fantasy as a genre in particular, and fiction in general. Every work must set its own boundaries; it must say, within these walls, this is real (or plausible) and that is not.

In my own novel, I too wanted to create a limited world, as if the mountain were my stage. As Jameson has pointed out, when writing about a community with different rules than one's own society, it is easier to create if it has inherent limitations and boundaries.

> Utopia is, in other words, not a place in which humanity is freed from violence, but rather one in which it is released from the multiple determinisms (economic, political, social) of history itself: in which it settles its accounts with its ancient collective fatalisms, precisely in order to be free to do whatever it wants with its interpersonal relationships—whether for violence, love, hate, sex or whatever. All of that is raw and strong, and goes farther towards authentication Le Guin's vision—as a return to fundamentals rather than some beautification of existence—than any of the explanations of economic and social organization which *The Dispossessed* provides. (Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin" 284)

Jameson wonders, in his discussion of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, whether this shutting off of options is a way of not asking questions. As he explains:

One is tempted to wonder whether the strategy of *not* asking questions ("Mankind," according to Marx, "always taking up only those questions it can solve.") is not the way in which the utopian imagination protects itself against a fatal return to just those historical contradictions from which it is supposed to provide relief. In that case the deepest subject of the Left Hand of Darkness would not be utopia as such, but rather our own incapacity to conceive it in the first place. (Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin" 287)

This may be so. In my own novel, the characters define the boundaries of their sub-culture by eliminating influences; they forbid all but the most basic technologies and all forms of mass media.

When Shevek visits Anarres, a planet like our own, we learn about his society by his surprise at dynamics we would find perfectly normal, like the inequality between the sexes.

The matter of superiority and inferiority must be a central one in Urrasti social life. If to respect himself Kimoe had to consider half the human race as inferior to him, how then did women manage to respect themselves—did they consider men inferior. (Le Guin *The Dispossessed* 22)

Through these insights, the work reveals itself as a kind of ethnographic surrealism even though the two planets are invented. On the other hand, the two planets are ours. One is a capitalist society, and the other is a combination of anarchist and communist alternatives. The colourless streets, lacking advertisements, reminded me of those I observed in the former Soviet Union and Nicaragua.

Le Guin uses defamiliarisation throughout the text to remind us that Shevek is alien to Urras 'not like any human face…as long as his arm, and terrible, unmistakable, there was an eye' (Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* 62). Here she is describing a donkey as Shevek sees one for the first time.

While she wrote *The Dispossessed* in a simple no-nonsense style, others of her works tend more towards a baroque excess, like *Always Coming Home* for example. In it she describes the customs, beliefs and artefacts of her

invented tribe in great detail for page after page. But all of her work has a distant tone whether the language is florid or terse. She says she created this deliberately, because she thought it gave her invented worlds the otherworldly quality they needed. 'Searching for a technique of distancing, I had come upon this one. Unfortunately, it was not a technique used by anybody at the moment, it was not fashionable, it did not fit any of the categories' (Bittner 29).

The Baroque Spirit is imaginative and expansive. It encourages experimentation without concern for the distinction between high and lowbrow, a freedom also shared with fantasy and science fiction. Few push the limits of imagination further than Le Guin, so I use her work as a limit case. Her work is an answer to the question, "How radically can one invent worlds?" In *the Left Hand of Darkness*, its people are androgynous. In one story, people engage in four-way marriages; in another, people must migrate across their plane once a year in order to mate when they are in heat. In *The Earthsea Trilogy*, she invents an archipelago and many planets populated with Hainish, Terran and other peoples.

As I wrote my novel, I had to constantly ask myself, "How far can I push the narrative and still have it be plausible?" Though as a novice I am very conservative in my experimentations, I draw inspiration from those far bolder than I. Le Guin uses her imagination in a dramatically different way than Miller. His creative journey was directed inward while she creates faraway planets. On the other hand, I view the invented places of Le Guin as maps of certain nether regions of her psyche. Her journey is also inward looking, but she has such a unique mind that she needs to travel to other planets in order to get there, just as Marquez needed to let Remedios the Beauty fly to heaven in order to most truthfully depict the Aracataca, Colombia of his childhood.

Chapter Three

4.1 Cloud Village: an experiment

In my own novel, I tried to build a utopian society. The community was a social experiment, and the writing of my novel was a type of literary experiment, as it is my first. For a novice writer, the whole of literary history opens seemingly endless possibilities of form. Questions of content were relatively simple to solve in comparison to questions of form.

The local Kogi tribe—which actually does exist—occupies a mythical place in the minds of the villagers in my novel in spite of the fact that they have difficulty creating close ties with the Kogi villages. The villagers have fashioned a sort of religion from half-digested ideas from the Kogi's mythology. The tribe's warning to the outside world to take care of the earth, or its ecosystems will collapse, was the motivation for the community's founding. However, the villagers' lack of contact with the Kogi is a source of great frustration, especially for those who were former anthropologists.

My main characters left the United States in part to escape the 'society of the spectacle'. Guy Debord described modern society this way: 'The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation' (Debord 12). In an attempt to move beyond the spectacle, the members of my utopian village wish to unite with this tribe which they at first conceive as a spectacular image without being aware that they are doing so. By that I mean, in essentialising the tribe they mediate their relationship to it; their ideal image separates them from the actual tribe as people. 'The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (Debord 2). And this image is not their own; it is spectacular in origin, a notion of the indigenous that was dragged from imperial history and crystallized into media images. '[The spectacle is] a *weltanschauung* that has been actualised,

translated into the material realm — a world view transformed into an objective force' (Debord 12-3).

As I have said, my task was to create a village in an environment I have never seen. I have been partially up the mountain where it is set, but I stayed in a town on the main highway due to safety concerns. The next two day's walk I had to reconstruct largely from the book and documentary, *The Heart of this World* by the BBC journalist Alan Ereira as well as from articles. I also read the work of the anthropologist Reichel-Dolmatoff. Though it is inevitable that I would give a distorted view, I tried to stick as closely to these sources as possible in my portrayal of the tribe. Since they bear witness to a disappearing culture, I tried to give these texts a second life through my novel. To gain more insight into the Kogi and their environment, I also drew upon my discussions with the Kogi linguist Carolina Ortiz. As I attempted to build the village from the ground up, I had to fill in the blanks where research failed me. I asked myself how other, more experienced, writers made far more radical inventions such as those found in magical realism and fantasy.

In the process of deciding the level of realism in my novel, I had to decide where the parameters of my own sense of reality lay. To what extent do the myths of the Kogi have a truth of their own for those who believe? The main characters must come to terms with their own sense of reality, not on a metaphysical level but on a social one.

I needed the details regarding the civil war in Colombia to be as accurate as possible (understanding that total accuracy is impossible), because they serve as a kind of witness to the brutality of its violence. The same was true of the degradation of the ecosystem on the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and of Kogi history. I felt that it is important for readers to be informed about these realities. In spite of the fact that the utopian community itself was an invention, I chose a sub-genre of classical realism in which the connection between the world and the text is always close, the ethnographic novel.

It wasn't important that my characters go into Kogi territory in particular; the important thing was that they go somewhere utterly alien. I chose this

setting, because the nearby tribe is the only fully uncolonised tribe in the Americas and the land is pristine. Once having decided on this setting, I had to make it plausible. Of course, my characters were as ignorant of the local tribe as I am. But having set the novel nearby, I had to deal with the uncomfortable question of the imperial gaze. How do I critically portray the characters' imperial gaze without myself promoting such a view? The original outline for the novel allowed for much more contact between the hippie utopians and the Kogi, but then I realized it was improbable that the two groups would have a close relationship. Alan Ereira of the BBC described the tribe as self-sufficient. He said that they utterly ignored those outsiders with whom they did not need to interact (Ereira 7). So I chose to have the Kogi of my novel allow the hippies to settle nearby only if they provide medical services during a tuberculosis epidemic. I decided that they should interact on this basis alone with a cordial distance. I made one exception however; the Kogi child Maria makes friends with the daughter of the North American couple in the village and her two best friends. Though the villagers are given only minor opportunities to challenge their own unwittingly imperial perspective and they are in denial about the imperial nature of their anti-conquest, I hope that the main characters are nevertheless able to refashion their sense of who they are; this is the very point of their journey.

Some traditional ethnographies provide transcriptions of fragments of the speech of their subjects. In this sense they are quite literally an assemblage of voices. The speech of the locals is often injected into an ethnography as if it were a collage of found objects, altering them as little as possible in an attempt to be as objective as possible. I did not use this method. I used two voices, Jade and her mother Emma's, one child and one adult. I tried to stick very closely to these two perspectives.

My aim was for my main characters to come to terms with their own North American society by removing themselves from it. In this way, I hope it succeeds as a work of ethnographic surrealism. They want to totally

reinvent themselves in a new land. But when paramilitaries force them to return home, we see that their journey was really about them understanding themselves, not going native. And more importantly, I hope they come to greater terms with the part of their psyches, their inner selves, that is untouched by culture. By attempting a reinvention of the self as radical as any of Le Guin's narratives, the family is attempting the impossible. One cannot throw away one's upbringing and reinvent oneself entirely. On the other hand, this does not mean that one cannot create one's own identity (cultural and otherwise) to an extent; immigrants do this all the time. 'The question of identification of a pre-given identity is never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image' (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 45).

But for the daughter of my fictional couple, the situation is not so cut and dried. Jade believes that the mountain is her home, and in fact, it is. She feels a foreigner in her parent's country. There, it is she who has an opportunity to reinvent herself. At first she speaks awkward English. 'Language,' says Bakhtin, 'becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his semantic and expressive intention' (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 293). She does not passively absorb the language or the cultural influences of her new city. Slowly, she must go through the process of making English her own.

The fact that her parents at first intended to completely reinvent themselves in the mould of their own imaginary vision of the Kogi life and cosmology does not mean they succeed. In this way, the novel's goal is similar to that of the *Lost Steps*. As Timothy Brennan said in his introduction,

> *The Lost Steps* fails not tragically but inevitably. He tried to cross over to what, by class and education, he did not understand. To be authentic meant just the opposite of becoming a "native". It meant learning whom one was—city dweller, cosmopolite, aesthete. Summoning *la naturaleza* (nature) in so loaded a way,

Carpentier is no avatar of a tired European fetishism of "natural man"...(Carpentier x-xi)

Carpentier's character believes that he can completely reinvent himself and never return to New York from the Orinoco, but he fails as inevitably as do my characters.

The problem with setting a first novel in an unfamiliar place was that the voices of my characters began to feel as distant as the place was to me. Because at first I could only envision the setting in a fragmented way, like Dr. Aziz in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* gazing at his future wife for the first time through a sheet, I had difficulties creating convincing characters and finding their voices. I now understand why most first time novelists write semi-autobiographically. It is easier to give emotion to that which one has lived, so I drew upon my experiences living in several communal living situations including a commune in Virginia in the U.S., a squat in Spain and a boarding house full of artists and hippies in Colombia. This is another reason I consider my novel ethnographic, because it draws so strongly from these experiences.

At first the characters in my novel refused to wear shoes; they emulated the Kogi who believed that to wear shoes was to separate oneself from Mother Earth. The community's founder Teresa nevertheless continued to dye her hair red. The two elements—a barefoot Teresa with her dime store chemical hair dye create an ethnographically surreal collage juxtaposing antithetical elements. I hoped to provide a cultural collage in my novel, not just between Kogi and European cultures on the one hand and Colombian and North American cultures on the other. Many other cultures with their accompanying grammars are juxtaposed in my novel: working class and bourgeois, traditional and countercultural, male and female.

Kogi culture had a separate and parallel evolution to that in the West. Like in traditional Tibetan culture many members devote their lives to spiritual contemplation. Their cultural evolution was on the spiritual and philosophical

level, not the technological or political spheres. Like the jungle people in *The Lost Steps,* The Kogi do not actually occupy the past. However, in the minds of the hippie villagers, by emulating Kogi life they were returning to an idyllic past. The image of a barefoot Teresa with dyed red hair is a juxtaposition of Teresa's image of a tribal past with her image of herself as youthful and hip in the present. Likewise Fabio's typewriter and his hammock form a kind of juxtaposition of images of past and present. In this way, as I have said, these images form dialectical images in Benjamin's historical sense, but only if they serve to demystify their underlying cultural assumptions. The varying levels of technologies in wider Colombian culture and that of the Kogi are those of the European past and present but do not correspond with the same time periods for the Kogi. The villager's utopian image of the Kogi is a kind of wish image.

Wish images perpetuate the illusions of commodity fetishism, the novelty of trends, historical progress, utopia, and other cultural assumptions while dialectical images have the potential to demystify them. Whether the cultural collages in my novel function as ethnographic surrealism by denaturalizing the pretensions of neo-colonial endeavors of its characters or reinforce them, whether they reinforce the utopian revolutionary ideals of the villagers or critique them, whether the novel critiques the primitivism of the villagers or reinforces it, whether its cultural collages function as dialectical images or wish images, is up to the reader to decide. I think it is inevitable that the novel contains both kinds of images. It is also inevitable that in trying to describe a tribe I know so little about that I would not only be inaccurate at times but also lapse into the same neocolonial perspectives that I intended to critique. Even if this is the case, I feel that it was worth taking that risk in order to open up questions on the nature of the pretentions of the anti-conquest. Ideally utopian fiction is a wish image transformed into dialectical image serving an ethnographic surrealist denaturalising function.

Cloud Village and its Literary Influences:

While trying to dream up my own novel I asked myself how other authors dealt with writing about places that they regard as Other. I read novels about invented tribes such as *Changing Planes*, other planets e.g. *The Dispossessed*, Utopian communities like that in Alex Gardner's *The Beach*, (communes) such as the Farm in Tennessee and Black Bear in Northern California in the United States, novels about exiles or missionaries like Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible,* memoirs about living in areas usually unknown to Westerners such as *Child of the Jungle* about a German girl growing up in Papua New Guinea. I also explored science fiction and magical realism, because I felt that the skill for radical invention they employed could be useful in the writing of my own novel.

As I mentioned, Le Guin deliberately created a distant and otherworldly quality to her fiction. I wanted to avoid this, however. This is one reason for my reading magical realism in my search for literary inspiration, in spite of the fact that my own novel is not part of that genre. Magical realism tends to be more intimate in tone than works of fantasy, because it allows the richness in the fabric of daily life in this world to accompany its flights of fancy. In this way it builds imagined worlds that are full of life and warmth, giving the reader a feeling of intimate acquaintance with the place and characters that is rare in fantasy and science fiction. I also looked to Henry Miller's work, because it clings to the earthly even when it makes surrealist leaps of logic.

Like Cloud Village, the town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* both exists and doesn't. It is Aracataca, Marquez' hometown, and it isn't. Marquez uses one omniscient authorial voice, though it keeps a distance from the characters' inner thoughts. But every sentence is full of vibrant colour. That is perhaps because while it includes flights of fancy into the impossible, it also includes settings, characters and situations that a reader can relate to. Also, it is easier for the author who has lived through similar events to portray them in an emotionally convincing manner than the author who is writing about Planet X. Method Actors say that costumes help them

get into character. Some familiarity with a setting or circumstance can also help the writer carry off her tale convincingly.

As I was writing my novel, I continually asked myself how far it was possible to push the narrative without losing its emotion. Though I chose to read the most imaginative work I could find, I did not want to read postmodern work in which the integrity of the self was brought into question like that in Kobo Abe's novel *The Box Man.* In it one narrator bleeds into the other, becomes the other in fact, and the voice is appropriately remote and non-descript. I believe, as did Henry Miller, that the integrity of the writer's voice is sacrosanct (even if it is also derived from and responsive to many other voices). Without it there would be little point in my writing a novel at all. So instead of reading postmodern writers, I focused on Miller and Carpentier's work, American offshoots of Modernism, less often discussed than that of Woolf and Joyce. Miller and Carpentier came back from the Paris of surrealism's heyday, and each responded in their own unique ways, appropriate to their own psyches and respective cultures.

Fiction must be beautiful and surprising, but it must still make sense. So I did not choose to read texts that were so wildly experimental that they were indecipherable. For instance, I did not read lyrical or surrealistic poetry. In order to learn how to construct a coherent narrative myself, I needed to focus on the possibilities that lie within the novel as a form. But I chose texts with a baroque spirit that had kinetic energy that simultaneously pushed up against the boundaries of the novel. Meanwhile, I was fascinated with how far one could stretch reality itself in a text without losing narrative coherence.

I feel that there is a tyranny of naturalism in the teaching of Creative Writing. In the average university writing workshop, one could easily think that there has never been anything else in the history of literature besides the modern Realist novel. Jameson attributes this rigidity to our current economic condition. '[T]he total system of late monopoly capital and of the consumer society—feels so massively in place and its reification so overwhelming and impenetrable, that the serious artist is not free to tinker with it or to project

experimental variations' ("Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." 275). On the other hand, in the last ten years, the walls around respected literary fiction have come down.

> The center does not hold. Or rather, literature now contains multiple epicentres. If the metaphor is territories then today's author's have more than just passports; they have multiple citizenships….Once four 21st century Pulitzer winners—Michael Chabon, Michael Cunningham, Cormac Mc Carthy, and Junot Diaz—have written about alternate timelines, androids, post-apocalyptic futures, and magic mongooses, traditional realism can no longer be claimed as a prerequisite of contemporary literary fiction….The genres themselves have been levelled. (Gavaler 99-100)

The genres have mixed and created new configurations. In her book, *The Novel of the Future,* Anaïs Nin said:

> There is a different plot from the one we are familiar with. A plot in which our originality, our individuality which give surprising endings which never resemble each other….Form created organically by meaning and born of individual character will be endlessly varied as each crystal varies from the next. (Nin 28-9)

One of the primary tasks of every writer is to find the form most appropriate for herself. Like Nin I hope that 'the novel of the future' will expand to give greater freedom of form, so each novel can be as varied as a crystal is from the next, spoken in the author's true voice.

Conclusion

In this exegesis I have looked at 'ethnographic surrealist' works that describe encounters between differing cultures or 'grammars', narratives whose imagery form ethnographically surrealist collages and stretch the bounds of realism without breaking them entirely. While all fiction contains the 'nucleus of potentiality' that Steiner speaks of, I examined works that stretch the bounds of the possible further than most (Steiner 7). I chose writers whom I considered to be original thinkers with exceptional imaginations.

New World baroque works opened hybrid spaces for such unique minds to flourish, encouraging the piling on of images, shying away from clean lines and empty spaces. It allowed space for European, African and Indigenous world-views and imagery to coexist. I examined such work, because I needed to create a hybrid space in my novel for Colombian and North American cultures to dialogue with each other. The characters in cross-cultural novels speak with different grammars; they need extra space to allow for the inherent dialogism already inherent in the novel to be explored even further.

The baroque was a period in which allegory was common, and utopian novels are allegorical commentaries on contemporary society. Since my own novel was about a utopian community, I chose to discuss two overtly utopian novels, *The Lost Steps* in which a city dweller travels to a rainforest he believes to be an Eden, and *The Dispossessed* that is set on an anarchist planet. The baroque spirit and utopian visions are powered by a drive to radically invent. Utopian images can serve as either wish images or dialectical images. I think the above novels serve to demystify cultural assumptions and thus serve as ethnographically surreal collages. Thus, I think they serve a function akin to that of the dialectical image.

The tendency towards the baroque and the utopian, are deeply intertwined; they share a common drive to radically invent. The former piles on images in order to make sense of them and the latter uses the power of the imagination to wipe away the old in order to create empty spaces for the new.

To take the most extreme example, the Nazi regime's final solution was the ruthless implementation of a utopian wish image.

The rich baroque language and imagery used in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* jumps off the page. Its utopian tendencies are less evident. I see its village Macondo as a utopia. In the early chapters of the novel, it has very few outside influences. Like the wall around the rocket launch in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed,* this 'world-reduction' allowed García Márquez to create a self-contained world in which a naked woman rising to heaven and a ghost in the courtyard and alchemy are made to seem ordinary (Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin" 279). In the absence of modernity, Macondo is allowed to grow in isolation resulting in unique qualities like the flora and fauna of New Zealand. In Jameson's sense this is a utopia because at first it appears to be removed from history ("World Reduction in Le Guin" 284). At first Macondo appears to be a utopian wish image, a figment.

Then García Márquez introduces a labor dispute and the Colombian civil war to this self-contained world. In doing so he allows Macondo and modernity to dialogue. Masterfully, he makes these facets of modernity appear even more surreal than Macondo. The novel is ethnographically surreal, because it denaturalizes modernity and utopian because it creates a self-referential imaginary alternative.

After discussing the aforementioned Latin American work, I argued that the work of Henry Miller was unwittingly neo-baroque. Traditionally, the New World Baroque was a phrase coined by Alejo Carpentier that he applied exclusively to Latin American work. I have argued that it is no longer accurate to thus limit its use. First of all, magical realism, another phrase coined by Carpentier (Faris and Zamora eds. 7), is a form that is typical of the New World Baroque, and many works of this genre are now written in North America and throughout the world. Secondly, the work of Miller has in common with magical realism an everyday life grittiness mixed in with the flights of the subconscious in a way that is distinct from that which one typically finds in surrealism or the fantasy genre; it is more full of life and

more akin to magical realism and grotesque realism. Miller was open to a wide variety of influences; he had an ear for the cadences of all of the speakers in the assemblage of voices that made up his work whether they came from high literature or the street. Its baroque piling on of images was the exact opposite of the journalistic concision found in Hemingway and many North American male writers of his time. His work was so inclusive that its frank sexuality was banned for decades. The dictates of good taste relish the clean empty spaces that baroque works feared. Miller's work was so cluttered with the grotesque that it had to be legally excluded.

Miller's work doesn't fall into the distant tone that Le Guin says is present in her own work, a tone that is common in the fantasy genre. Miller shares an emphasis on the corporeal and quotidian with neo-baroque works. For example in the most far-fetched passages of *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* one always feels physically present. Likewise, whether one likes it or not, no matter how much Miller's passages jump time and context, they always return to the corporeal.

Miller's work is not utopian in the sense that it is never set in a utopia, but it is counter-cultural; it is meant to challenge established values. In this sense it posits philosophical alternatives to mainstream society. Though much of his work was written in exile and gave him an outside perspective on the United States, I think his opposition to established values gives him a unique perspective, distinct from that of other exiles of his time and makes his work more radically ethnographically surreal.

In spite of her intentionally distant tone, Le Guin's work has a baroque spirit as well. The baroque piling on of images of her early work caused it to be rejected by publishers. More than its beautiful style or the fact that she has produced many allegorical works, the scope of her baroque imagination stands out among contemporary writers from any country. The baroque spirit is kinetic; it naturally pushes the boundaries between the 'empirical and the imaginary' (Steiner 101). All great literature stretches our understanding of the bounds of the possible, bursting old nuclei of potentiality and creating

new grammars in their place. The great works of classical realism also achieve this, though in a dramatically different fashion than Le Guin. She does this in two ways. The first is radical invention of planets or peoples with unique cultures or even fabricated biology. The second is by juxtaposing unlikely details from our world like the surrealists did, like Sanskrit speaking in Cleveland.

While I would not describe my own work as baroque, my examination of the above works helped me explore my options as a writer. I hoped to widen my own literary horizons even while sticking to a variation on classical realism, because I needed a form in which the relationship between the text and the world was simple and direct.

However, I think my work does share two elements with the work of Carpentier, García Márquez, Miller and Le Guin. First of all, my novel is 'ethnographically surreal', because it is meant to create a distance from the main characters' North American culture so that they can reinvent themselves and their values. I wanted to 'pose questions at the boundaries of civilizations' (Clifford 121). Secondly, the setting of my novel, Cloud village, is a self-referential utopia. It is set in an isolated spot that allows the main characters to have a hermetically sealed ideology that limits them. Its walls are as strongly built as those around Le Guin's rocket launch. At least that is what its characters want to believe.

Like my characters, I believed it was possible to create a place that was totally other. I thought I could build a village from the ground up. At first my characters tried to create a bubble, censoring any information about 'the city' (industrial civilization) from their children. They thought that by moving to an isolated mountain they could create a blank slate; their children would form a totally new and more enlightened culture. They didn't understand that this idea was flawed, both because they brought themselves and their own cultures to the village and because it was not possible to isolate themselves politically or ecologically. They built their village near a war zone. Though at first the fighting was far away, after thirteen years it had grown closer. The

false conception that it was possible to isolate oneself from society turned out to be their fatal flaw when they were evicted by paramilitaries at gunpoint.

When Le Guin invents planets, she populates them with familiar people, things, and more importantly, social dynamics refashioned in imaginary ways. For a brief time, I wanted to create a fantastic village. However, I found that the more imaginary the village, the more distant was my writing voice, sometimes as distant as another planet. While this works for Le Guin, it did not work for me. So I decided that, while the setting of the village in my novel is invented, there was no reason why I couldn't populate it with familiar people, much like Le Guin's alien planets at times look suspiciously like our own, though perhaps viewed through a kaleidoscope. So I threw fantasy aside to write an ethnographic novel, drawing upon my experiences living in communes and squats and of course, living in Colombia.

Utopian literature allows a writer to break out of her own time and place in a radical way like the writer of fantasy. In this way it is an extreme form of 'ethnographic surrealism'. From this outside point of view, looking back on one's own life, society and self, the writer engages in a dialogue with her own culture. The cross-pollination between cultures is that which gave birth to all language (and all culture, for that matter). English, for instance, is a hybrid between the Anglo-Saxon and French, so all new linguistic creative forms are ultimately a refashioning created in the aftermath of the clash between different 'grammars'. Since the Americas are fundamentally mestizo and hybrid, it is only natural that they would have found unique literary forms to express their lived experience with what García Márquez called 'unbridled reality'.

I believe that the genre levelling that is appearing in twenty-first century literature is a result of profound cultural and societal shifts. In a megalopolis, two hundred cultures or more may meet and mix. Twenty-first century literature is a series of ecotones or 'edges'. Like Edward Said said,

Once we accept the actual configurations of literary experiences overlapping with one another and interdependent, despite national boundaries and coercively legislative national antinomies, history and geography are transfigured in new maps, in new types of connections. Exile…becomes something closer to a norm…. (Said 317)

In the next century, as the world becomes even more multicultural, and late capitalism becomes even more surreal, new forms of literature will appear that we can now scarcely imagine. World War One was such a shock to the sense of reality of those that lived through it that one group of survivors created the surrealist movement. The escalating ecological crisis will no doubt give birth to new literary forms. Multicultural societies like Australia, and my own, the United States, should have much to contribute if they can manage to hold onto their inner baroque spirit over and above the homogenizing forces that stifle daily life in late capitalist societies.

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